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Linking Cruise Ship Arrivals to MSMEs Empowerment: A Case Study of Benoa Port, Bali

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Abstract: This study examines the linkages between cruise ship arrivals and the empowerment of MSMEs at Benoa Port, Bali. The research is grounded in the phenomenon of MSMEs' dependency on the episodic flows of cruise tourists, which simultaneously create opportunities and vulnerabilities. The objective of the present study is threefold: first, to analyze MSMEs responses to cruise tourism; second, to assess social, economic, and environmental dimensions through the SET-Based Evaluation framework; and third, to identify emerging adaptive strategies. A qualitative case study approach was employed, combining in-depth interviews, participant observation, and secondary data analysis. The findings indicate that MSMEs derive substantial economic benefits by adopting positive adaptation strategies such as pricing adjustments, product diversification, extended operating hours, and digital payment adoption. However, a small group of MSMEs exhibited neutral or resistant attitudes, indicative of heterogeneity in adaptive responses. The study's findings indicate that cruise tourism offers considerable potential for the empowerment of MSMEs. To promote long-term sustainability, the study recommends policy interventions aimed at enhancing resilience, expanding market access, and ensuring inclusive and environmentally responsible development.

Keyword: Benoa Port Bali, Cruise tourism, MSMEs Empowerment, SET-Based Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

Cruise tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry, contributing significantly to regional economies through passenger expenditure, port fees, and ancillary services (Brida & Zapata, 2010; Lin et al., 2022; Syriopoulos et al., 2020). In Southeast Asia, cruise destinations such as Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia are increasingly positioning themselves as cruise hubs to capture this lucrative

market (APEC, 2020). Bali, in particular, has emerged as a pivotal node in cruise itineraries, attributable to its cultural allure, natural splendor, and the ongoing expansion of its port facilities at Benoa. The arrival of cruise ships has been shown to generate direct economic benefits, as well as indirect opportunities for local communities, particularly micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). These MSMEs often serve as suppliers of goods, handicrafts, food, and tourism services.

Despite the growing attention to cruise tourism, scholarly inquiry has predominantly focused on macro-level impacts such as environmental externalities, port infrastructure, and destination competitiveness (Božovi, 2025; Hoarau-Heemstra et al., 2023; Ruiz-Guerra et al., 2019). However, there has been far less attention paid to the question of how cruise tourism translates into local economic empowerment, particularly in the context of MSMEs in developing economies. A substantial body of research has emerged on the subject of the role of MSMEs in tourism, with a particular focus on their impact on poverty alleviation, job creation, and cultural preservation (Armanu et al., 2023; Widiastini et al., 2023). Nonetheless, the relationship between cruise ship arrivals and the empowerment of MSMEs in port-adjacent communities remains an under-explored area, resulting in a substantial research gap.

In the context of Bali, the development of Benoa Port as a cruise terminal has been the subject of considerable controversy, with debates focusing on environmental risks, land use conflicts, and community resistance (Adharani et al., 2020; Dinariyana et al., 2025). However, there is a paucity of empirical evidence regarding the potential of cruise tourism to stimulate inclusive local development through MSMEs. This dearth of evidence is problematic, given that MSMEs constitute the backbone of Indonesia's economy, contributing more than 60% of GDP and employing the majority of the workforce (Suci Ramadani et al., 2025). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between cruise tourism and MSMEs growth is imperative for evaluating the equitable distribution of benefits derived from tourism expansion.

This study aims to address these gaps by examining the linkages between cruise ship arrivals and MSMEs empowerment at Benoa Port, Bali. Specifically, the study investigates how local MSMEs respond to cruise tourism, what challenges and opportunities they encounter, and to what extent cruise tourism fosters sustainable livelihoods. The present study contributes to the extant literature in three ways by adopting a case study approach. First, it provides empirical insights into the micro-level impacts of cruise tourism on MSMEs in a developing economy context. Secondly, it contributes to the existing discourse on tourism-driven empowerment by focusing on a niche yet growing segment of the tourism industry. Thirdly, it proffers policy-relevant recommendations for balancing port development, cruise tourism growth, and local economic empowerment.

