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<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-01986-3>

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Exploring motivation via three-stage travel experience: how to capture the hearts of Taiwanese family-oriented cruise tourists

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The cruise market has significant potential for family travel as birth rates continue to decline. To explore the reasons behind family cruise travel, passenger needs, and the three stages of cruise travel experience (anticipation, participation, and recall), this study employs qualitative research and in-depth survey methods. The study's findings indicate that motivations for joining family cruise travel include "new experiences," "desire for cruise travel," "convenience," and "generating social topics/publicity." During the anticipation and recall stages, the most significant factors are the "port of call" and the "destination" of the cruise itinerary. Additionally, other important aspects include the dining options on the cruise. In the participation stage, the study reveals that cabins, entertainment, and special considerations for children hold particular significance. These results can provide valuable guidance in the planning of family cruise travel.

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Introduction

Global tourism has witnessed significant growth in recent years, with the number of international tourists reaching approximately 1.326 billion in 2017, representing a 7% increase from the previous year (UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2021). The Asia-Pacific region accounted for a substantial portion of these tourists, with around 306 million visitors (Executive Yuan 2017). Among the contributing factors to the tourism market, the cruise industry has played a pivotal role, generating substantial value and promoting logistics business (Executive Yuan 2017). In 2018, the Cruise Lines International Association reported that approximately 28.5 million travelers embarked on cruises worldwide, with Asia experiencing a remarkable growth rate of 23% between 2013 and 2018, making it the third-largest cruise source market globally (CLIA 2018a, 2018b). The rapid development and prosperity of port cities in the Asia-Pacific region, including Taiwan, have been instrumental in driving the growth of the Asian cruise market (Chen 2016). Taiwan, with its advantageous geographical location, serves as a significant transportation hub and ranks among the top 10 cruise source markets in Asia (CLIA 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Tourism Bureau 2019).

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the global tourism industry, leading to severe economic consequences across various sectors, including cruises (Gössling et al. 2020; Seyfi et al. 2020). In 2020, the number of global tourists plummeted by 73% compared to the previous year, highlighting the extent of the pandemic's impact (UNWTO 2021). The cruise industry, in particular, faced unprecedented challenges as many countries implemented strict measures, including port closures, flight restrictions, and travel bans, to curb the spread of the virus (Liu and Chang 2020; Yuen et al. 2021). Consequently, the number of cruise ships and passengers in Asia declined significantly (CLIA 2020).

To recover from the pandemic's aftermath, the cruise industry needs to regain the trust and confidence of travelers by understanding their motivations and demands based on previous experiences (Pan et al. 2021). Family travel, a crucial market segment in tourism, offers opportunities to enhance the quality of family life and functioning (Wu et al. 2021). Following the epidemic, a surge in revenge tourism commenced, leading to a gradual recovery of the international cruise market, with a particular focus on the Asian market (CTWANT 2023). Investigating the phenomenon of "revenge travel" and exploring tourists' motivations and demands through a three-stage travel experience can help identify significant market niches and attractive themes in family cruise travel (Shadel 2020). Family travel not only contributes to children's development (Li et al. 2020) but also strengthens family connections, fosters unity, and promotes interaction, identity, and shared values (Wang et al. 2018).

Considering the diverse composition of family travel groups, such as nuclear families, single parents with children, and multigenerational families, cruises offer a wide range of experiences encompassing dining, shopping, activities, entertainment, and relaxation. Furthermore, cruises eliminate the need for itinerary planning, transportation arrangements, and local accommodation bookings (Polat 2015). Travel experiences are subjective and influenced by personal factors, situational elements, and interpersonal interactions (Zatori et al. 2018). These experiences are shaped by various activities, facilities, and products, while travelers' perceptions and memories evolve over time (Lyu et al. 2018). A comprehensive travel experience that encompasses the stages before, during, and after the journey is essential for meaningful and transformative travel (Matson-Barkat and Robert-Demontrond 2018). While cruise tourism in Western countries has been extensively studied, there is a relative scarcity

of research on family and children's cruise travel experiences in the Eastern cruise market (Wondirad 2019). Given the significant role of children in family cruise travel, it is crucial to consider the perspectives of parents, grandparents, and children, taking into account cultural and familial differences (Wu and Wall 2016).

To conduct research on family cruise travel, it is important for tourism scholars to familiarize themselves with systems theory, which considers a family as a complex system where each member and their interactions contribute to the overall functioning of the family unit (Bowen 1978). This theory suggests that the experience of family cruise travel is influenced by various factors and individuals within the family system. When applying systems theory to family cruise travel, several key aspects become relevant. Firstly, the concept of interconnectedness emphasizes the impact of family members on each other. During a cruise, family members share common spaces, engage in activities together, and rely on each other for support and coordination, which necessitates an understanding of these interconnected dynamics to navigate conflicts, balance individual preferences, and foster positive interactions. Secondly, the establishment of clear boundaries within the family system is crucial. On a cruise, family members may need to negotiate boundaries related to personal space, privacy, and the balance between togetherness and individual autonomy, ensuring a healthy equilibrium throughout the trip.

Effective communication is vital in family cruise travel, and systems theory underscores the significance of open and clear communication channels within the family system. This involves encouraging active listening, expressing needs and concerns, and practicing empathy to enhance family communication and address any challenges or conflicts that may arise during the cruise. Furthermore, recognizing and understanding the roles and expectations of family members is essential. Different family members may assume various roles such as trip planner, organizer, or decision-maker, and discussing these roles and expectations in advance promotes shared responsibility, reduces stress, and encourages a collaborative approach to family cruise travel. Lastly, adaptability is emphasized by systems theory as a crucial aspect within the family system. Unexpected situations may arise during a cruise, such as itinerary changes, weather conditions, or differing preferences among family members. Being flexible and adaptable enables the family to navigate these challenges and adjust their plans accordingly, contributing to a smoother and more enjoyable cruise experience.

To investigate family cruise travel experiences, a three-stage model is adopted. The anticipation stage involves examining family members' expectations regarding equipment, meals, activities, and facilities (Jamal et al. 2019). The cruise participation stage encompasses various aspects such as customized arrangements, shore excursions, and the implementation of onboard facilities (Radic 2019). Finally, the recall stage explores whether the cruise vacation met expectations, identifies the most memorable experiences, and assesses the likelihood of taking a cruise for future family travel (Chen and Rahman 2018). By exploring family cruise travel through these three stages, valuable insights can be gained into the motivations and overall experience of family travelers.

