

## FESTIVAL CRUISES AS A HYBRID TOURISM FORMAT: AN EXPLORATORY TARGET GROUP ANALYSIS IN GERMANY

M. J. BAUER, L. BUDE

Matthias Johannes Bauer<sup>1</sup>, Lea Bude<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> IST University of Applied Sciences, Germany

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6050-5612>, E-mail: [mjbauer@ist-hochschule.de](mailto:mjbauer@ist-hochschule.de)

<sup>2</sup> Vacation At Sea GmbH, Germany

E-mail: [l.bude@vacationatsea.de](mailto:l.bude@vacationatsea.de)

**Abstract:** *This study addresses a notable research gap concerning festival cruises, a hybrid format largely unexplored scientifically, aiming to identify potential target groups and analyze their needs and expectations for successful long-term establishment. A quantitative-empirical research design with an explorative approach was employed, utilizing a standardized online questionnaire completed by 833 participants, with 579 interested individuals forming the basis for further analysis. Data analysis involved a Two-Step Cluster analysis to segment target groups based on socio-demographic and travel behavioral characteristics, followed by a success factor analysis using descriptive statistics and ABC analysis, differentiated by cluster. The results identified two distinct target segments: a younger, festival-affine, lower-income group without prior cruise experience (Cluster 1) and an older, comfort-oriented, higher-income group with extensive cruise and music festival experience (Cluster 2). Both clusters prioritize a fitting music genre, retreat areas, long restaurant opening hours, and an uncomplicated online booking process, while also identifying unsuitable music and financial aspects as key booking barriers. However, differences exist, with Cluster 1 emphasizing festival atmosphere and sustainability more, and Cluster 2 showing a slightly higher willingness for premium pricing. These findings indicate that festival cruises appeal to diverse segments with shared core requirements but also distinct preferences, necessitating differentiated offerings and communication strategies for successful market positioning.*

**Keywords:** *tourism segmentation; consumer behavior; experience economy; cruise tourism; music tourism; travel preferences*

### 1 Introduction

The cruise industry has long been the fastest-growing sector in tourism (Schulz & Auer, 2010). The cruise market reached a new peak of 34.64 million cruise passengers in 2024 (CLIA, 2025). As a new hybrid model, festival cruises combine key elements of cruises and music festivals and have great potential for the tourism market. This combination is considered a special format in both the cruise and music festival sectors. Although there has been little academic research into the synthesis to date, it holds great market potential due to the combination of two established tourism formats, particularly in light of the diversification of offerings (Business Insider Editorial Team, 2025).

The first offers for festival cruises already exist in the US and Europe. However, there has not yet been a comprehensive scientific analysis that examines the specific target group potential and success factors of this hybrid format. Of particular interest is the question of which target groups can be specifically addressed in which form and which aspects these groups consider to be particularly important for festival cruises. Consequently, the study aims to provide valuable insights for the long-term establishment of festival cruises by identifying

potential target groups and analyzing their needs and expectations from a demand perspective. For this purpose, an online survey was conducted to identify the potential participants for festival cruises and to analyze what expectations, needs and wishes potential participants have regarding the hybrid-format festival cruise.

## **2 Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Fundamentals of cruise tourism**

Today, cruises are the most important form of maritime tourism. A cruise is a multi-day voyage characterized by resort-style amenities, which is carried out as a round trip with a pre-planned route. It calls at one or more ports where passengers have the opportunity to leave the ship to visit the destinations there. With a cruise, the character of pure passenger transportation between several places is transcended and the ship itself serves as an independent vacation destination (Schulz & Auer, 2010).

A cruise is a package tour organized by a cruise line company on a ship with a predefined passenger capacity. It is therefore a comprehensive product bundle and includes various individual services such as transportation, accommodation, catering, entertainment and use of all onboard amenities, such as theaters, sports and shopping facilities. The aim is to ensure that all passengers' needs are met (Steinecke, 2018).

In contrast to river cruises, traditional ocean cruises are the foundational model of the industry. Club cruises are the most popular type of cruise worldwide. Within the cruise industry, niche cruises can also be differentiated as a specific form of cruise offer. One form of niche cruise relevant to this study is the theme cruise, where the majority or the entirety of trip is themed. (Kizielewicz 2013) By focusing on specific themes, such as music or sport, cruise operators try to differentiate their offers from those of their competitors and continuously offer the target group new, interesting offers (Cashman 2014; Cashman and Hayward 2014; Schulz & Auer, 2010).

### **2.2 Basics of festival tourism**

An event is characterized by the fact that it is planned, limited in time, tailored to a specific audience and organized for various reasons (Getz, 2008). According to Holzbaaur et al. (2010), an event is described as an event if it also has a special experience factor. Events are characterized, among other things, by a high positive memory value and uniqueness as well as an additional benefit for the participants. Ultimately, an event is defined by the subjective experience of the participant and thus varies with individual impressions (von Graeve, 2011; Holzbaaur et al., 2010).