METHOD

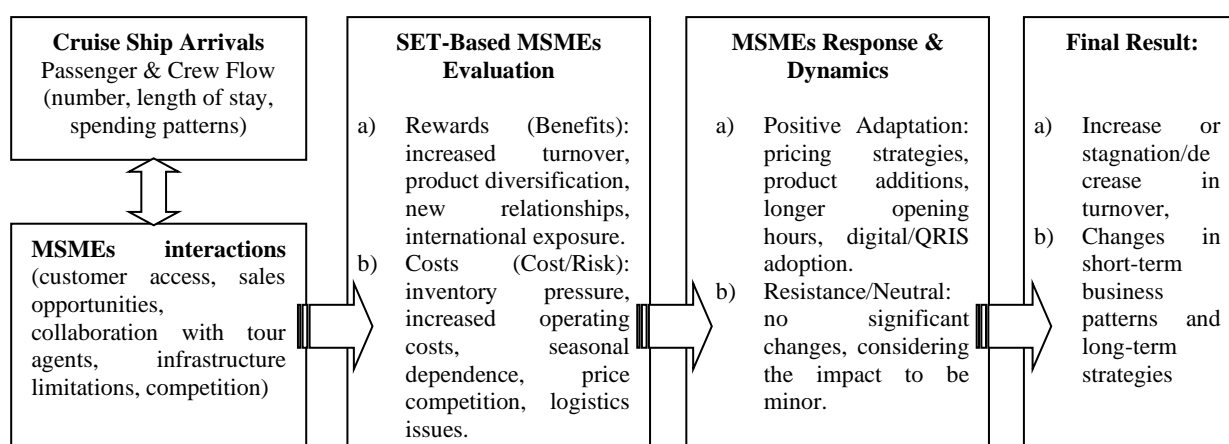
The researchers employed a qualitative case study approach to understand the socio-economic dynamics of cruise ship arrivals at Benoa Port, Bali, and their implications for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). The decision to utilize a case study design was predicated on its demonstrated efficacy in facilitating a profound and contextualized comprehension of intricate social phenomena, particularly in establishing a nexus between global tourism flows and local business empowerment. The present study was conducted in the area surrounding Benoa Port, which has increasingly become a hub for international cruise ships. The selection of this location was predicated on its representation of a critical interface where global tourism directly interacts with local livelihoods. The local economy is characterized by a variety of MSMEs including handicraft vendors, food and beverage providers, tour operators, and service-based enterprises. These enterprises are

particularly important in their direct interaction with the cruise passengers and crew members who frequent the area.

The primary method of data collection entailed the implementation of semi-structured interviews and participant observation. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, a series of interviews were conducted with MSMEs owners, local workers, port authorities, and community leaders. This approach aimed to capture a diverse array of perspectives. The researcher conducted observations during the days when cruise ships were docking, which allowed for direct recording of passenger flow patterns, interactions with MSMEs, and immediate business responses. Secondary data sources, including port statistics, policy documents, and tourism reports, were also reviewed to enrich the analysis and enable triangulation.

The analytical framework utilized in this study was guided by Social Exchange Theory (SET), which posits that individuals and groups evaluate social and economic interactions based on perceived rewards and costs (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Delamater, 2006). Within this framework, the experiences of MSMEs were analyzed in terms of the benefits they gained, such as increased revenues, product diversification, and international exposure as well as the challenges they faced, including operational pressures, price competition, and logistical constraints. These evaluations informed the interpretation of MSMEs responses, whether in the form of adaptive strategies, neutral stances, or resistance. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and categorize them into broader themes related to MSMEs empowerment (Mariani et al., 2024; Sadeli, 2025). The development of codes was an inductive process, derived from the data. These codes were then refined in relation to the SET concepts of rewards and costs. This enabled the study to map how MSMEs strategies evolved in response to the opportunities and risks posed by cruise tourism.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were prioritized. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, confidentiality was maintained, and findings were validated through member-checking with selected informants. This approach ensured that the study adhered to ethical standards and accurately reflected the lived realities of local stakeholders.



