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Aims and Scope

Research in Hospitality Management (*RHM*) is a peer-reviewed Open Access journal publishing articles that make an original contribution to the understanding of hospitality and to the theory and practice of international hospitality management.

The journal focusses on three main areas: (1) "Hospitality (Management) Studies" includes articles related to the study of and the study for hospitality. The study of hospitality refers to studies about the essence and ethics of hospitality from a social sciences perspective, while the study for hospitality refers to a more disciplinary approach according to the quintessential managerial areas of Finance, Human Resources, Operations, Marketing & Sales, and Technology; (2) "Hospitality Management Education" is devoted to articles about curriculum content and delivery methods for training and educating hospitality managers. Considering the size and scope of the hospitality industry, and the number of staff and students involved, studies on efficient, effective, and innovative ways of developing hospitality competencies are considered indispensable; (3) "Student Research Projects" allows excellent student work to be published. Student work can relate to excellent BA dissertations or MA theses.

RHM also accommodates short communications, working papers, book reviews and discussion papers.

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EDITORIAL

The concept of luxury has been a part of humanity for thousands of years — most probably since the dawning and creation of humans. In the Stone Age, one could see luxury being a warm cave with a well-lit fire; in today's world, luxury has come full circle with evidence-based research showing that luxury holds tremendous social and economic power.

The theory of the leisure class critically examines the concept of luxury as something in high regard/esteem. Details and evidence of such are plentiful throughout the world, especially in the Middle East, Asia and some parts of Africa.

While the definition of luxury is challenging, the stereotypical associations of such are well known to most people. High prices, exclusivity, high quality and excessiveness, for example, are all in accordance with what may be expected when one talks about luxury, however, the definition(s) have changed over time. While "old" luxury was viewed to be in accordance with a more tangible and focused set of luxury items, in today's modern world and "new" luxury, it could now be said to be very much based around experiences. The essence of providing an experience has pushed itself to the front for many individuals across the world — in today's global society, it could be suggested that people are now looking more for a "once-in-a-lifetime" experience rather than the product which the majority of people are able to access or afford as the distribution of wealth and money has arguably brought society into a more equalitarian place. In other words, luxury is now considered to be more easily accessible than ever before. What makes it different to other things — i.e. outside of everyday normality — is still to be seen.

In modern society, we can suggest that there has been a significant shift in both consumer attitudes towards spending, along with people's interpretations of what does and does not constitute luxury. Definitions of luxury have developed as time has progressed; cultures have become more diverse and technological advancements have played a substantial role in affecting modern day equilibriums throughout the world. How this affects hospitality, events and tourism is still to be discussed in greater detail — with this journal hopefully bridging the gap to it in the future.

This Special Issue: Luxury

This Special Issue of *Research in Hospitality Management* was curated to deepen our insight into luxury, to grow the research literature on the topic as well as to bring forth new ideas about the luxury hospitality, events and tourism sectors — all of which are a necessity, it could be argued — while much literature about luxury focuses on the retail sector.

A variety of articles have been selected that examine, discuss and explore diverse topics. **Christopher Berry** examines the moral threat of luxury as it shifts from being a materialistic phenomenon to what could be described as a need for social and personal well-being. **Kasia Minor and Andy Heyes** looks at the somewhat darker nature of luxury hospitality, a topic that is relatively under-researched or discussed. **Sophie Thorne** critically discusses the concept of spas and wellness. In a society that has now identified the importance of health in order to live well in the future, is wellness a necessity or a luxury? **Eileen Lee, Carl Boger and Andy Heyes** critically analyse the first-class airline experience, focusing mainly on the sensory nature of such experiences. **Rabab Abu Ramadan and Ioanna Karanikola** discuss the career paths of general managers in Dubai (a destination well known for its luxury image) and how progression in this career has changed over time. **Ewaldt Janssen** discusses the current predicament and importance of revenue management in the luxury hotel sector in South Africa. **Hartwig Bohne** discusses collaboration within human resource structures of luxury establishments. **Charles Bladen** explores the semiotics of luxury events with regard to service delivery and customer experience design. Lastly, an important aspect of this journal is to bring forth quality student research from the many institutions across the world. As such, **Nguyen Vinh Hoa and Isaure May**, both recent graduates from the Luxury Hotel School in Paris, discuss the need to critically analyse the *Michelin Guide*'s stance and whether it is still considered luxurious.

This Special Issue has generated a series of ideas about luxury and luxury hospitality which we will explore in future, collectively, as passionate practitioners and academics, to develop a more nuanced understanding of "luxury hospitality" and "luxury hospitality management", terms in need of development and deeper understanding.

As Guest Editor, I thank all the authors who have contributed to this special luxury edition of *Research in Hospitality Management*, the generous reviewers for taking their time to review articles, and the sponsors who kindly sponsored this journal — all of whom I hope will benefit in some way from its worldwide distribution. I look forward to hearing your thoughts and comments about this Special Issue.