Events are particularly relevant in the tourism industry as they attract visitors and contribute to the positioning of destinations (Getz & Page, 2016, p. 595; Grubelnik, 2015, p. 17). Furthermore, festival marketing is subject to specific customer centricity factors that are relevant for visitor loyalty (Bauer et. al., 2025b).

Belonging to the experience economy, a music festival is a specific form of event (Rivera et al. 2015; Morgan 2008; Pine and Gilmore 1998). Bellinghausen (2015) defines the term "music festival" as an event at which a number of artists present their music to an audience. The performing musicians can usually be assigned to a common musical genre or a thematic focus.

With a 99% market share, music festivals are the dominant festival form in Germany (Festivalfire, 2023). Electro, rock and pop festivals are the most popular types of festival, with techno being the most popular festival genre at 81%, followed by electronic dance music, or EDM for short, at 61%. Rock music is the fifth most popular genre with 19% (Bauer et al., 2022; Festivalfire, 2023).

### **2.3 Festival cruises as a hybrid format**

From a tourism viewpoint, the combination of cruises and music festivals is an innovative hybrid offering that draws on two established formats, cruise tourism and festival tourism. The festival cruise combines the two concepts by using the cruise ship both as a means of transportation and a venue. This combination leads to a new perception of the travel experience that cannot be exclusively categorized as either a cruise or a classic festival, giving it an innovative character (Bauer et. al., 2022; Betz et al., 2017, Cashman 2021, 2019, 2017).

Festival cruises can be assigned to the category of themed cruises (Steinecke, 2018; Kizielewicz 2013). In the context of festival cruises, the focus is on music events that take place on board and which generally focus on a specific musical genre (seetours, 2025). Not only are classic cruise elements such as transport, catering and on-board entertainment offered, but a music festival program is also integrated into the trip (Travelbook, 2024; Bauer et. al, 2022). Informal interactions between fans and musicians are common on festival cruises outside of the shows. (Cashman 2016)

Providers—especially cruise operators—can derive substantial benefits from the hybrid festival cruise format, as it offers them various strategic advantages. On the one hand, it offers the opportunity to develop unique selling propositions that help providers stand out from standardized cruise offers. On the other hand, festival cruises help to extend the season for both festival-goers and cruise tourists. This specialization simplifies the targeting of new target groups for both festival and cruise providers (Steinecke, 2018).

From a conceptual perspective, festival cruises can be understood as hybrid tourism products, as they combine elements from two established but distinct experiential formats: cruise tourism and music festivals. Cruise tourism provides the spatial, infrastructural and service-based framework, including accommodation, gastronomy, mobility and destination-related components. Music festivals, in contrast, contribute the event-related, atmospheric and community-oriented dimension of the experience. The hybrid character of festival cruises therefore does not merely result from placing concerts on a ship, but from the integration of two different experiential logics into one tourism product. (cf. chapters 2.1 and 2.2)

This interpretation is closely linked to the experience economy perspective. Following Pine and Gilmore (1998), tourism products increasingly compete through staged experiences rather than through services alone. Festival cruises can be interpreted as such experience-oriented products because they combine entertainment, escapism, aesthetic staging and social participation within a temporarily bounded tourism setting. This makes them particularly relevant for research on product hybridization, experience design and tourism segmentation.

## **3 Methodology**

Given the limited state of research on festival cruises, this study follows an exploratory rather than a hypothesis-testing research design. Therefore, no confirmatory hypotheses were formulated. Instead, the empirical analysis was guided by exploratory research questions focusing on three aspects: first, the identification of potential target group segments for festival cruises; second, the description of differences between these segments in terms of socio-demographic and travel-related characteristics; and third, the identification of perceived success factors and preferences relevant to the design and marketing of festival cruises.

### **3.1 Research design**

A quantitative-empirical research design with an exploratory approach was chosen for this study, as the topic of festival cruises has been a research gap to date. The focus is on the exploratory identification and segmentation of relevant target groups based on socio-

demographic and behavioral characteristics as well as the subsequent identification and weighting of success factors based on the assessments of the target group segments.

### **3.2 Survey procedure**

In order to answer the research questions empirically, a standardized online questionnaire with 52 items was created which were derived from the theoretical framework briefly outlined above in Chapters 2.1 to 2.3 (Reinders et al., 2022). It first asked for basic demographic data. This was followed by questions on previous travel behavior and previous participation in cruises and music festivals. Then, a filter question on general interest in festival cruises followed. In the next step, the remaining participants were asked questions to explore perceptions of the concept of festival cruises in order to formulate success factors.