Literature review

Revenge travel and cruise travel. In the context of revenge travel and its association with cruise travel, it is important to acknowledge the profound challenges and setbacks faced by the tourism industry, including the cruise travel sector, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Pan et al. (2021),

the pandemic has had a detrimental impact on the tourism industry, resulting in a 10.4% decrease in GDP and the loss of 319 million jobs. Wang and Xia (2021) emphasize that despite people's reluctance to be confined, their desire to travel has grown stronger, as reported by Shadel (2020) in *The Washington Post* (The Harris Poll 2020). Consequently, the concept of "revenge travel" has emerged, referring to the potential for tourism to make a remarkable resurgence as more countries reopen their borders to eager tourists. Individuals are seeking to alleviate pandemic fatigue and boredom by embarking on travel experiences, following extended periods of confinement due to lockdowns and quarantine regulations. Furthermore, revenge travel encompasses the notion of compensating for lost time during the pandemic, often reflecting individuals' frustration and anger regarding the disruption of their plans and daily routines (Mauran 2022).

Instead of seeking compensation from a specific destination, revenge travel seems to be motivated by a genuine passion for travel. CNN (2022) reports that many travelers are now willing to allocate more financial resources to their vacations compared to previous years. Within the realm of leisure travel, cruise travel can be regarded as a prominent form due to its distinctive characteristics and the array of experiences it provides to passengers. Leisure travel, broadly defined, involves travel primarily undertaken for recreational, relaxation, and personal enjoyment purposes rather than for business or work-related reasons. It encompasses activities that enable individuals to unwind, explore new destinations, partake in leisurely pursuits, and escape from their daily routines (Wang and Xia 2021).

Cruise travel stands as one of the most lucrative, popular, and rapidly expanding sectors within the tourism industry. It combines elements of accommodation, leisure, entertainment, dining, and sightseeing, generating substantial revenue and employment opportunities across various locations (Han and Hyun 2019). As the European and American markets reach saturation, the cruise industry has shifted its focus toward developing the Asian market (Chen, 2016), which currently holds the position as the world's third-largest cruise market, following North America and Western Europe (CLIA 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). Modern cruise ships have evolved beyond mere transportation vessels to become floating resorts, offering enticing destinations, a wide range of leisure and entertainment options, diverse dining experiences, shopping facilities, theaters, and swimming pools (Toh et al. 2005). In response to changing holiday preferences, the cruise tourism industry has diversified its product offerings, introducing new destinations, revamped cruise experiences, innovative services, facilities, shore tourism activities, and themed cruises (Rodrigue and Notteboom 2013).

CLIA (2018a, 2018b) has identified 11 major trends in cruise travel: 1) Instagrammable experiences; 2) total restoration; 3) achievement travel; 4) personalized on-board technology; 5) conscious travel; 6) inaccessible destinations; 7) Generation Z preferences; 8) off-peak adventures; 9) working nomads; 10) female-centered cruising; and 11) solo travel. These trends reflect the changing needs and preferences of cruise customers and the industry's response to those needs by combining nature, history, culture, technology, and new experiences to create a richer travel experience (Chen 2016). As the Asian cruise industry develops, there is a growing focus on family groups, providing an unforgettable cruise experience for all ages (Taiwan International Ports Corporation, Ltd. 2019a, 2019b). Disney Cruises is a cruise brand that specializes in serving parent-child families and has won the "Best Family Cruise" title for several years, with children's programs and entertainment activities being their most popular features (Disney Cruise Line 2019). With Asian tourists being the largest group of parent-child families during the summer vacation, the cruise company has optimized parent-child

activities and increased entertainment experiences, including partnering with Discovery to create exploration camps and recreational games for different age groups (Princess 2018). Cruise companies continue to innovate and cater to the changing needs of the family travel market through the design and planning of various cruise travel products (Radic 2019).

Family travel and motivations. Tourism is an essential element in personal development, as it provides a platform for various types of learning and broadens one's horizons (Li et al. 2020). The family travel market is a large and expanding segment of the tourism industry. Family travel has evolved from a form of relaxation to a way of reconnecting with loved ones (Brey and Lehto 2008). Today, family travel may include three generations, large families, or single parents traveling with children (Schänzel and Yeoman 2015). Families travel together to create memories, bond, and engage in activities that facilitate children's learning and development (Li et al. 2020). Family travel refers to a trip where at least two family members travel and spend more than 24 h away from home to enhance family cohesion and create lasting memories (Kennedy-Eden and Gretzel 2016). Family leisure is positively related to family satisfaction and cohesion (Lehto et al. 2012). Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) classify family leisure as either core or balanced, with the former being low-cost and easy, while the latter requiring more time, money, or planning. Although the frequency of balanced leisure may be lower, the experiences and memories created are often more significant. Family travel, as a form of balanced leisure, increases intimacy and cohesion among family members (Lehto et al. 2016), and contributes to the development of children.

Numerous studies have explored the decision-making process involved in family tourism. When planning a family trip, it is crucial to consider various factors, such as destination, vacation time, budget, attractions, activities, and accommodation, all of which require family members to discuss and agree upon. These decisions are influenced by the family's situation, age, and socioeconomic status (Kang and Hsu 2004). As times have changed, family decision making has become more democratic, shifting from the traditional parent-dominated approach to a more child-influenced process (Jamal et al. 2019). Although children may not have the final say in decisions, they still play a crucial role in influencing the process (Curtale 2018).

Previous studies have primarily focused on cruise traveler satisfaction, value, and trust (Wu et al. 2018), motivation and experience (Hung and Petrick 2011; Han and Hyun 2018), the environmental impact of the cruise industry (MacNeill and Wozniak 2018), and the Western child cruise experience (Radic, 2019). With changing lifestyles and travel patterns, more Asians are opting for cruises as their preferred travel choice (Chen 2016). However, very few studies have examined Eastern family cruise travel, and there are some differences between Western and Asian tourists (Wu et al. 2018). For example, while Western children often desire to have their own cruise experiences and make new friends, Asian families tend to focus on creating shared memories (Wu et al. 2019).