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The changing career of luxury: From moral threat to material well-being

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ABSTRACT: The elusive nature of luxury and its history have been discussed for thousands of years. Previously known to be for the rich and famous, it could be argued that luxury is a moral threat to society, bringing about social divides and tension. But was is the real meaning of luxury? What was once a threat can now be considered to assist with well-being. This article discusses the historical developments of the phenomenon of luxury.

KEYWORDS: Aristotle, demoralisation, desire, Hume, virtue

Introduction[1]

Some ideas are elusive. Luxury is a case in point. It is indicative of its elusiveness that, historically speaking, its effective meaning has not remained constant. To read, for example, the Roman historian Sallust (1971) on the insidious danger of luxury alongside the celebratory enticements to stay in a luxury hotel is to be presented with two very different sets of assumptions. This difference can be informatively illuminated by observing how the meaning of "luxury" has changed from being a morally charged threat to virtue to being a morally acceptable synonym for material well-being and enjoyment, like a stay in The Ritz.

From the Greeks through to the Romans (especially) and on into Christianity and the Renaissance, luxury belongs in a generically moralised vocabulary. Cicero (1913, I.30) conveniently summarises the context. He juxtaposed a frugal life of temperance, sobriety and austerity that is worthy or *honestum* with a life of luxury and softness that is corrupt or *turpe*. Frugality, poverty and the like were virtues that embodied the conduct of a "natural life" — a life *kata phusin* or *secundum naturam*. Elsewhere, Cicero (1927, V.35) declares it to be self-evident that nature's requirements are few and inexpensive. The "natural life" is the "simple" or Christian ascetic life, where meeting the needs for food, shelter and clothing is easy because they are finite or possess a "natural limit" (i.e. "eat to live"). Those who live simply will not be poor because they are not "in need". Conversely, it is only those who have exceeded nature's bounds who feel "poor" and that is because they desire more (i.e. "live to eat"). Once the natural limit is passed then there is no resting place since the "unnatural" has no terminus (see Seneca, 1932, #16).

Desires in general and those for luxuries a fortiori were judged a threat on both an individual and social level. Regarding the former, there is a somatic focus. This has remained and it is a central part of the history of luxury that from being negative this focus has become a positive. On the classical view, the definitive characteristic of desires that focus on the body is that they are boundless. For example, Seneca (1932, #119) disparages the enjoyment of fine food. To give one of his examples, bread made from inferior flour assuages hunger as effectively as that baked from better quality ingredients; the purpose of food is to fill the stomach, not indulge it. From this perspective, what the desire for luxuries amounted to was investing inappropriate value in bodily satisfactions. An informative illustration comes from the late Stoic philosopher, Epictetus. He is recorded as saying that the purpose of footwear is to protect feet. Once that appropriate or "natural" measure of needfulness is forsaken, then there are no limits and, as a result, there is nothing inappropriate about successively desiring a gilded, a purple, and an embroidered slipper (Epictetus, 1932, §39). It was this limitlessness associated with 'desire' that made it so threatening and, as this example intimates, these gilded slippers are unneeded luxury items.

Viewed from that perspective, life will always appear too short. Those who see matters in this light will become "soft through a life of luxury" and accordingly afraid of death (Seneca, 1932, #78). Such fear is unmanly and illustrates a long-running association of luxury and softness and effeminacy. Pointedly, men who live a life of luxury become effeminate. That is to say they become "soft" and fickle like women, unable to endure hardship and act steadfastly in a virile "manly" fashion, where that means acting in the public arena, including risking death and acting courageously. It is not mere coincidence that in both Greek and Latin the words for "man" have the same root as those for "courage". Such a life has social consequences. A society where luxury is established will devote itself to private, self-regarding ends and men will be unwilling to act for the public good or fight for their patria. This society, it follows, will be militarily weak — a nation of cowards will easily collapse.

A further implication of this weakness was that the desire for luxuries or the valorising of bodily satisfactions corrupted the proper means to provide the basic needs of a natural life. According to Aristotle, the proper locus to provide for those needs was the "household" (*oikos*), which is to be understood as an "estate", not the dwelling of a nuclear family. The task or function of the household was to meet limited needs. This responsibility may, within limits, go beyond the immediate confines of the estate. Accordingly, olives may be exchanged for some honey, as long as — and these are the limits — the recipient uses the olives for their proper or natural purpose, that is, consumes them. But this process of exchange ("economics") remains an instrumental task subordinate to the intrinsically worthwhile activities that constitute the "good life" of "politics", that is, engagement in matters of general or public concern. If the merely instrumental became instead an end, then that was an unnatural perversion. From this it followed that "economics" was embedded in a moralised context; it had its proper (subordinate) place. This moralisation ultimately rested on a conception of a worthwhile human (male) life of freedom that is debased if it is spent slavishly pursuing merely necessary (unfree) existential ends.