The evaluation was carried out using a five-point Likert scale, the endpoints of which were "Not at all important" and "Very important" (Ritschl et al., 2023). In the next step, the participants were asked about their willingness to pay. They were then asked to indicate in a multiple-choice question which, if any, additional services they would book on board, as well as the reasons that would dissuade them from booking a festival cruise despite a suitable offer. The survey ended with that question.

The questionnaire was not designed to measure latent constructs using reflective multi-item scales, but to collect exploratory, item-based evaluations of preferences, experiences and perceived success factors related to festival cruises. Consequently, the items were analyzed individually and were not aggregated into composite indices. For this reason, classical reliability measures such as Cronbach's alpha and procedures for construct validation or item reduction, such as exploratory factor analysis, are not given here.

### **3.3 Data collection and analysis**

The online questionnaire was distributed via the newsletter and social media channels of the employer of one of the authors, who works in the tourism industry, as well as through a snowball effect via other social media channels, portals, and groups, and within the authors' own networks. The questionnaire was created using the "Google Forms" tool. Participation was anonymous and compliant with data protection regulations.

After a pre-test with ten participants, the data collection was carried out in the period from March 21, 2025 to April 30, 2025 and analyzed using the statistical program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The first step involved a cluster analysis (Bacher et. Al., 2010; Schendera, 2010) in order to segment potential target groups within the respondents interested in festival cruises. The aim was to use exploratory segmentation to identify similar segments in terms of demographics and travel behavior which differ as clearly as possible in terms of key characteristics such as age, occupation, travel behavior and experience with cruises and music festivals. The two-step cluster method (IBM Documentation, 2025; Bacher et. al., 2010) was used.

The variables included in the cluster analysis were selected based on their relevance for tourism segmentation and the exploratory objectives of the study. They covered socio-demographic characteristics as well as travel- and experience-related variables, including age, marital status, profession, income, travel frequency, cruise experience and festival experience. These variables were chosen because they reflect both life-stage-related differences and prior experience with the two reference formats of festival cruises: cruise tourism and music festivals (cf. chapter 2).

A Two-Step cluster analysis was applied because it is suitable for exploratory segmentation with larger datasets and can handle categorical variables. The procedure also allows the number of clusters to be determined automatically based on statistical criteria. The

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resulting two-cluster solution was selected because it provided a plausible and interpretable segmentation of the respondents.

Since the aim of the analysis was exploratory rather than confirmatory, no additional stability testing or significance testing of cluster differences are given here. The identified clusters should be interpreted as indicative target group profiles rather than statistically generalizable market segments.

Second came the success factor analysis. Subsequently, descriptive statistics were used in SPSS, whereby the mean value and standard deviation were calculated for each item. An ABC analysis was also carried out to categorize and simplify the interpretation of the results (Schawel & Billing, 2018). The next step involved a more differentiated analysis of the success factors. In the course of a cluster analysis, the 33 items in which the respondents were asked to rate the importance of certain factors using the five-point Likert scale were included as evaluation fields. Based on the available data, two clear cluster patterns have emerged. For an in-depth analysis of the differences between the clusters with regard to the success factors, some items were analyzed using cross-tabulations. The aim of the analysis was to enable a detailed description of the clusters in terms of their personal success factors.

Note: The cluster analysis followed an exploratory approach, aiming to identify potential target group structures rather than deriving statistically generalizable segments. This aligns with the exploratory nature of the study, which seeks not to establish confirmatory segmentation but rather to provide an initial structure for a phenomenon that has received little research attention to date. Consequently, the identified clusters should be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive segments, and further research is needed to psychometrically validate and refine the segmentation results. In line with exploratory segmentation approaches in novel research contexts, the focus was on interpretability and practical relevance rather than formal model optimization and evaluation.

### **4 Results and discussion**

This paper examines the potential target groups for festival cruises and the success factors for establishing this hybrid format. A total of 833 people took part in the online survey. 254 participants (30.49 %) were removed from the data set by means of a filter question and excluded from the evaluation of the success factors. The sample relevant for this analysis comprises  $n = 579$  people.

#### ***4.1 Target group potential for festival cruises***

The results of the two-step cluster analysis make it clear that two clearly distinguishable target group segments can be formed among the respondents.

The clusters are differentiated both in terms of demographic and travel behavior-related characteristics (see Table 1). The two most important items for cluster formation were age with an importance of 1.00, followed by occupation (0.99). Income, travel intensity, cruise experience and marital status played a moderate role in cluster formation, while festival experience contributed less to differentiation. Cluster 1 comprises 39.7% of the sample ( $n = 230$ ). Cluster 2 forms a slightly larger group with 60.3% ( $n = 349$ ). The differences in size should be taken into account when interpreting the data, although this is only relevant to a limited extent, as the analysis relies primarily on percentage values.