Source: Researcher (2025)

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that cruise ship arrivals at Benoa Port constitute both an opportunity and a challenge for local MSMEs, particularly in handicrafts and cultural-based products. The flow of passengers and crew introduces a concentrated demand that directly connects global tourism markets with small-scale local enterprises. Consistent with

earlier research on cruise tourism in small island economies (Cheer, 2017; Sandven et al., 2024), this dynamic reinforces the dual character of cruise tourism as a driver of immediate economic gains while simultaneously generating structural vulnerabilities.

MSME Interactions.

During docking days, MSMEs engage directly with cruise passengers through sales of handicrafts, culinary offerings, and cultural services. These interactions provide essential market exposure and open new channels of collaboration with tour operators. Yet, infrastructural constraints, uneven bargaining positions, and intra-local competition limit the scale and sustainability of such benefits. Similar findings in Balinese rural tourism contexts suggest that local enterprises often face a “middleman dilemma,” where benefits are filtered through intermediaries, thereby reducing local capture of tourism revenues (Cole, 2012).



Source: Researcher (2025)

Figure 2. (a) The condition of the art market at Benoa Port when there are no cruise ships
(b) The interaction between local SMEs and tourists when cruise ships arrive

Empirical observations at Benoa Port demonstrate a marked contrast in the dynamics of the art market contingent upon the presence or absence of cruise ships. In the absence of docking, the marketplace exhibits a notable degree of inactivity, as evidenced by the presence of unoccupied stalls and an absence of trading activity. This condition suggests a limited domestic demand for handicrafts and souvenirs within the port area, highlighting the structural vulnerability of local MSMEs. The economic activities of these MSMEs are closely tied to external tourist flows rather than local consumers, indicating a need for policies that support local economic development and strengthen the resilience of MSMEs in the face of external shocks. This reliance underscores the vulnerable state of these enterprises, which are susceptible to inactivity and revenue stagnation in the absence of international tourist arrivals.

Conversely, the arrival of cruise ships results in the transformation of the art market into a vibrant economic space characterized by intensive interactions between local MSMEs and international tourists. Vendors actively display and sell various cultural products, while tourists engage in direct transactions and interpersonal exchanges that foster both economic benefits and cultural appreciation. This shift underscores the pivotal role of cruise tourism in driving demand, thereby generating a temporal yet highly concentrated market opportunity for MSMEs. This phenomenon underscores the pivotal role of cruise tourism in driving

economic growth, while simultaneously highlighting the vulnerability of MSMEs that heavily rely on this market sector.



Source: Researcher (2025)

Figure 3. Cruise ship passengers engaging with local MSMEs at Benoa Port, fostering cultural exchange and economic opportunities

The integration of these two conditions reveals that MSMEs at Benoa Port exhibit a high degree of vulnerability to variations in the frequency of cruise ship arrivals. While the short-term benefits of cruise tourism, such as direct market access and cultural exposure, are evident, there are concomitant concerns regarding the potential for structural dependency, which could compromise long-term sustainability. This dependency underscores the necessity of strategic policy interventions to diversify market opportunities, expand alternative consumer bases, and enhance adaptive capacities of local enterprises. Absent such measures, the livelihoods of MSMEs will remain precariously tied to the uncertain and seasonal rhythms of global cruise tourism.

SET-Based Evaluation.

Applying the SET-Based Evaluation framework to the condition of MSMEs at Benoa Port, and triangulating it with insights from in-depth interviews, provides a comprehensive understanding of how cruise ship arrivals are directly linked to the economic empowerment, social visibility, and environmental challenges of local enterprises. This multidimensional perspective illustrates that while cruise tourism creates significant opportunities for MSMEs growth and cultural expression, it simultaneously exposes them to structural vulnerabilities and sustainability concerns, thereby underscoring the complex relationship between global tourism flows and local community empowerment.