A significant consequence of this moralised hierarchy was that traders or merchants, that is, those who engaged in exchange for a living, lived less than fully human lives. These individuals were thus disparaged. According to Aristotle, for example, in the best "state" (*polis*) those who live a "mercantile life" will not be citizens because such a life is ignoble and inimical to virtue (Aristotle, 1944, 1328b40–41).[2] It was not that men could not adopt the commercial life, but that such a life was unworthy; it was akin, as Seneca and others had observed, to the inferior preoccupation with mere living that was the object of animals, slaves and women. Women, moreover, being weak or soft, craved the delights of luxurious living. For example, according to Livy (1919, bk. 34 §§2–4) Cato described women as having "uncontrollable natures" because they wanted to repeal the *Lex Orchia*, 215 BCE, one of the many Roman sumptuary laws. This particular piece of legislation, inter alia, limited the amount of gold women could possess, forbad them from wearing a coloured cloak and riding in a carriage inside the city. Similar (misogynistic) sentiments were expressed in early Christian thought.[3]

These adornments, along with opulent furnishings, exotic foodstuffs and other goods deemed luxuries by critics were, of course, not supplied by the home estates, but by merchants. This reinforced the judgment that merchants were not merely superfluous, but also potentially corrupting intermediaries. The need-determined exchange of olive and honey was indeed "natural", but traders or merchants functioned to furnish and fuel self-regarding desires, especially for goods to satisfy bodily satisfactions (like embroidered slippers) and their motive for doing so was to enrich themselves. And given the normative hierarchy of ends over means, the actions and motives of merchants were morally suspect. Merchants are motivated by their private interests, whereas a citizen in the full sense, that is, the independent male head of the household, dedicated his life to the common interest or public good.

In sum, luxury constituted a moral threat; it undermined for both individuals and their societies the virtues that come from living where the values of the good life obtain. The negation of this moralised context for luxury centrally concerned a revaluation of the place of desire and the role played by commerce.

Berry (1984, ch. 5) has called this negation "de-moralization". This is a gradual and uneven process. Among the many contributing factors is the impact of Galilean science. This not only overturned Aristotelian physics, it also contributed to the overturning of Aristotelian teleological ethics; the focus is increasingly on "how" things happen, not "why". Isaac Newton did not know what gravity was, but it was sufficient that it could be measured, and its operation was law-like. Similarly, why pleasure pleases is unknown, but it is sufficient to know that humans like it and their actions are, in consequence, predictable.

What this shift represented was a different reading of human nature. It was this which underwrote the emergence of positive assessments of luxury by establishing the philosophical basis for its demoralisation. The crux was the identification of a regularity or constancy in human motivation that is rooted in the passions, in desire and aversion. It is a predictable constant that all humans move toward whatever pleases them and away from whatever pains them. From which followed a new moral assessment: pleasure is good; pain is bad. The corollary to the universality of passionate motivation is that reason plays an instrumental role; it calculates the best (most efficient) way to bring about what is desired (Hobbes, 1991, ch. 5). This is a reversal of the classical account which saw reason in the role of commander and the bodily passions as subservient. And since on that account to enjoy luxury was to be enslaved by desires then this reversal now permits a re-evaluation of luxury, as a source of pleasure and an incentive to produce the goods to make life better.

Rather than provide a survey of this shift, I will seek to capture it by outlining the argument of David Hume in his essay "Of Refinement of Arts", which on its first appearance in 1752 was entitled "Of Luxury". This essay stands historically at a key point. It builds on or assumes the "new" account of human motivation with its defence of pleasure and critique of austere virtue as well as the defence of commerce, an affirmation (pace Aristotle) of the "noble vocation" of a merchant (Mun, [1664] 1928, p. 3) together with an associated rehabilitation of desire undertaken by theorists of trade, culminating in Bernard Mandeville's notorious *Fable of the Bees* (1988). Hume, in other words, is less an innovator than a brilliant exponent of the shift. On the other hand, to the same effect, after Hume (which is not to say *because* of Hume), the shift has largely been completed. Of course, there are no sharp edges in these matters. There were always moralists about like Henry Thoreau who, in *Walden* ([1854] 2012, p. 12), judged most luxuries to be "positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind", and in the late nineteenth century there was a flurry of publications worried about "luxury" and the development of mass consumption. Moreover, it is possible that some late twentieth and twenty-first century attacks on consumerism can be interpreted in a similar light.