Cluster 1 consists mainly of younger people. 87.4% of respondents in this cluster were born between 1995 and 2004 and a large proportion of them are single and students. The cluster has a low net household income of less than 1,000 euros and tends to travel once or twice a year. Almost 60% of respondents in the cluster have already been to a music festival. What is striking, however, is that most people in Cluster 1 have no cruise experience, but are interested

in doing so (40%). The combination of relatively low income, high affinity with music festivals and a lack of cruise experience suggests that the people in Cluster 1 are a young, open and potentially receptive target group segment that is likely to be responsive to the music festival context (Bauer et. al., 2025a).

Cluster 2 represents the demographically older opposite pole. 30.4% were born between 1965 and 1974 and 21.8% between 1955 and 1964, which means that this cluster is primarily composed of active seniors (Maas, 2023). The target group is characterized by being predominantly employed and married. For the most part, respondents have a medium income of 2,000 to 2,999 euros per month, although a closer look at the results shows that the distribution of income in higher income brackets is relatively balanced. People in this cluster tend to travel slightly more often, typically three to four times a year. There is a major difference from Cluster 1 in terms of cruise experience, as 83.7% in Cluster 2 have already taken part in a cruise. In addition, 60.7% already have music festival experience—and are therefore not festival ‘virgins’ (Cashman 2019). This target group segment tends to comprise experienced, higher-income people with an affinity for cruises. They are more likely to find the format interesting in the cruise context, but also have an affinity for festivals.

**Table 1.** Results of the cluster analysis on demographic and travel behavior-related characteristics (own illustration)

|                                | Cluster 1                   |                               |            | Cluster 2                   |                               |            |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|
|                                | Cluster size 39,7 % (n=230) |                               |            | Cluster size 60,3 % (n=349) |                               |            |
| Item                           | Most frequent category      | Percentage within the cluster | Importance | Most frequent category      | Percentage within the cluster | Importance |
| Item 1: Age group (birth year) | 1995-2004                   | 87.4%                         | 1          | 1965-1974                   | 30.4%                         | 1          |
| Item 3: Marital status         | Single                      | 52.2%                         | 0.47       | Married                     | 50.1%                         | 0.47       |
| Item 6: Profession             | Student                     | 77.4%                         | 0.99       | Employed                    | 61.9%                         | 0.99       |
| Item 7: Income                 | Below €1,000                | 37.8%                         | 0.59       | €2,000 to €2,999            | 16.6%                         | 0.59       |
| Item 8: Travel frequency       | 1-2 times per year          | 51.3%                         | 0.41       | 3-4 times a year            | 36.7%                         | 0.41       |
| Item 9: Cruise experience      | No, but interested          | 40.0%                         | 0.55       | Yes                         | 83.7%                         | 0.55       |
| Item 10: Festival experience   | Yes                         | 59.1%                         | 0.03       | Yes                         | 60.7%                         | 0.03       |

#### 4.2 Success factor analysis for the establishment of festival cruises in general

The evaluation of success factors enables an assessment of which attributes potential participants in festival cruises rated as particularly relevant and which they rated as less

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important. An ABC analysis was carried out for categorization, in which items with a mean value from 4.00 upwards were rated as particularly important (A), those with a mean value of 3.00–3.99 as neutral (B) and those with a mean value below 3.00 as comparatively unimportant (C) (see appendix A).

The analysis of all respondents shows that five factors in particular were rated as especially important and were therefore classified as Category A. The most important success factor is the preferred musical genre during the cruise, with the highest mean value (4.43) and the lowest standard deviation (0.81). Pop dominates as the preferred musical genre (69%), followed by rock and EDM. The second most important success factor ( $M = 4.29$ ) is that there are quiet areas away from the festival action, followed by an uncomplicated booking process via the internet. Long and flexible restaurant opening hours are also a Category A factor for the respondents, as is provision of a large selection of non-alcoholic and alcoholic drinks on board.

### ***4.3 Success factor analysis for the establishment of festival cruises in general by cluster***

For a more detailed analysis of the preferences within the target group segments identified, the mean values and associated ABC categorizations of the success factors were considered within the cluster analysis. A general analysis of the relevance of success factors within all those interested in festival cruises, conducted independently of the clusters, already showed that individual aspects such as the preferred musical genre, the opportunity to withdraw to a quiet space, long restaurant opening hours, a large selection of drinks and an uncomplicated online booking process are of above-average importance.

This assessment is also largely shared by both target group segments. In both Cluster 1 and Cluster 2, the preferred musical genre was rated as one of the most important success factors. In addition, both clusters cite an unsuitable music genre as a possible obstacle to booking. However, the clusters differ in terms of the preferred musical genre. Although both segments prefer pop music, Cluster 1 tends more towards electronic music, hip-hop and indie, while Cluster 2 prefers music genres such as rock and pop.