The topic of travel motivation is significant and the push-pull factor is a commonly used theory to explain it. The push factor is driven by inner desires such as the need for relaxation, adventure, knowledge acquisition, family reunion, and pressure. On the other hand, the pull factor is driven by the unique attributes of the destination, such as recreational facilities, historical culture, natural resources, beaches, and scenery (Sung et al. 2015). Various studies have explored travel motivation, including adventure tourism loyalty (Sato et al. 2018), wildlife tourism satisfaction in national parks (Mutanga et al. 2017), and slow

travel motivation (Özdemir and Çelebi 2018). Some studies have also examined the travel motivation of specific groups, such as elderly travelers abroad (Wijaya et al. 2018) and hearing-impaired backpackers (Ho and Peng 2017). According to Li et al. (2017), family travel is motivated by spending quality time with children, creating pleasant memories, learning and development, self-compensation, and compensation for children. Four dimensions of motivation have been identified in cruise tourism, including self-esteem and social recognition, escape and relaxation, learning, discovery, and thrill, and bonding (Han and Hyun 2019). Tourists take a cruise to get a worry-free and relaxing vacation and escape from everything (Mancini 2010). This study specifically focuses on the motivation of family members in choosing a cruise for family travel.

Experience. Tourist satisfaction and their willingness to revisit are directly influenced by their travel experience (Buhalis and Amaranggana 2015). According to Kong and Chang (2016), tourists construct their travel experience through various activities from the decision to travel until the end of the tour. Campos et al. (2015) suggested that travel experience is created through activity participation and interaction. The composition of travel experience is diverse and includes education, aesthetics, escape from reality, and entertainment (Stamboulisa and Skayannisb, 2003). Seyfi et al. (2020) noted that everyone has different travel experiences due to their different backgrounds, values, attitudes, beliefs, and environments, including within different generations of family members (Li et al. 2020). Walls et al. (2011) proposed that physical experience, human interaction, individual characteristics, and situational factors all affect travel experience.

Certain events can make a travel experience unforgettable (Kim et al. 2010), particularly when children participate in family travel and contribute to their parents' enjoyment (Li et al. 2020). Unforgettable memories may be the most valuable source of information for tourists when deciding to revisit a specific destination (Chandralal and Valenzuela 2013) because people believe that past experiences are a reliable reference for future decisions (Chen and Rahman 2018). Kim et al. (2010) developed a scale with seven dimensions to measure memorable tourism experiences, including hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty. This scale was adopted by Zhang et al. (2017) to explore Korean tourists' perception image, memorable tourism experience, and willingness to revisit China, and by Seyfi et al. (2020) to develop a scale for memorable cultural tourism experiences with six dimensions: prior perceived significance of the experience, authenticity, engagement, cultural exchange, culinary attraction, and quality of service.

Several studies have identified multiple stages of travel experience, such as the five stages of recreational experience proposed by Clawson and Knetsch (1966): anticipation, outbound, on-site experience, return, and recall stages. Park and Santos (2016) discussed tourist experience using the three stages of before, during, and after travel, and Radic (2019) used the three stages of pre-travel planning and decision making, cruise participation, and reinterpretation and evaluation to study children's experience with cruises. However, regardless of the number of stages, a memorable, interesting, and attractive experience can occur in each stage. Therefore, this study focuses on the three stages of travel experience and their application to family cruise travel.

Methodology

Research process and subjects. To gain a deeper understanding of the respondents' memories, feelings, and opinions about their own experiences, this research utilizes in-depth interviews.

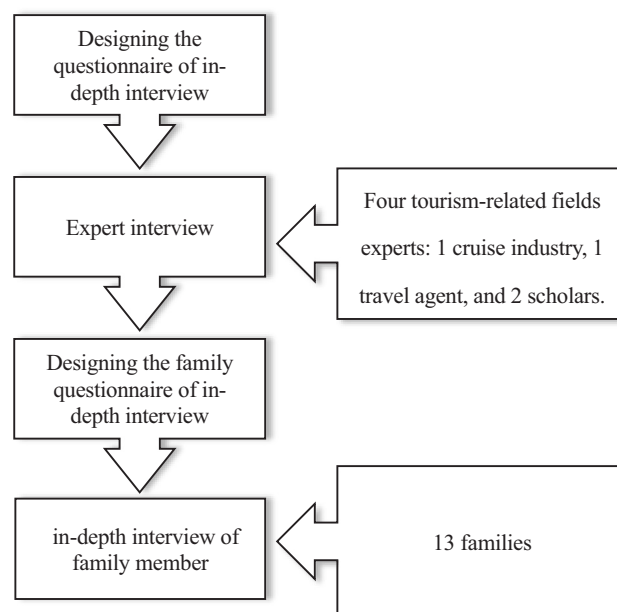


Fig. 1 Research framework flow. The research framework involved utilizing expert interviews to help formulate the questionnaire used in the subsequent phase of conducting in-depth family interviews.

Qualitative research methods are necessary to explore the "why" behind the respondents' experiences and obtain more complete information (Milena et al. 2008; Patton 2005). In-depth interviews are used with content analysis to collect interviewees' opinions, views, and attitudes about a particular incident to gain a deeper understanding of the issue (Tsaur and Huang 2015). The three steps of content analysis, including dividing and condensing, coding, and establishing category and theme, are applied to improve the quality of inferences and provide an understanding of the knowledge and phenomena of the research (Downe-Wamboldt 1992; Erlingsson and Brysiewicz 2017). Content analysis is also suitable for more difficult, special, and sensitive fields (Bogner et al. 2009).

Consequently, qualitative research was employed in the present study to gather pertinent information. Initially, the questionnaire for the in-depth interviews was designed based on previous research. The questions were subsequently revised after undergoing expert review, which involved four professionals: a cruise tourism expert, a travel agent, and two scholars specializing in tourism-related fields. The expert interviews aided in shaping the questionnaire for the subsequent stage of in-depth family interviews (please refer to Fig. 1 for the research framework flow). The experts were invited to review and modify the questionnaire, offering suggestions to enhance its design. Table 1 provides background information on the four experts.

Furthermore, to identify suitable cruise travel families for this study, the participants were primarily recruited through the following sources: (1) Families who had previously taken cruises were introduced to the researchers by experienced tour guides who had led cruise tours. (2) Qualified volunteers were invited from cruise travel Facebook communities. (3) Employing the snowball sampling method, the researchers reached out to families who had previously traveled on cruises through referrals from cruise travel agencies and interviewees who had organized cruise trips. The interviewed family members primarily consisted of those who had at least one experience of cruise travel and had traveled on cruises with their children. Only these families were selected as participants for this study.