One indication of Hume's historically sensitive situation is his own self-consciousness. He opens his essay by stating that "luxury" is a word of "uncertain signification" (1987, p. 268). He knows full well the position of those "severe moralists' (as he calls them — Sallust is named as an example) that "luxury" is a vice, and he also knows that Mandeville has attacked this line and that it had been taken up more soberly by contemporaries like Jean-François Melon (1734). Against this background, Hume gives his own definition: luxury is "great refinement in the gratification of senses" (Hume, 1987, p. 268). Any thought that this is intended to be read censoriously as an endorsement of the moralists is displaced by his generalising remark that "ages of refinement" are "both the happiest and most virtuous" (1987, p. 269). In a clear break from the moralist tradition, therefore, Hume is coupling luxury/refinement with happiness/virtue, *not* opposing them.

For Hume, happiness comprises repose, pleasure and action (1987, pp. 269–270). Of these, the last is given most weight, but it is the twist that Hume gives to it that is crucial. The focus is not the Ciceronic *negotium*, with its preoccupation with public or political affairs, but the private endeavour of industry. Where industry abounds, then individuals will be not only opulent, but happy as its members "reap the benefit of...commodities so far as they gratify the senses and appetite" (Hume, 1987, p. 263). If we ask what motivates them, Hume answers "avarice and industry, art and luxury" (ibid.). Since "avarice" was uniformly condemned by the severe moralists, then this statement alone effectively signals the switch in evaluations that has occurred. We can pursue what was involved in that switch by picking up on a further remark of Hume's. As a ratchet effect, humans, when presented with luxury goods, are roused to activity or industry by a "desire of a more splendid way of life than what their ancestors enjoyed" (Hume, 1987, p. 264). Contrary to Epictetus, that desire feeds on desire is now an accurate description of what is natural, of the way the human world works.

The shift away from moralism that Hume's account exemplifies means that luxury can be understood as the opposite of necessity. Once demoralised, a life of necessity now signifies not the austere life of poverty, but an impoverished one, a life of misery. There is nothing ennobling or redemptive about *this* poverty. As Adam Smith put it in the Introduction to the *Wealth of Nations* ([1776] 1981), those who are "miserably poor" are "

frequently reduced or, at least, think themselves reduced, to the necessity sometimes of directly destroying and sometimes abandoning their infants, their old people and those afflicted with lingering diseases, to perish with hunger or to be devoured by wild beasts (1981, p. 10).

While in a "civilized and thriving country", "universal opulence" extends itself to the "lowest rank of people" (Smith 1981, p. 22), who are able to enjoy "luxury" in their "way of living" (Smith, 1982, p. 489). Once luxury is seen in this light, then its development into the lexicon of "ad speak" can be understood. "Luxury" can, without hesitation, be tacked on adjectivally to almost any article of merchandise from pizzas to handbags, from a fountain pen to an apartment and to hotels. The adjective is attached presumably to make the "good" more desirable and thus more likely to be bought. Of course, no one *needs* a pair of embroidered slippers, the decorativeness of which is superfluous. But from the demoralised perspective, embroidered slippers are more pleasing than plain ones, and where is the harm in that pleasure? Moreover, think of all the extra industry generated and employment created by the desire to have those exquisitely produced slippers and think, too, of the economic benefits that will flow from my desire next year to own an even more fashionable and luxurious pair.

The dynamism of desire in this way fuels the engine of modern economies. One way of depicting this dynamism is to chart the seemingly never-ceasing transformation of luxuries into necessities. This transformation demonstrates that, whereas in the world of Seneca and others, luxury (bad) and poverty (good) stood as categorically opposed ways of life, in the modern world, luxury is only contingently contrasted with necessity; they are points on a single scale or continuum. There is a further dimension to this dynamism. Since any alteration to Epictetus' functional slipper is unwarranted then there is seemingly no place for change or innovation. One of the striking things about the classical critique of luxury was that very often in practice it aimed to sustain a hierarchical status quo.

The prevalence of sumptuary legislation from the Romans through to the eighteenth century in some societies bears this out. A central concern in these laws was to preserve the pecking order, to attempt through display to maintain "distance" (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 58), and thus to confine the incidence of a good and prevent its diffusion. Luxury, "new" wealth, always threatened to overturn this. Those in the lower ranks of these societies may well have wanted some of those privileged goods, but that "wanting" was a mark of their unworthiness, since they desired them for their own personal use. The decline of sumptuary laws is a marker not necessarily of greater economic equality, but of the wish of individuals (consumers) to be free according to their own preferences, to get delight and pleasure from attractive clothes, delicious meals, comfortable homes and enjoyable holidays. And that wish itself signals the recognition that the desire on the part of the "have-nots" to those goods currently possessed by the "haves" is legitimate. This morally endorsed combination was captured by Smith (1982, p. 185) in his Glasgow lectures when he professed that the "opulence and freedom" were the "two greatest blessings men can possess".