Clusters 1 and 2 also agree on some other attributes, such as quiet areas on board, long restaurant opening hours and an uncomplicated booking process via the internet, and rate these as A factors. This indicates that these are the core requirements for festival cruises, which can be regarded as necessary basic conditions regardless of age, travel experience and income. Only the aspect of beverage selection is evaluated slightly differently by the clusters: Cluster 2 rates this aspect with a lower relevance, assigning it to the B category, while Cluster 1 gives it a higher relevance and classifies it as an A factor. Overall, however, these factors should definitely be considered relevant requirements when designing the offer.

However, a detailed examination of both target group clusters also reveals differences in the importance of some success factors (see Appendix B). In Cluster 1, for example, the festival atmosphere on board is classified as an A factor, while in Cluster 2 this aspect is only rated as a B factor. Similar differences in prioritization can also be seen in the long opening hours of the bars or the selection of drinks on board. In contrast to Cluster 2, both items are also rated as an A factor in Cluster 1. In addition to the items relating to the festival experience, other aspects are also valued more highly in Cluster 1 than in Cluster 2. Among other things, it is more important to respondents in Cluster 1 that the trip takes place in warmer weather. The sustainability aspect is also rated as an A factor in Cluster 1 but not in Cluster 2, which only classified it in category B—unlike at regular open-air festivals, where the issue of sustainability plays only a minimal role for all guests (Bauer et. al., 2025a; Bauer et. al., 2024). The difference in the importance of the provision of diet choices such as vegetarian and vegan food is

particularly striking. While this variable was classified as an A factor in cluster 1, it is rated as unimportant in cluster 2 and falls into Category C.

Considering the overall picture, the question of potential booking obstacles also arises. In addition to financial aspects, environmental and sustainability concerns, fundamental reservations about cruises and a different preferred form of vacation play an important role for Cluster 1. Cluster 1 prefers social media as a communication channel. This can be explained by the age structure of the cluster (ARD & ZDF, 2024). The other preferred communication channels, such as festival websites and online advertising, also show the cluster's affinity for online communication. In addition, value is also placed on interpersonal recommendations.

Cluster 2, on the other hand, has a different profile. The average age of the people assigned to cluster 2 tends to be that of active seniors. Respondents in this cluster tend to be employed, have a higher income and to be very experienced cruise passengers. They rate traditional comfort and quality aspects more highly than Cluster 1 and, in terms of gastronomy, also rate onboard à la carte restaurants as more important. However, respondents in Cluster 2 are not enthusiastic about typical festival snacks, which they categorize as a C factor. These are rated more highly in Cluster 1. Cluster 2 also differs from Cluster 1 in terms of the selection of additional services, in that it has a significantly higher affinity for booking specialty restaurants as an additional service. This indicates that Cluster 2 respondents place more value on gastronomic quality and service. With regard to the choice of cabin category, Cluster 2 also opts for higher and more expensive cabin categories than Cluster 1. Balcony cabins tend to be booked in Cluster 2, while inside and outside cabins are preferred in Cluster 1. Ship size is also more relevant in Cluster 2 than in Cluster 1. As is typical for mass tourism (Georgsdottir & Oskarsson, 2017), both clusters are most likely to opt for normal to large ocean-going vessels; however, the choice of ship size and type was evaluated as a B factor in Cluster 2, while in Cluster 1 it was considered rather unimportant and subsequently placed in the C category, here.

Cluster 2 is also more open to festival cruises for which a flight to join the cruise would be necessary. This may be partly due to the higher income within the cluster. Shore excursions on the festival theme, on the other hand, are rated as unimportant in Cluster 2, in contrast to Cluster 1. With regard to factors which would dissuade them from booking, Cluster 2, like Cluster 1, cites financial aspects as the biggest obstacle. Additionally, an unsuitable musical genre and a lack of time or vacation days are also important factors. Cluster 2 also differs from Cluster 1 in terms of communication channels, with the official websites of cruise operators being mentioned most frequently, which can be explained by the high affinity for cruises. Cluster 2 is also most likely to be reached via traditional online channels such as social media and email marketing. The cluster also attaches importance to interpersonal recommendations.

With regard to willingness to pay for festival cruises, despite the differences in income between the clusters, it can be seen that both clusters indicated a preferred upper price limit of 150–199 euros per night. However, differences can be seen in the upper price levels, as these were almost exclusively indicated by Cluster 2. This indicates a higher willingness to pay, but only to a small extent (Klein et al., 2017).

In summary, the differentiated cluster analysis with regard to success factors shows that both target group segments have some similarities in terms of their rating of individual factors, but also have different preferences: The similarities in the A factors suggest common core requirements that should be considered mandatory for festival cruises offerings in general. Unanimously rated C factors can be disregarded when designing the offer. The differing preferences of the clusters offer potential for target group-specific offer differentiation, for example in the basic design of the trip, the program content or the choice of communication channels for marketing.