Table 1 The profile of cruise experts (N = 4).

| Code | Profession | Gender | Experience |
|------|---|--------|------------|
| A | The experienced cruise tourism consultant and academic researcher | M | 29 years |
| B | The senior managers in charge of planning family cruise tour packages, who possess experience in interacting with family cruise travelers | M | 21 years |
| C | The academic researcher specializing in cruise tourism education | F | 7 years |
| D | The academic researcher specializing in cruise tourism education | F | 9 years |

A total of 13 families were interviewed to explore their motivations and experiences of cruise travel, while the dimensions of cruise tourism services were examined through a literature review. The initial scale was evaluated for content and face validity by the experts, all of whom held master's degrees or higher education, with three of them having experience in leading family groups. The questionnaire for the in-depth family interviews was divided into three parts: "before (anticipation)," "during (participation)," and "after (recall)" of the cruise travel, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the respondents' experiences.

Development of research questionnaires and data collection.

Cruising is a mode of transportation that combines travel and lodging, offering a range of amenities, activities, and shore excursions (Sun et al. 2014). In recent years, there has been a surge in innovative facilities, routes, destinations, and exclusive experiences (Rodrigue and Notteboom 2013). In Asia, cruise tourism has gained popularity with great potential (Chen 2016). Theme cruises have emerged as a trend, and they can be categorized into three types: specific themes with onboard activities and arrangements, specific groups such as seniors and parent-child travelers, and charter boats where the itinerary is planned by a corporation or organization (Weaver 2011). Consequently, this research defines cruise travel as the use of cruises as the primary means of transportation, combined with lodging, dining, entertainment, and shore excursions.

Family travel involves the departure of at least two family members from their home for a period exceeding one day (Kennedy-Eden and Gretzel 2016). According to Gram (2005), the objective of family travel is to engage in collective activities, explore new destinations, and forge lasting memories as a family. Parents dedicate their time, effort, and finances to curate an unforgettable vacation experience for their children (Hilbrecht et al. 2008). As people live longer, the structure of families is undergoing vertical development, with grandparents increasingly developing strong bonds with their grandchildren, leading to a growing trend of traveling together (Schänzel and Yeoman 2015).

In Taiwan, the family composition has witnessed significant changes in recent times. Traditionally, Taiwanese families adhered to the nuclear family model, consisting of two parents and their children. However, social and economic factors have contributed to the evolution of family composition. Currently, the most prevalent family compositions in Taiwan include nuclear families, single-parent families, and multi-generational families comprising three generations (National Development Council 2023). Understanding the dynamics of family composition holds paramount importance in the context of family cruise travel for several reasons.

Firstly, tailored services are necessary to address the distinct needs and preferences associated with different family compositions. By comprehending the family composition within their target market, cruise operators can customize their offerings and amenities to cater to the specific requirements of each family type. For instance, single-parent families may benefit from

accommodations designed for smaller groups or specialized activities tailored to their needs. Secondly, accommodation considerations play a crucial role, as family cruise ships must provide suitable lodging options for families with varying compositions. This may involve offering larger cabins or connecting rooms to accommodate nuclear families or multi-generational families. Understanding the family composition assists cruise operators in allocating resources and designing accommodations accordingly.

Thirdly, activity planning should take into account the diverse interests and preferences of different family compositions, both onboard and during shore excursions. By considering the family composition, cruise operators can provide a wide range of activities and experiences that cater to the specific needs and desires of each family type. This ensures the participation and enjoyment of all family members throughout the cruise. Lastly, pricing and package strategies can be tailored based on family composition. For instance, family packages may include discounts for children or special rates for single parents. Understanding the family composition enables cruise operators to develop pricing strategies that appeal to different family types and maximize their market reach.

Consequently, comprehending the family composition in Taiwan is of great significance in the realm of family cruise travel, as it empowers cruise operators to offer customized services, appropriate accommodations, diverse activities, and suitable pricing structures for various family types. By addressing the specific needs and preferences associated with each family composition, cruise operators can enhance the overall travel experience and attract a broader spectrum of family travelers. Furthermore, within the context of this research, a family traveler is defined as a parent or single parent who brings at least one child under the age of 18, with or without the inclusion of grandparents. The travel experience, as defined by this research, encompasses the various encounters tourists face at different stages of their trip (Radic 2019). Considering the nature of cruise travel, this research divides the travel experience into three stages: the anticipation stage prior to boarding the cruise, the cruise participation stage, and the recall stage. Hence, travel experience is delineated as the three stages of the travel journey, allowing for an examination of distinct experiences at each stage.

Three stages of cruise travel experience. The interview questions for this study are based on Hung and Petrick's (2011) research, which identified four categories of motivation for cruise travel: self-esteem and social recognition, escape and relaxation, learning, discovery, and thrill, and bonding. The study focuses on the three stages of cruise travel experience: anticipation, participation, and recall, drawing on Juan and Chen's (2011) exploration of Taiwanese cruise passengers' behavior at different stages, the factors influencing cruise vacation decisions (Bahja et al. 2018), and research on children's cruise experiences (Radic 2019).

In the anticipation stage, Juan and Chen (2011) found that price, trip duration, desires of companions, activities, and facilities were the main determinants of cruise trip selection. However, as this study focuses on family travel, desires of companions were modified to desires of family members.

Bahja et al. (2018) examined the relative importance of six factors in cruise customers' decision-making process: cruise vacation price, duration, distance from the cruise port, itinerary, environmental friendliness of the cruise line, and online reviews. Radic (2019) found that cruise brand, activities, and ports of call were significant considerations for tourists. Consistent with these studies, the factors considered by cruise tourists in this study were price, number of days, cruise brand, activities, equipment, itinerary (port of call and destination), family members' desires, and online reviews of cruise ships. The study further explores the differences in family members' considerations for cruise travel during the anticipation and recall stages.

Service dimensions during the cruise travel experience stages. Drawing on previous research on group package travel (Wang et al. 2000), Taiwanese cruise travelers' behavior at different experience stages (Juan and Chen 2011), cruise experience (Hwang and Han 2014), and factors influencing Taiwanese women's choice of cruise travel (Chen et al. 2019), the study developed 11 in-depth interview questions. These questions cover a range of aspects such as cruise characteristics, cabins, restaurants, facilities, entertainment activities, tour guides, shopping, exclusive activities for children, work teams, self-financed activities, and other relevant factors.