Contemporary luxury is just a particular subset of adjectives. Clothing, food, accommodation and leisure remain the basic categories of desired goods (Berry, 1984, ch. 1). A Dior dress, a Michelin-star meal, a 5th Avenue penthouse and a stay at The Ritz are each qualitative refinements of those four categories of commonly shared desires. From this, it is easy to appreciate what a five-star hotel will seek to offer — space, high-quality toiletries and bathrobes, excellent service, a spa, a gym, its own Michelin-starred restaurant and so on, all alongside the provision of an experience to be treasured. In sum, as the acme of luxury, it pampers the body and provides well-being.

Note

1. This article draws on Berry (1995; 1999; 2005).
2. Similar sentiments can be found in Plato and Xenophon, while among Roman authors, Cicero (1913, 1, §150) for example, judged merchants to be engaged in a sordid or demeaning activity; indeed, they have to tell lies to make a living.
3. See the fulminations of Clement of Alexandria (1891, pp. 439–440) and Tertullian (1869, p. 331), who strikingly refer to female luxury as effeminising the manliness of faith (fidei virtus effeminari). The role of Eve, as first manifesting weakness by succumbing to the wiles of the serpent and then exhibiting guile to get Adam to eat the forbidden fruit, added another dimension to this misogyny. From the Christian fathers to the Middle Ages, "luxury" was conterminous with "lust".

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Luxury hospitality — Is this the time to rethink the ethical stance?

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ABSTRACT: The term "luxury" — and thus "luxury hospitality" — has positive connotations for many; however, the demand of trying to meet the needs and wants of others is questionable. This article discusses the nature of luxury along and the need for future research on luxury hospitality which is relatively under-researched.

KEYWORDS: criminality, ethics, exploitation, illegality

Introduction

The hospitality industry is experiencing one of the most challenging times with regard to COVID-19, which has exposed the fragility of the industry but highlighted incredible resilience and commitment to innovation. We found ourselves redefining the meaning of service, space and safety; thus, one should ask the question: Should we go a step further and redefine the approach to ethical practices, particularly in the luxury context?

Derrida (2000) noted that hospitality in a pure form is linked to social morality, and Lashley (2015) noted an exchange of money makes hospitality a commercial exchange. With luxury, comes not only money but the essence of excessive need, surpassing what a person needs to survive (Berry, 1994; Maslow, 1954). The personal desire to feel superior to others is said to express the need for individuals to be seen as positioned higher than others within society (Berry, 1994). However, how far those moral and ethical issues go is still to be seen and will be discussed later in this article. Stereotypical definitions of luxury suggest high quality, decadence, and a somewhat excessive comfort (Bellaiche et al., 2010; Frank, 1999; Hoffmann & Coste-Marnière, 2012; Thomas, 2007). Hansen and Wanke (2011, p. 789) explain that "the idea of luxury products and services are exceptions to the everyday normalities of life", bringing into context a person's real-life cultural experiences, needs and social backgrounds (Hoffmann & Coste-Marnière, 2012). However, characteristics associated with luxury depend upon a person's social status, economic leverage, and consumption patterns that are exclusive to a high-status few.

The essence of money, however, is a delicate matter. The power of money, for example, makes people believe they can afford "everything" or "everyone", leading to a conviction that the power of one's wallet far outweighs the expectations of ethical behaviour (Heyes & Lashley, 2017). While some could come to think that luxury was and is only associated to the very wealthy of our society, others could suggest that luxury in today's day and age is available to everyone, based on their own individual definition of luxury (Heyes & Lashley, 2017). While marketing alone plays an important role (Twitchell, 2002), others could argue that luxury is seen in the eye of the beholder rather than the eye of the giver (Heyes & Lashley, 2017). Indeed, the high price often emphasises luxury through the creation of exclusiveness, often achieved through discretion and secrecy. Extravagant spending showcases ones' superiority, creating "us" vs "them" through a display of social and economic power. This conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899), some could argue, will lead people into illegal practices and thus make them exponentially consume items and/or services that others would deem immoral, illegal, or dangerous. Does money and luxury also buy secrecy and privacy? In some cases, yes.

Luxury and hospitality

Hospitality, in general, is not immune to the "grey" aspects of life. As Sherman (2007) points out, luxury hospitality brings together a wide range of guests from a variety of different cultures joined together within a property which conceals an excess of materials; this is often achieved against the backdrop of privacy, secrecy and discretion. It can be claimed that this entitlement is extended to the employees' own moral values, which can be perceived as situational where the staff needs to adopt moral styles (Patico, 2009), where private morality is replaced with a working one. In other words, introducing what staff might deem as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour can be considered necessary skills in order to produce a discreet, high-end service.