#### **4.4 Practical implications**

The findings have practical implications for both cruise operators and festival organizers. For cruise operators, the results indicate that festival cruises should not be marketed as conventional cruises with added music entertainment, but as experience-oriented hybrid products requiring differentiated programming, pricing and communication strategies. For festival organizers, the findings suggest that the cruise setting offers opportunities to extend festival brands into tourism contexts, but also requires adaptation to the expectations of cruise-oriented audiences, particularly with regard to comfort, gastronomy and service quality.

The segmentation results further suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to address the full market potential of festival cruises. Younger, event-oriented participants may respond more strongly to music programming, atmosphere and accessible pricing, whereas older, cruise-oriented participants may place greater emphasis on comfort, service quality and the overall travel experience.

#### **5. Conclusions: Limitations and outlook**

The present study is subject to several limitations that must be taken into account when evaluating the results.

One central limitation results from the innovative nature of the subject of the study. Festival cruises represent a hybrid tourism format that remains largely under-explored to date and for which there is neither an established theoretical definition nor reliable empirical preliminary work. The design of the online questionnaire was therefore based on existing literature on the two established reference formats of festival and cruise tourism (see above, chapters 2.1 to 2.3.). This provided a preliminary framework to identify the relevant dimensions, but was necessarily limited by the fact that features specific to festival cruises are only indirectly observable.

The sample is subject to self-selection effects, as the survey was distributed through snowball sampling and social media channels. Consequently, the sample cannot be considered representative of the German population or of all potential participants in festival cruises. The survey was conducted in German and focused on the German market. Therefore, the findings should not be generalized to other national source markets without further comparative research.

A further limitation concerns the design of the survey instrument. The success factors were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale for subjective assessment, a standard method for eliciting opinions (Ritschl et al., 2023). Due to the odd-numbered scale format, however, there is the possibility that the middle category is used as a so-called escape choice, for example in cases where the respondent has not formulated an opinion. This can lead to a reduction in selectivity and thus to inaccuracies in the results (Porst, 2014).

Further limitations result from the cluster analysis carried out. The segmentation was carried out exclusively on the basis of selected demographic characteristics. Consequently, it is possible that different cluster configurations would have resulted if other variables or alternative analytical methods had been included. The identified target group segments should therefore be seen as an exploratory first attempt to determine the target group. In addition, the economic, organizational and legal framework conditions of the providers were not systematically taken into account when deriving the recommendations for action. The success factors identified therefore primarily reflect the perspective of potential participants, while aspects such as cost structures, logistical feasibility or regulatory requirements were not included.

Furthermore, the cluster analysis revealed age as a particularly influential segmentation variable. While this reflects meaningful differences in life stage, travel experience and cruise

familiarity, it also limits the interpretation of the clusters as purely behavior-based segments. The identified clusters should therefore be understood as socio-demographically anchored target group profiles.

The aforementioned limitations provide several starting points for future research. Qualitative methods, in particular semi-structured interviews with people interested in festival cruises, could help to capture motivations, expectations and needs in greater depth (Reinders et al., 2022). In addition, the inclusion of the provider perspective appears to be a sensible next step, for example through expert interviews with product and program managers, in order to gain additional insights into the development and implementation of the product concept. Due to the exclusive use of the German language and the distribution of the questionnaire, this study focuses on the German market. Future studies could examine the international marketability of festival cruises through comparative analyses with data from other source markets and analyze cultural differences in the relevance of individual success factors. Overall, the study makes an initial scientific contribution to research into the hybrid format of festival cruises and thus creates a starting point for further empirical and conceptual work.

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**Appendix**

**Table A.1.** *Results of the mean value analysis of the success factors in relation to all interested persons from important to unimportant (own illustration).*