The experts have revised the questions, resulting in the following dimensions of motivation. For the motivation dimension of self-esteem and social recognition, the aspects are as follows: 1. Impress others; 2. Receive high praise from others; 3. Feel like a better person; 4. Obtain a high-quality vacation; 5. Enhance self-worth; 6. Achieve a sense of accomplishment; 7. Capture exotic photos to show off to friends. For the motivation dimension of escape and relaxation, the aspects are as follows: 1. Have fun; 2. Enjoy the freedom to do what I want; 3. Escape from everyday life; 4. Relax physically and mentally. For the motivation dimension of learning/discovery and novelty/excitement, the aspects are as follows: 1. Enjoy nature; 2. Gain knowledge; 3. Experience other cultures; 4. Enjoy exciting activities. For the motivation dimension of socialization, the aspects are as follows: 1. Make new friends; 2. Meet different people. For the motivation dimension of interpersonal connection, the aspects are as follows: 1. My friends or family members want to go on a cruise travel; 2. I can interact with my friends or family members during the trip.

The experts made several modifications to the factors that influence customers' choices in the anticipation and recall stages. These factors include price, duration of travel, cruise brand, activities, cruise equipment, cruise itinerary (destination and ports of call), family members' desire for cruise travel, online reviews, and travel agency. Cruise reviews, including online reviews, newspapers, magazines, and word of mouth, replaced online reviews. In the participation stage, the experts recommended that cruise tonnage be used as a reference criterion for cruise features, and added court and cinema to facilities, friendliness to tour leaders as an important consideration, and duty-free shopping to the shopping section. The service enthusiasm of the service team was also added as a criterion. The experts also proposed two types of briefing for tourists, one for participation in activities at their own expense and another for the introduction to tourist attractions and transportation from the pier to the tourist attractions. Based on these modifications, the experts suggested some service dimensions for the participation stage that would be further explored in the follow-up in-depth interviews.

Results

This study conducted in-depth interviews with family tourists through online video. The interviews lasted for 30 min to 1 h and

were recorded with consent, with one family member representing and sharing the thoughts and opinions of other family members. Thirteen families were interviewed, and the respondents were referred to as A-M. The study provides demographic data, motivations, and descriptions of the three-stage service aspects of the cruise travel experience: anticipation, experience, and recall. The majority of the interviewees were middle-aged parents with the final say in cruise travel, with 38.5% being male and 61.5% being female. 46.2% of the interviewees were aged 42–50. Regarding family income, 69.2% were double-income families, and 30.8% were single-income families. Most of the interviewees (76.9%) had a family income of over TWD 140,001. Less than half (46.2%) worked in the business industry, and the majority held a bachelor's degree (53.8%). Nuclear families accounted for 69.2%, followed by extended families (23.1%) and single-parent families (7.7%). The largest group of travelers was 4–6 people (46.2%), and the largest percentage of accompanying children was 1 (53.8%), followed by 2 (38.5%), and 3 (7.7%), with a maximum of 20 children. The age range of the children was 0–6 years old (nine children), 7–12 years old (seven children), and 13–18 years old (four children). The largest destination was Northeast Asia (69.2%), followed by Europe (15.4%), Southeast Asia (7.7%), and Mexico (7.7%). The most common travel duration was 2–7 days (84.6%), and 53.8% of the interviewees indicated that they had gone on a cruise once, followed by four times (30.8%) and twice (15.4%). Please see Table 2.

Furthermore, to establish the validity of the interview items and analyze the data, content analysis was employed in this study. The initial step in the data analysis process involved extracting the units of analysis. As per Wang et al. (2009), graduate students specializing in tourism marketing were invited to serve as judges and perform naming and content categorization based on the verbatim transcripts. In this study, graduate students from the tourism research institute with practical experience and an academic background in tourism were selected as Judges A and B. Both judges carefully read and categorized each basic unit of analysis, repeating the process until a consensus was reached. Interjudge and intrajudge reliability tests were subsequently conducted to assess consistency among different judges and over different time periods for the same judges, respectively.

To ensure the reliability of the classifications, intrajudge and interjudge reliability tests were conducted at different time periods. Keaveney (1995) suggests that intrajudge and interjudge reliability should exceed 0.80. After one week, Judge A and Judge B were asked to classify the data again for the intrajudge reliability test. Additionally, Judge C, a project director with 11 years of experience in the travel agency industry, was invited to classify the data and conduct the interjudge reliability test. The results demonstrated an intrajudge reliability of 0.96 and an interjudge reliability of 0.97, indicating the reliability of the classification results in this study. The interview transcripts of family tourists were analyzed and compiled into a data summary presented in Table 3. Moreover, to enhance the credibility and validity of the content analysis results, this study employed not only triangulation among Judges A, B, and C but also utilized the data triangulation method proposed by Mhyre (2010). By comparing and confirming the perspectives of the interviewed family participants, travel agency expert, cruise industry expert, and tourism scholars, the study achieved the purpose and effectiveness of data triangulation.

Anticipation stage. The majority of interviewees expressed their desire for a high-quality travel experience, which is influenced by the characteristics, quality, and level of the cruise ship, as it can enhance their self-esteem and social recognition.

Table 2 Demographic profile of interviewees (N = 13).