From an economic vantage point, the findings from the interviews consistently indicate that vendors placed significant emphasis on the cruise ship schedule as the primary factor influencing their income. One respondent articulated the following: *"In the absence of a ship, it is not possible to sell any goods. On occasion, I visit the market, only to find it desolate and depart without making any sales."* This statement elucidates the structural vulnerability of SMEs, whose livelihoods are contingent on external flows of international tourists. While cruise ship arrivals generate significant short-term revenues, the absence of alternative customer bases highlights a lack of diversification and resilience.

The social dimension was identified as a prominent theme during the course of the interviews. Vendors expressed a sense of pride in their ability to introduce Balinese culture to foreign visitors through crafts, souvenirs, and direct communication. An artisan observed,

"Tourists often inquire about the symbolic significance of our carvings, and I feel a sense of fulfillment when I can articulate their deeper meanings." Such interactions have been shown to foster cultural appreciation and strengthen local identity. However, this sense of empowerment is only intermittent and sporadic, as opportunities only arise during ship arrivals. During non-operational periods, vendors reported feelings of uncertainty and social disengagement, thereby reinforcing the episodic nature of cruise-dependent livelihoods.

From an ecological perspective, respondents exhibited a deficiency in awareness concerning the comprehensive ecological ramifications of cruise tourism (Paiano et al., 2020). While acknowledging the low-impact nature of their own activities, some expressed concern over waste accumulation during periods of high arrival rates. As one vendor noted, *"Upon the vessel's arrival, the port is often inundated with debris, and there are instances of remnants being left behind. We have endeavored to maintain our area, yet our efforts are ultimately ineffectual."* This observation underscores the indirect correlation between MSMEs and the environmental externalities of the cruise industry, despite the relatively sustainable nature of their direct operations.

The integration of observational data and in-depth interviews has yielded a more nuanced understanding of MSMEs' dependence on cruise tourism. The SET-Based Evaluation indicates that while economic benefits are substantial, they are precariously concentrated; social empowerment is episodic rather than continuous; and environmental concerns remain externalized. This underscores the pressing need for policies that not only diversify income streams for MSMEs but also foster awareness of sustainable practices and fortify community resilience against the volatility of global cruise tourism.

Response and Dynamics.

The regular arrival of cruise ships at Benoa Port, occurring three to four times per month, has been regarded as a substantial opportunity by the majority of MSMEs operating within the art market. Despite the episodic nature of these arrivals, the majority of vendors exhibit a strong orientation toward positive adaptation, implementing a range of strategies to maximize the benefits derived from international tourist flows.

Positive adaptation manifests in several ways. First, many MSMEs reported adjusting their pricing strategies to align with tourists' perceived purchasing power, while maintaining competitive value to encourage sales. Secondly, product diversification has emerged as a prevalent response strategy among vendors, who have introduced novel designs, diminutive souvenir items, and bundled packages to align with the multifaceted preferences of consumers. Thirdly, certain vendors extend their operating hours, particularly during cruise ship docking days, with the objective of effectuating as many transactions as possible within the limited timeframe. A salient trend that merits attention is the adoption of digital payment systems, particularly QRIS, which vendors recognize as a pivotal adaptation to address the expectations of international travelers seeking cashless transactions. One vendor noted, *"When the ship arrives, I open earlier and stay longer. In addition, new products are prepared, such as keychains or small carvings, due to the popularity of items that can be easily carried among tourists."* Furthermore, inquiries have been made regarding the possibility of utilizing QR or card payments, prompting the decision to join QRIS with the objective of streamlining the process.

Conversely, a smaller group of MSMEs exhibited resistance or neutral responses, implementing minimal to no alterations in their business practices. These vendors generally perceived the impact of cruise arrivals to be negligible or transient, exhibiting minimal inclination to adapt their practices beyond their established routines. As one respondent articulated, *"My primary focus is on the sale of conventional products, irrespective of the presence or absence of a ship. The artist's approach to this endeavor is characterized by its*

adaptability, evidenced by the variability in the artist's selection of subjects.” This perspective, however, was found to be less common compared to the more proactive adaptation strategies adopted by the majority of MSMEs.