| Item                                                                                                                                                      | Average | Standard deviation | Category |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------------------|----------|
| Item 23: How important would your preferred music genre be during the festival cruise?                                                                    | 4.43    | 0.811              | A        |
| Item 36: How important is it to you that there are quiet areas on board away from the festival activities for relaxation?                                 | 4.29    | 0.98               | A        |
| Item 47: How important would a straightforward booking process via the internet be to you?                                                                | 4.23    | 1.038              | A        |
| Item 45: How important would it be to you that restaurants have long and flexible opening hours so that you can also eat out during the festival program? | 4.18    | 0.937              | A        |
| Item 39: How important would a large selection of drinks on board be to you?                                                                              | 4.08    | 0.992              | A        |
| Item 29: How important would it be to you to have a strong festival atmosphere?                                                                           | 3.97    | 1.016              | B        |
| Item 46: How important would it be to you that bars are open until late at night?                                                                         | 3.95    | 1.179              | B        |
| Item 40: How important would the option to book an all-inclusive upgrade with drinks in advance or on board be to you?                                    | 3.84    | 1.262              | B        |
| Item 20: How important would it be to you that the cruise operator is already established and has a good reputation?                                      | 3.82    | 1.132              | B        |
| Item 17: How important would it be to you that the trip takes place in warm temperatures?                                                                 | 3.78    | 1.083              | B        |
| Item 24: How important would it be to you that well-known headliners and artists from the music genre perform?                                            | 3.75    | 0.99               | B        |
| Item 30: How important would it be to you that the ports and destinations are attractive?                                                                 | 3.75    | 1.064              | B        |
| Item 21: How important would it be to you that the cruise operator places great emphasis on sustainability and environmental protection?                  | 3.68    | 1.277              | B        |
| Item 35: How important is the choice of cabin category to you?                                                                                            | 3.64    | 1.186              | B        |
| Item 33: How important would it be to you that there is sufficient time in the port (no stops that are too short)?                                        | 3.62    | 1.171              | B        |
| Item 26: How important would it be to you to have multiple stages or venues on board?                                                                     | 3.58    | 1.138              | B        |

|                                                                                                                                                  |      |       |   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------|---|
| Item 13: How important would the optimal duration of a festival cruise be to you?                                                                | 3.54 | 1.007 | B |
| Item 42: How important would it be to you to have buffet restaurants?                                                                            | 3.48 | 1.199 | B |
| Item 15: How important would it be to you to be able to book a travel package (train/flight) through the provider?                               | 3.27 | 1.437 | B |
| Item 43: How important is it to you that individual dietary needs are taken into account?                                                        | 3.18 | 1.549 | B |
| Item 27: How important would it be to you that, in addition to the main concerts, there is a varied daily program with additional entertainment? | 3.17 | 1.246 | B |
| Item 19: How important would the preferred size of the ship be to you?                                                                           | 3.13 | 1.149 | B |
| Item 31: How important would it be to you to have shore excursions related to the festival theme?                                                | 3.05 | 1.166 | B |
| Item 44: How important is it to you that festival-typical snack food is also offered?                                                            | 3.05 | 1.344 | B |
| Item 41: How important would it be to you to have à la carte restaurants?                                                                        | 3.03 | 1.304 | B |
| Item 14: How important would it be to you that you don't have to fly for the trip?                                                               | 2.98 | 1.529 | C |
| Item 37: How important would it be to you to have a wellness/spa area?                                                                           | 2.94 | 1.383 | C |
| Item 28: How important would it be to you that additional activities with the artists are offered?                                               | 2.74 | 1.267 | C |
| Item 25: How important would it be to you that niche genres are also presented?                                                                  | 2.62 | 1.134 | C |
| Item 38: How important would it be to you to have a fitness area?                                                                                | 2.6  | 1.342 | C |
| Item 48: How important would detailed advice from a travel agency be to you?                                                                     | 2.55 | 1.391 | C |
| Item 32: How important would it be to you to have as few sea days as possible on the trip?                                                       | 2.42 | 1.244 | C |
| Item 16: How important would it be to you that the trip takes place during holiday periods or over public holidays?                              | 2.17 | 1.433 | C |

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**Table A.2.** *Results of the mean value analysis of the success factors in relation to the two cluster groups formed (own illustration)*

|                                                                                                                                          | Cluster 1                   |             |          | Cluster 2                   |             |          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|----------|-----------------------------|-------------|----------|
|                                                                                                                                          | Cluster size 39,7 % (n=230) |             |          | Cluster size 60,3 % (n=349) |             |          |
| Item                                                                                                                                     | Average                     | Importance  | Category | Average                     | Importance  | Category |
| Item 13: How important would the optimal duration of a festival cruise be to you?                                                        | 3,57                        | 0           | B        | 3,52                        | 0           | B        |
| Item 14: How important would it be to you that you don't have to fly for the trip?                                                       | <b>3,38</b>                 | <b>0,07</b> | <b>B</b> | 2,72                        | <b>0,07</b> | <b>C</b> |
| Item 15: How important would it be to you to be able to book a travel package (train/flight) through the provider?                       | 3,51                        | 0,03        | B        | 3,11                        | 0,03        | B        |
| Item 16: How important would it be to you that the trip takes place during holiday periods or over public holidays?                      | 2,85                        | 0,23        | C        | 1,73                        | 0,23        | C        |
| Item 17: How important would it be to you that the trip takes place in warm temperatures?                                                | <b>4</b>                    | <b>0,05</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>3,63</b>                 | <b>0,05</b> | <b>B</b> |
| Item 19: How important would the preferred size of the ship be to you?                                                                   | <b>2,93</b>                 | <b>0,04</b> | <b>C</b> | <b>3,27</b>                 | <b>0,04</b> | <b>B</b> |
| Item 20: How important would it be to you that the cruise operator is already established and has a good reputation?                     | 3,67                        | 0,02        | B        | 3,91                        | 0,02        | B        |
| Item 21: How important would it be to you that the cruise operator places great emphasis on sustainability and environmental protection? | <b>4,01</b>                 | <b>0,07</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>3,46</b>                 | <b>0,07</b> | <b>B</b> |
| Item 23: How important would your preferred music genre be during the festival cruise?                                                   | 4,54                        | 0,02        | A        | 4,36                        | 0,02        | A        |
| Item 24: How important would it be to you that well-known headliners and artists from the music genre perform?                           | 3,75                        | 1,34 E-4    | B        | 3,75                        | 1,34 E-4    | B        |