| Gender | Frequency | Percent | Types of family income | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------|-----------|---------|------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Male | 5 | 38.5 | Single income | 4 | 30.8 |
| Female | 8 | 61.5 | Double income | 9 | 69.2 |
| Occupation | Frequency | Percent | Family monthly income | Frequency | Percent |
| Housewife/husband | 2 | 15.4 | <TWD 50,000 | 1 | 7.7 |
| Business industry | 6 | 46.2 | TWD 50,001–80,000 | 1 | 7.7 |
| Manufacturing | 1 | 7.7 | TWD 80,001–110,000 | 1 | 7.7 |
| Public employees | 2 | 15.4 | TWD 110,001–140,000 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Service industry | 2 | 15.4 | >TWD 140,001 | 10 | 76.9 |
| Education | Frequency | Percent | Age | Frequency | Percent |
| College | 2 | 15.4 | 31–40 | 5 | 38.5 |
| Bachelor | 7 | 53.8 | 41–50 | 6 | 46.2 |
| Master or above | 4 | 30.8 | 51–60 | 2 | 15.4 |
| Family status | Frequency | Percent | Number of travelers | Frequency | Percent |
| Single-parent family | 1 | 7.7 | >3 | 4 | 30.8 |
| Nuclear family | 9 | 69.2 | 4–6 | 6 | 46.2 |
| Three-generation family | 3 | 23.1 | <6 | 3 | 23.1 |
| No. of children | Frequency | Percent | Days of travel | Frequency | Percent |
| 1 (age of 0–6) | 7 | 53.8 | 2–7 days | 11 | 84.6 |
| 2 (age of 7–12) | 5 | 38.5 | 8–15 days | 2 | 15.4 |
| 3 (age of 13–18) | 1 | 7.7 | 16 days or above | 0 | 0.0 |
| Last time travel | Frequency | Percent | Travel time | Frequency | Percent |
| 2020 | 1 | 7.7 | 1 | 7 | 53.8 |
| 2019 | 5 | 38.5 | 2 | 2 | 15.4 |
| 2017 | 5 | 38.5 | 3 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Before 2017 | 2 | 15.4 | 4 or above | 4 | 30.8 |
| Last destination | Frequency | Percent | | Frequency | Percent |
| Northeast Asia | 9 | 69.2 | Europe | 2 | 15.4 |
| Southeast Asia | 1 | 7.7 | Mexico | 1 | 7.7 |

Table 3 The unit of analysis of family cruise travel.

| Items | Units | Percentage (%) |
|--|-------|----------------|
| Self-esteem and social recognition | 11 | 11/176, 6.25% |
| Escape and relaxation | 13 | 13/176, 7.39% |
| Learning/discovery and novelty/excitement, | 13 | 13/176, 7.39% |
| Socialization | 3 | 3/176, 1.70% |
| Interpersonal connection | 11 | 11/176, 6.25% |
| New experience | 9 | 9/176, 5.11% |
| Family members' desire | 4 | 4/176, 2.27% |
| Convenience | 6 | 6/176, 3.41% |
| Topic/Advertisement | 8 | 8/176, 4.55% |
| Cruise characteristics | 11 | 11/176, 6.25% |
| Entertainment activities. | 12 | 12/176, 6.82% |
| Cabins | 21 | 21/176, 11.93% |
| Restaurants | 11 | 11/176, 6.25% |
| Facilities | 7 | 7/176, 3.98% |
| Shopping | 10 | 10/176, 5.68% |
| Optional activities | 7 | 7/176, 3.98% |
| Exclusive activities for children | 7 | 7/176, 3.98% |
| Work teams | 7 | 7/176, 3.98% |
| Tour leader | 2 | 2/176, 1.14% |
| Others | 3 | 3/176, 1.70% |
| Total units | 176 | |

Obtaining top-notch travel experiences is the paramount aspect of embarking on a cruise, as it eliminates the need for personal itinerary and meal arrangements.

You know, considering a cruise as an accomplishment is important because it's like fulfilling a personal goal. When there's a new cruise available, you can't help but feel excited to embark on it and experience something new. It's a way to

discover and understand yourself better, which is truly fulfilling.

In terms of seeking escape and relaxation, all interviewees mentioned that cruising is an ideal way for families to unwind and rejuvenate their bodies, minds, and souls, as it saves transportation time and includes accommodation, food, and activities.

You know, one of the things I love about being on a cruise is that internet access can be quite pricey. So, I've made a conscious choice to disconnect from the online world for a little while and simply relax. It's a chance to take a break from constant connectivity and truly unwind during my cruise experience.

Travel has the power to uplift your spirits, with a cruise offering the added benefits of delightful culinary experiences and a plethora of engaging activities. Moreover, the opportunity to disembark at various destinations for sightseeing adds to the overall relaxation and enjoyment of the trip.

Additionally, cruising provides opportunities for learning/discovery and novelty/stimulation, as it exposes children to different cultures through various activities and services.

On a cruise, you'll encounter people from diverse countries, alongside a wide range of activities and gourmet dining options. It's an incredible opportunity to immerse yourself in various cultures and expand your children's international perspectives. They can gain a broader understanding of the world by experiencing different customs and interacting with people from around the globe.

The cruise offers a plethora of activities for everyone to engage in, especially children who have the chance to

Table 4 Rankings of factors in the anticipation stage.

| Factor | Mean | S.D. | Ranking |
|-------------------------------|------|------|---------|
| Itinerary | 2.54 | 1.95 | 1 |
| Price | 3.77 | 2.55 | 2 |
| Travel days | 3.92 | 1.69 | 3 |
| Brand | 4.31 | 2.05 | 4 |
| Equipment | 4.85 | 1.75 | 5 |
| Activities | 5.46 | 1.78 | 6 |
| Reviews | 6.08 | 1.59 | 7 |
| Family members' travel desire | 6.31 | 2.92 | 8 |
| Travel agencies | 9.15 | 0.53 | 9 |

independently explore and discover new things. This self-driven exploration can lead to valuable personal growth and learning experiences for them.

Although socialization is not a primary motivation, it was found that cruising can foster social connections with old friends and increase family cohesion.

When I travel with friends and family, my focus primarily remains on spending time with them rather than actively seeking new acquaintances.

You know, one of the great things about being on a cruise is that using mobile phones is not as common. This actually works out in our favor because it means the family gets to spend more time together. Without the constant distraction of phones, we all actively participate in activities together, strengthening our family relationships and creating lasting memories. It's a wonderful opportunity to truly connect with one another and make the most of our time together on the cruise.

Furthermore, this study identified other motivations such as the desire for new experiences, the convenience of cruising, and the potential for generating social topics and publicity. In this stage, the interviewees ranked the following factors in order of importance, with 1 being the most important and 9 being the least important: itinerary (port of call, destination), price, travel days, brand, equipment, activities, reviews (online, newspapers and magazines, and word of mouth from relatives and friends), family members' travel desire, and travel agencies. The mean value was 4.00, and the standard deviation was 2.16, as shown in Table 4.

Participation stage. Families take into consideration various features such as tonnage, style, and age when selecting a cruise.

I intend to select a cruise ship that possesses substantial tonnage and offers a comparatively high level of stability.