Human trafficking and prostitution

Issues relating to human rights are not always on hospitality agendas. Indeed, there is a presumption that the luxury hospitality industry is immune to problems relating to them. However, no part of the hospitality industry can claim to be free of human rights violations. Sexual exploitation, forced labour and unfair labour conditions are some of the many issues relating to the industry (International Tourism Partnership, 2014), but are often hidden and unacknowledged or overlooked on the premises of a hospitality business. Hotels often fear reputational damage by admitting human rights violations can happen on their premises, rather than create policies and training to handle human rights violations. Within the luxury hospitality industry, one could assume that there is higher reputational damage which can occur; especially depending on geographical location and cultural differences, for instance. Nevertheless, it is not unusual to hear of stories about prostitutes who use luxury hotels as a means of attracting clients due to the nature of wealth and disposable income that most guests find themselves with. While illegal in some European countries, there is evidence to suggest that such practices do exist and are indulged in in luxury hotels, causing difficulties when it comes to legality and, of course, the establishment's reputation.

Human trafficking, however, *is* illegal in all countries, and trafficking for sexual exploitation accounts for 59% of all trafficking cases. Trafficking is a notoriously difficult crime to detect, so, obtaining data with regard to the extent of this procedure is difficult. Yet, what is known is that it disproportionally affects girls and women (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, 2018). The hospitality industry is said by Lashley and Morrison (2000) to be used by traffickers in all three stages of trafficking: the recruitment, the movement and the exploitation. Often the hotels are misguided by the notion that luxury means giving everything to the high-paying customer. The crucial point is not whether prostitution is legal or not, it is the fact that it is considered a voluntary activity. Human trafficking, on the contrary, is not, and it is extremely difficult to recognise a person who is forced into this procedure. In fact, only 14% of hotels are reported to have any policies dealing with the specific risk of sexual exploitation on their premises, despite the enormous efforts of various organisation worldwide providing guidance in the matter (Minderoo Foundation, 2019).

Questions are asked about the levels of secrecy required of staff. For instance, a customer who is paying US$10 000 per night to stay in a luxury suite might be difficult to say "no" to. Some general managers, for example, may be inclined to turn a blind eye, mainly due to the amount of revenue which the establishment is making. Again, we ask: Should "money talk"? Should money give you power? Should money buy discretion?

Poorly trained and underpaid workforce

One of the issues supporting sex trafficking and modern slavery on hotel premises is the nature of hospitality employment. High employee turnover, low pay and a transient workforce contribute to a general lack of skills in the industry. A hotel that relies on "on the job" training may be altogether missing out on specialised training designed to tackle human rights issues and to safeguard the hotel's reputation. In instances where such training is ad hoc rather than formal, many employees miss out on essential skills training.

On the contrary, pro-active management of the issues such as human trafficking can act to strengthen a brand and build trust that the brand is moral and ethical to the core. Businesses Ending Slavery and Trafficking (BEST) (n.d.) links staff morale and the pro-active management of human trafficking issues. They point out that if the staff is trained to detect instances of human trafficking, they feel empowered and employee morale improves. Organisations such as EuroCHRIE have looked to strengthen the need for future training in this area, including that of human trafficking workshops (EuroCHRIE, 2020). However, the Minderoo Foundation (2019) reported that hotels, in general, are failing to address the risks of modern slavery in their direct operations and supply chains. Yet, it is the luxury hotels that may fail to address human rights issues due to the misplaced belief that addressing and employing an appropriate code of conduct equals admitting guilt that these practices exist on the premises. The punishment for illegal acts can become severe. Beyond the obvious breaches of the law, this may lead to reputational impacts where the trust between the luxury brand and the customer is broken, leading to loss of business (COMBAT Project, 2017).

The way industry employs people, increased casualisation and reliance on agency workforce, coupled with a lack of third-party employment practices can contribute to hotels unknowingly employing people who are forced to perform a job. Housekeeping departments in particular are vulnerable to exploitative working conditions (Minderoo Foundation, 2019), due to a high proportion of agency, migrant and female employment. Housekeeping as a non-revenue generating department tends to be treated as a cost, thus making it more likely to be subcontracted, meaning the hotel loses the ability to control employment conditions and practices. Poor human resource management practices and the relative invisibility of housekeeping work often lead to little or no checks or vetting of subcontractors, hence the risk of poor service delivery. Similarly, with some establishments charging in excess of GB£20 000 (Heyes & Lashley, 2017) per night in some instances, it is questionable to think that overcoming the social divide between customers and employees in luxury hotels will be on the hotels' agendas any time soon. Large gaps in wealth distribution mixed with multiple professional occupations can no doubt leave some employees feeling inadequate — merely "just a servant" to the rich and powerful in society. These poor human resource practices can reflect upon the duty of care given to the staff, i.e. the moral or legal requirement to ensure the well-being of others, with a substantial duty of care placed upon the employers toward employees.