|                                                                                                                                                  |             |             |          |             |             |          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| Item 25: How important would it be to you that niche genres are also presented?                                                                  | 2,71        | 0,01        | C        | 2,55        | 0,01        | C        |
| Item 26: How important would it be to you to have multiple stages or venues on board?                                                            | 3,88        | 0,07        | B        | 3,38        | 0,07        | B        |
| Item 27: How important would it be to you that, in addition to the main concerts, there is a varied daily program with additional entertainment? | 3,4         | 0,04        | B        | 3,01        | 0,04        | B        |
| Item 28: How important would it be to you that additional activities with the artists are offered?                                               | 2,5         | 0,04        | C        | 2,91        | 0,04        | C        |
| Item 29: How important would it be to you to have a strong festival atmosphere?                                                                  | <b>4,34</b> | <b>0,14</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>3,73</b> | <b>0,14</b> | <b>B</b> |
| Item 30: How important would it be to you that the ports and destinations are attractive?                                                        | 3,63        | 0,02        | B        | 3,83        | 0,02        | B        |
| Item 31: How important would it be to you to have shore excursions related to the festival theme?                                                | <b>3,22</b> | <b>0,03</b> | <b>B</b> | <b>2,93</b> | <b>0,03</b> | <b>C</b> |
| Item 32: How important would it be to you to have as few sea days as possible on the trip?                                                       | 2,37        | 0           | C        | 2,45        | 0           | C        |
| Item 33: How important would it be to you that there is sufficient time in the port (no stops that are too short)?                               | 3,57        | 0,01        | B        | 3,66        | 0,01        | B        |
| Item 35: How important is the choice of cabin category to you?                                                                                   | 3,18        | 0,16        | B        | 3,94        | 0,16        | B        |
| Item 36: How important is it to you that there are quiet areas on board away from the festival activities for relaxation?                        | 4,42        | 0,02        | A        | 4,2         | 0,02        | A        |
| Item 37: How important would it be to you to have a wellness/spa area?                                                                           | 2,87        | 0,01        | C        | 2,99        | 0,01        | C        |
| Item 38: How important would it be to you to have a fitness area?                                                                                | 2,55        | 0           | C        | 2,64        | 0           | C        |



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|                                                                                                                                                           |             |             |          |             |             |          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| Item 39: How important would a large selection of drinks on board be to you?                                                                              | <b>4,3</b>  | <b>0,06</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>3,93</b> | <b>0,06</b> | <b>B</b> |
| Item 40: How important would the option to book an all-inclusive upgrade with drinks in advance or on board be to you?                                    | 3,92        | 0,01        | B        | 3,79        | 0,01        | B        |
| Item 41: How important would it be to you to have à la carte restaurants?                                                                                 | <b>2,69</b> | <b>0,08</b> | <b>C</b> | <b>3,26</b> | <b>0,08</b> | <b>B</b> |
| Item 42: How important would it be to you to have buffet restaurants?                                                                                     | 3,72        | 0,05        | B        | 3,32        | 0,05        | B        |
| Item 43: How important is it to you that individual dietary needs are taken into account?                                                                 | <b>4,09</b> | <b>0,37</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>2,58</b> | <b>0,37</b> | <b>C</b> |
| Item 44: How important is it to you that festival-typical snack food is also offered?                                                                     | <b>3,4</b>  | <b>0,07</b> | <b>B</b> | <b>2,83</b> | <b>0,07</b> | <b>C</b> |
| Item 45: How important would it be to you that restaurants have long and flexible opening hours so that you can also eat out during the festival program? | 4,38        | 0,05        | A        | 4,05        | 0,05        | A        |
| Item 46: How important would it be to you that bars are open until late at night?                                                                         | <b>4,29</b> | <b>0,09</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>3,72</b> | <b>0,09</b> | <b>B</b> |
| Item 47: How important would a straightforward booking process via the internet be to you?                                                                | 4,56        | 0,1         | A        | 4,01        | 0,1         | A        |
| Item 48: How important would detailed advice from a travel agency be to you?                                                                              | 2,4         | 0,02        | C        | 2,65        | 0,02        | C        |