Considering the presence of my children, my preference lies in selecting a family-oriented cruise ship that caters to their needs and provides a suitable environment for them.

The newly launched cruise ship offers upgraded facilities and rooms, which are both modern and superior in quality.

All interviewees preferred cabins with balconies or external windows, and expressed concern about the size of the beds.

Having a balcony is a must when embarking on a cruise, as it adds an element of pleasure to the experience. The ability to savor a cup of coffee or enjoy breakfast on the balcony is truly delightful.

I desire a more spacious cruise cabin to ensure a higher level of comfort during my stay.

When embarking on a cruise, the aspects of dining and resting take center stage, making the size, comfort, and amenities of the bed crucial factors to consider.

The diversity of restaurant options, including Chinese cuisine and kids' bars, was also a significant consideration.

The restaurant ought to offer a diverse selection of dishes that cater to both adults and children, providing ample choices for everyone.

I would prioritize considering a cruise ship that provides Chinese cuisine as an option, as it can be comforting to have familiar food available in case I am not accustomed to other cuisines.

Essential facilities such as water facilities, swimming pools, and courts were important, along with entertainment options such as shows.

A swimming pool, particularly one with a water slide, is a necessity as our children thoroughly enjoy water play.

Ample space for recreational activities, such as basketball courts and table tennis rooms, is essential to ensure that everyone can participate and enjoy playing together.

The presence of visually captivating shows or performances holds significant importance, as well as the availability of evening venues for entertainment, considering that certain places like casinos are not suitable for children.

While strolling around, one might encounter bustling crowds of people, indicating the presence of impromptu performances that can pleasantly catch you by surprise.

Our family thoroughly enjoys open-air cinemas, where we can leisurely recline and relish movies accompanied by the refreshing sea breeze.

Simple souvenirs were preferred for shopping, while parents emphasized the importance of children's exclusive activities and programs.

During shopping hours, the outlet often offers clearance prices, providing excellent opportunities to purchase items at significantly reduced and affordable rates.

The primary focus of our shopping is not on high-end consumption. Instead, we tend to select items that can be used as gifts upon disembarking from the cruise ship.

Given that my child is quite young, I will request the assistance of the kids club in looking after them, thereby granting me the opportunity to enjoy some personal space and leisure time.

In order to accommodate family outings, which primarily revolve around children, it is essential to have dedicated activities specifically designed for them.

Good service was a priority, as long as basic needs were met.

The housekeepers play a crucial role as they not only provide directions to your room if needed but also engage in friendly interactions with the children, adding a touch of interactivity to the experience.

Table 5 Rankings of factors in the recall stage.

| Factor | Mean | S.D. | Ranking |
|-------------------------------|------|------|---------|
| Itinerary | 1.85 | 1.46 | 1 |
| Travel days | 3.62 | 1.15 | 2 |
| Brand | 4.15 | 1.96 | 3 |
| Price | 4.38 | 2.47 | 4 |
| Equipment | 5.23 | 2.08 | 5 |
| Family members' travel desire | 5.69 | 2.73 | 6 |
| Activities | 5.58 | 1.87 | 7 |
| Reviews | 6.15 | 1.7 | 8 |
| Travel agencies | 9.00 | 0.68 | 9 |

The event staff will inquire about our requirements and ensure that the services we need are provided to us.

Families also planned their own shore tourism activities and placed a high value on security.

Safety, particularly when traveling with children, should be prioritized and given heightened attention on a cruise ship.

Recall stage. During the recall stage, family members have varying factors to consider when planning their next cruise travel. These factors are ranked in order of importance, with 1 being the most important and 9 being the least important. The primary considerations are itinerary, including the port of call and destination, followed by the number of days, brand, price, facilities, family members' desire for a cruise, activities, evaluation, and travel agencies. Additionally, food is an important factor with a mean score of 4.00 and a standard deviation of 1.00, as shown in Table 5.

Tables 4 and 5 present comparative analyses of factor rankings in two distinct stages, namely the anticipation stage and the recall stage. These stages correspond to the decision-making processes of individuals regarding their upcoming cruise travel. The focus is placed on evaluating the relative significance of various factors in the decision-making hierarchy. The following discussion summarizes the key findings derived from comparing the two tables:

In both the anticipation and recall stages, itinerary emerges as the foremost influential factor, as it attains the highest ranking in both tables. However, there exists a slight disparity in the mean scores and standard deviations associated with itinerary between the two stages. The factor of price consistently retains a considerable level of importance in both stages. Nonetheless, its ranking undergoes a transition from the second position in the anticipation stage to the fourth position in the recall stage. Notably, the mean score for price exhibits an increase in the recall stage as compared to the anticipation stage. Travel days continue to hold significance as a factor influencing decision-making in both the anticipation and recall stages. However, there is a change in its ranking, with travel days occupying the third position in the anticipation stage and the second position in the recall stage.

The importance attributed to brand remains relatively stable across both stages. Although there is a slight alteration in its ranking, the variance is minimal. Equipment. The significance of equipment exhibits consistency in both the anticipation and recall stages, with only a slight enhancement in its mean score during the recall stage. Activities, Reviews, Family members' travel desire, and Travel agencies. The rankings of these factors differ between the anticipation and recall stages while maintaining a consistent overall trend of importance. Notably, food emerges as a vital factor during the recall stage, attaining a mean score of 4.00 and a standard deviation of 1.00.

To summarize, while certain factors retain their importance throughout both the anticipation and recall stages, there are disparities in rankings, as well as minor variations in mean scores and standard deviations for specific factors. Furthermore, the recall stage introduces food as a salient consideration, which is not explicitly highlighted in the anticipation stage.

Conclusion and discussion

The study's findings revealed that motivation for cruise travel varied across several aspects. The "self-esteem and social recognition" aspect aimed to improve the quality of tourism and achieve a sense of accomplishment. "Escape and relax" emphasized relaxation of the body and mind. "Learning/discovering and novel/stimulating" involved experiencing diverse cultures and discovering new things. Experiencing a variety of cultures and uncovering novel aspects can be both educational and exciting. This parallels the concept of immersing oneself in the distinctive local essence of a culture, which has the potential to enhance tourists' satisfaction (Dai et al. 2019). "Socialization" referred to meeting new people and making friends. "Interpersonal connection" pertained to the interaction between family members and friends. The results of "escape and relax" and "learning/discovering and novel/stimulating" were consistent with those of Hung and Petrick's (2011) study.