A comprehensive review of the extant literature reveals that the operational characteristics of MSMEs at Benoa Port are predominantly influenced by a proactive approach toward cruise ship arrivals. The majority of vendors adopt an adaptive strategy to optimize economic benefits. The presence of a small segment that remains resistant or neutral reflects heterogeneity within the MSMEs community. However, this heterogeneity does not diminish the overall trend toward positive adaptation. Instead, it underscores the necessity for customized capacity-building initiatives that promote the broader adoption of adaptive practices, thereby ensuring that all MSMEs can fully capitalize on the opportunities presented by cruise tourism.

Policy Recommendations

Through the SET lens, the findings emphasize that empowerment is contingent upon a favorable balance of rewards over costs. MSMEs that perceived greater benefits were more inclined to adapt and invest in innovation, while those perceiving higher risks or costs tended toward resistance or stagnation. For policymakers, this indicates the necessity of interventions that mitigate risks (e.g., infrastructure support, fairer distribution mechanisms with tour agents) while enhancing the capacity of MSMEs to maximize rewards. At a broader level, the study contributes to the discourse on sustainable cruise tourism by situating MSMEs as pivotal actors in ensuring that economic linkages extend beyond port authorities and large operators to reach local communities.

The findings of this study carry several important policy implications for strengthening the role of MSMEs in cruise tourism development at Benoa Port, Bali. First, infrastructure support must be prioritized to ensure that local enterprises can effectively access and serve cruise passengers. The provision of dedicated market spaces, improved logistics, and adequate facilities around the port area would reduce the bottlenecks and unfair competition currently faced by MSMEs. Second, capacity building is essential to enhance SME resilience. Training programs in product innovation, quality assurance, and digital literacy would enable MSMEs to better align with international consumer preferences while maintaining the authenticity of Balinese cultural products. Encouraging digital payment systems, such as QRIS, should be accompanied by technical and financial support from government and private actors. Third, fair partnership mechanisms need to be institutionalized. Transparent collaboration between MSMEs, tour operators, and port authorities can ensure more equitable revenue distribution. Policy interventions could include cooperative arrangements or revenue-sharing models that empower MSMEs rather than relegating them to peripheral roles in the tourism value chain.

Finally, the development of a sustainable strategy is crucial. Cruise tourism policies must balance economic growth with cultural preservation and environmental responsibility. Long-term planning should incorporate MSME participation in decision-making processes, ensuring that local voices shape how cruise tourism evolves in Bali. This aligns with broader sustainable tourism frameworks that emphasize inclusivity, resilience, and equitable benefit-sharing. In summary, the policy recommendations derived from this research suggest a comprehensive approach that combines infrastructural improvements, capacity enhancement, equitable governance, and sustainability principles. Such strategies would enable cruise tourism at Benoa Port to function not only as an entry point for international visitors but also as a platform for local empowerment and sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate a direct linkage between cruise ship arrivals and the empowerment of MSMEs at Benoa Port, Bali. The findings demonstrate that the majority of enterprises actively capitalize on the opportunities presented by cruise tourism through positive adaptation strategies, including product innovation, pricing adjustments, extended operating hours, and the adoption of digital payment systems. Conversely, a limited proportion of MSMEs demonstrated neutral or resistant responses, which does not negate the prevailing trend toward proactive adaptation. The employment of the SET-Based Evaluation framework in this study underscores the considerable economic advantages accruing from cruise tourism, the augmentation of social visibility through cultural exchange, and the indirect linkage with environmental risks engendered by the cruise industry. These findings underscore the importance of policy interventions aimed at diversifying markets, strengthening MSMEs capacities, and promoting sustainable business practices to safeguard long-term resilience.

The primary contribution of this research lies in providing empirical evidence on how cruise tourism can serve as a catalyst for MSMEs empowerment in a developing economy, while also acknowledging the structural vulnerabilities inherent in such dependency. Consequently, this study enhances the extant literature on cruise tourism and MSMEs management by offering practical insights for policymakers seeking to balance economic growth, social empowerment, and environmental sustainability in port-based destinations.

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