Lack of care has now been seen to affect employees' health. The industry is struggling with substance abuse among their employees; indeed, alcohol and drug use seem to be commonplace. Gordon Ramsay, for example, documented having found traces of cocaine in the staff and customer bathrooms of his Michelin three-star restaurant (ITV, 2017). Studies highlight substance abuse is much higher than in other industries (Pidd et al., 2006; Pizam, 2010). Long, unsociable hours, coupled with intense emotional and physical labour, are often blamed for this situation. Lack of policies relating to drug and alcohol detection is common despite the professional knowledge that such behaviour happens. Support mechanisms and educational programmes are also lacking, thus putting into question the duty of care owed to the people delivering the service. While organisations such as Hospitality Action do exist, there is a need for organisations such as these to raise further funds along with providing further support to other people. The effects of COVID 19 and, in some cases, Brexit have raised further concerns. However, are these really excuses to what is/has been a problem in the industry for multiple decades?

While some may believe that this applies to the whole hospitality industry, with the inclusion of money, customers may succumb to an array of wants and desires (Berry, 1994).

Whether this is ethical and morally acceptable is still to be seen. Nevertheless, thoughts turn towards a relatively under-researched area of luxury hospitality — the so-called darker side that many people believe is taboo or otherwise refuse to accept happens.

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Are spas and wellness still considered luxurious in today's world?

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ABSTRACT: The world of spas has been around for thousands of years. Built as a supplementary service or facility for luxury hotels, it has quickly become a must have for most if not all luxury hotels around the world. Difficulties may be arising, however. Are spas still considered a luxury? Based on current readings, it could be suggested that spas and wellness have become a part of life, depicting a necessity for survival rather than anything else. Questions are therefore asked: Are spas and wellness still considered a luxury in the current era? This descriptive analysis article will take a critical look at spa and wellness, asking questions about its so-called luxury status.

KEYWORDS: consumers, consumer behaviour, hospitality, luxury, spa, wellness

Introduction

Spas and wellness — a world of extravagance based on "health" and in other cases "beauty". Similarly, the concept of luxury — a world of desire and pleasure according to Berry (1992). It could be argued that both run parallel to one another. The concept of spas as a luxurious idea especially within a hotel environment has been questioned. The concept of spas existence in luxury hotels in the 1980s could now start to be considered just normality rather than a luxurious addition. This conceptual discussion article takes a critical exploration of the past and present of spas' transition throughout time, raising questions about their so-called luxury standpoint. Are spas still considered luxurious today?

Literature review

What is a spa? An unusual definition

Williams (2006, p. 3) states that she believes a spa is "a commercial establishment that provides health and wellness treatments". The Cambridge Dictionary (2020, [Online] has an original concept of where spa water comes from, and they describe a spa as "a town where water comes out of the ground and people come to drink it or lie in it because they think it will improve their health".

In 2007, the International Spa Association (ISPA) proposed a certified definition: "Spas are places devoted to overall well-being through a variety of professional services that encourage the renewal of mind, body and spirit". All three statements could be correct, as Zill (2009) concurs with ISPA (2007) that the spa experience contains ten elements: water, nourishment, movement, touch, integration, aesthetics, environment, cultural expression, social contribution and time (as one entity), and spa and rhythms (as one entity). Nevertheless, to officially define the term spa is seen to be problematic. Hair and Beauty Jobs (2020) reveal that every spa does not include every domain, whereas Zill (2009) stated that all ten elements are associated and work in partnership and in parallel. Therefore, who is correct on this topic? Besides, the ten "domains" or "elements" subordinate to core therapies. Crebbin-Bailey et al. (2005, p. 68) disclose that the core therapies are "the most essential part, or innermost part, of the spa", which can be divided into five groups: hot, cold, water, touch, and relaxation. The mixture of the senses can be argued to assist in creating both physical and mental health. These core therapies may be found within the treatments and facilities that spas operate today. What is key to understand, however, is the reasons why such things are developing into the future. Is there a need for future innovations within this domain which will enlighten the spa and wellness concept into a futuristic and luxurious perspective? Only time will tell.

How old are spas and where did they come from?

Spas may have originated in the 14th century, however, this is criticised, where a thermal spring was discovered in Belgium in later times. Lyon Financial (2020) declare, "[f]or the Western world, the earliest proponent of the spa for therapeutic purposes was Hippocrates (460BCE–370BCE)". Preceden (2020) seems to disagree. For example, on their timeline of spa history, they consider that spas could have originated as far back as the Egyptians, with water therapy and herbal remedies in 3100BCE. Van Tubergen and Van Der Linden (2002) consider that spas may have been named after the Latin word *spagere*, which means to scatter, sprinkle, moisten, or could possibly be an abbreviation of the Latin phrase health through water, *sanitas per aquas*. It seems that we can only trace spa therapies back as far as Egyptian times, nevertheless human beings could have been incorporating these sorts of treatments known as spa procedures even further back in history. Were spas therefore a therapeutic means to deliver better health to people?

Wellness — How is it associated with spas?