In the Hsu and Li (2017) research, Hsu and Li directed their attention towards emerging markets in Asia, particularly Mainland China and Hong Kong. Their objective was to create a cruise motivation scale that encompassed several factors including novelty, escape, nature, leisure, social interaction, relaxation, relationship, and isolation. However, the present study shifts its focus to the motivations of family-oriented cruise tourists during the three-stage travel experience. The findings of this study indicate that family interaction holds greater importance compared to socialization. Additionally, the study identifies other motivations such as the pursuit of new experiences, a desire for cruise travel, convenience, and the generation of social topics or publicity.

The participation and recall stages of cruise travel planning highlighted the importance of itinerary, followed by the number of travel days, cruise brand, travel agency, and meals. In summary, Taiwan's cruises are primarily chartered, and it is suggested to develop additional ports of call to strengthen tourists' behavioral intentions while planning the itinerary. Additionally, travel agencies should differentiate their marketing and services to attract consumers. In contrast to Westerners, Asians prefer spending time together in activities (Chen et al. 2016), which can be attributed to the individualism cultural dimension theory (Hofstede 2001). Therefore, more activities should be designed for parent-child participation, which can enhance their relationship through family travel (Wu et al. 2019). The study also found that consumers attach considerable importance to the tonnage of cruise ships, as larger ships offer more facilities and activities.

According to Han and Hyun (2019), cruise travel is also motivated by learning, exploration, and excitement. Facilities such as waterslides and rock climbing are particularly appealing to children. With the rise of the internet, cruise companies can utilize social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and internet celebrities for advertising. Previous studies on cruises have examined tourist satisfaction, environmental impact, and the effects on ports. For instance, Wu et al. (2018) investigated the satisfaction and quality of experience of cruise tourists. However, these studies have largely focused on the Western cruise market, and there has been relatively little research on family cruise travel with children or the Asian cruise market (Wondirad 2019). Furthermore, the participation stage of cruise travel is seldom

explored. Radic (2019) divided the experience into three stages: pre-tour planning and decision making, cruise participation stage, and reinterpretation and evaluation, to investigate children's experiences on cruises.

Based on the study's findings, family members are motivated to go on cruises to seek new experiences, convenience, generate social topics/publicity, and fulfill their desire to travel. In the anticipation and recall stages of their travel experience, tourists prioritize the cruise itinerary, while during the participation stage, they value cabin space, exclusive activities for children, and clubs that cater to family members' needs. Family travel is an opportunity for children to explore the world, foster interests and interpersonal interaction, and strengthen familial relationships. To attract more families to choose cruise travel, tourism operators and cruise companies should tailor their strategies to the needs and motivations of their target market. However, the COVID-19 pandemic may negatively impact travel choices, and cruise companies should adapt by tailoring their offerings to suit different demands and motivations.

Taiwan stands as one of the top ten cruise tourist markets in Asia, making significant practical contributions (CLIA 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). The number of tourists continues to grow, particularly in the parent-child segment, leading to the emergence of numerous parent-child hotels, restaurants, attractions, and tourism options. Engaging children in outdoor activities during family trips enables them to learn through hands-on experiences. By interacting with parents and receiving guidance, children can explore the world, develop interests, socialize, and strengthen family bonds (Global views 2023).

To attract more tourists to choose cruises for family trips, tourism operators and shipping companies must understand the motivations behind tourists' choices, especially considering that modern travelers tend to avoid group travel, and cruise travel is a niche market. Hence, it is crucial to develop corresponding strategies. This study aims to collect and analyze factors valued by family tourists throughout the three stages of cruise travel. Based on interviews, the following suggestions are proposed, 1. Increase advertising exposure. 2. Introduce different cruise fleets or brands. 3. Offer new destinations and short-day travel arrangements. 4. Implement differentiated marketing strategies for travel agencies. 5. Enhance on-board activities, software, and hardware adjustments and updates.

These research findings can serve as references for future operators seeking to attract family groups. Additionally, they provide insight into improving the criteria for the anticipation stage, guiding itinerary design, and shaping sales considerations during the recall stage. Ultimately, these efforts aim to make cruising the top choice for families who have never experienced it before or for those who have taken a cruise and wish to repeat the experience.

This study had several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size was small, consisting of only 13 families who were interviewed using a snowballing research method. Moreover, the interviews were conducted with only one family member, which may not have fully captured the opinions and perspectives of other family members. The reliance on a single interviewee could limit the comprehensiveness of the data. Additionally, family cruises are relatively uncommon in Taiwan, which posed challenges in recruiting participants, particularly children. As a result, some participants, especially children, may have had blurred memories or difficulties expressing themselves, potentially impacting the accuracy and depth of their responses.

To address these limitations and provide more comprehensive insights, future research could explore the use of a simple closed questionnaire. This method may facilitate children's responses and mitigate some of the challenges associated with in-depth

interviews. By employing a questionnaire-based approach, a larger sample size could be obtained, increasing the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the findings from this study can serve as a valuable reference for designing future questionnaires, ensuring the inclusion of relevant aspects related to family cruise travel. It is also worth noting that future research could consider exploring cultural and regional differences in family composition and their impact on family cruise travel. By investigating these factors, a deeper understanding of how cultural and regional nuances influence the preferences, needs, and experiences of family travelers in the context of cruises could be gained. This would contribute to a more comprehensive analysis of the target market and provide valuable insights for cruise operators and tourism professionals seeking to cater to diverse family compositions in different cultural and regional contexts.

Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are included within the article.

Received: 29 January 2023; Accepted: 24 July 2023;

Published online: 15 August 2023

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Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

Prior to conducting the current study and conducting interviews with the 13 families, we obtained approval from an ethics review board of Leisure Management Department, National Pingtung University to ensure that the research is carried out in an ethical and responsible manner, with due regard for the protection of the subjects' rights and well-being.

Informed consent

In Taiwan, individuals who are above 20 years of age are not mandated to sign an informed consent form when participating in research, as this is deemed to align with ethical research practices. Moreover, prior to their involvement in the study, the parents of the 13 families were provided with detailed information about the research and were given the chance to seek clarifications before making a decision on whether or not to participate. This included furnishing the participants with a consent form that outlines the study's objectives, procedures, potential benefits, and their right to withdraw their involvement at any point.

Additional information

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