The World Health Organization (WHO) concurs that wellness is considered an optimal condition of health, physically, psychologically, emotionally and spiritually, while enhancing the definition by inserting that all aspects of one's life are considered, including workplace and environment. Ellis (2013) mentions that the term spa originated a long time before wellness, which has only been used since 1961, but her research suggests that the spa industry is simply a minor part of wellness, and that the entirety of the activities in spas are wellness related. Stará and Charvát (2013) determine that the term wellness originated because modern medicine in the 1960s was nearing its capacity. People were dying as a result of the way they lived; consequently others recognised that they had to adjust their lifestyle. Dunn (1961, p. 2) was the first person to formally propose the wellness concept in everyday life in his book *High-level wellness*: "Complete well-being calls for all of these states to happen together — wellness of the body, of the mind, and of the environment". Nevertheless, why and where the definition of wellness came from and into popularity is still to be decided. Uberoi (2014) agrees that wellness and spas should not appear as stand-alone concepts, but should work simultaneously as two mechanisms devoted to helping individuals improve their overall well-being. Is well-being therefore a necessity or a luxury ... is well-being a necessity? In today's world, we could argue it is a necessity for the longevity of life – especially in an era whereby pandemics such as COVID 19 and in some mental health cases BREXIT originate. The need for greater health (both physical and mental) accessories is at the forefront of the everyday well-being of life. The Global Wellness Institute (2020) specify that consumers have been operating a more holistic and natural approach to their health by utilising preventative care and self-healing, which has brought the wellness movement into the forefront for wellness in the 21st century.

The wellness movement

As wellness has evolved by consumers adopting aspects such as self-care, nutrition, and meditation practices, wellness could now be seen as a necessity for healthy living instead of a luxury due to a shift in population attitude and approach based on government attitudes and references towards sustaining healthy living. As agreed by Hotel Kralj (2020), "wellness is defined as a necessity, while spa is defined as luxury". Interestingly, the words spa and wellness play an important role in determining where in the dictionary and individual interpretations each one operates. McCann Health (2015) somewhat disagrees by stating that wellness is a model which is so prosperous that the wellness movement is shifting from an apparent luxury to an elementary human right. Questions remain, however. While health is and should be a human right, society could argue that some of humanity disregard and overlook health secondary to other important factors.

Nevertheless, what do we mean by an elementary human right? Does everyone have the right to be "well"? Brown and Zavestoski (2004) state that the wellness movement has led to an amplified popularity of merging traditional medical treatments with complementary and alternative medicine. Hill (1992) showcases what can now influence elements of our health through constructive lifestyle changes, while Schramm (2010) pronounces that wellness programmes are becoming more to individuals. Bush (2008) agrees with Schramm (2010) that wellness programmes are a necessity for enhanced health, whereas Brown and Zavestoski (2004) declared that recent events the majority of health movements have concentrated on the growth of health care, as well as admittance and improving the quality of health care to the general public, both through private and public health care schemes, especially within the United Kingdom. Cohen and Bodeker (2008) discovered that the trend of mixing medicine and spas had a variety of interpretations, some about prevention and wellness, others a service offering complementary, alternative or integrative aspects. Awofeso (2004) saw that health promotion projects are navigating their way back to societies way of life — and that public health seems to have travelled full circle. Hill (1992) believed that wellness programmes would increase in size and number, as they not only decrease medical bills, but also improve total health, productivity and morale (by how much. Awofeso (2004) suggests that Chadwick's method to safeguard the public's health is as valid today as it was 160 years ago. He published the 1842 report on the sanitary condition of the labouring population of Great Britain, using statistical information to highlight the life expectancy variations caused by class, leading to the Public Health Act 1848. In which, the British Government took responsibility for the health of its citizens and improved health by removing refuse, installing an effective sewage system and clean running water in every house (UK Parliament, 2021). This may seem like minor in the modern day, but it demonstrated the overwhelming influence of verminous environmental conditions on adverse health outcomes (Awofeso, 2004). Uberoi (2014) agrees that the spa industry business proprietors will find that development in the industry will continue to concentrate on the perception of wellness, making wellness more accessible to more people throughout the world. Wellness, it could be argued, comes in multiple disciplines from physical to mental. The need for wellness is essential and, in the era of COVID-19, wellness is now more than ever needed in multiple forms. How can spas help with this is still to be seen. However, queries remain. What is luxury and in what way are spas associated with the luxury phenomenon?

Why do consumers visit spas?

Spa demand is made up of international consumers visiting hotels, resorts and destination spas, where they pursue acts of wellness and may be interested in culturally based therapies (Azara, 2017). Tressider (2011) agrees but adds that engaging in with wellness tourism is not a new phenomenon and offers consumer's escape, as well as health benefits. The Global Wellness Institute (2014) distinguished two types of consumers based on their incentives: primary wellness consumers who journey specifically for wellness purposes; and secondary wellness consumers who engage in such activities as a small part of their trip. Nevertheless, they also discovered that 87 per cent of wellness tourism trips as well as 84 per cent of expenditures were accounted for by secondary wellness consumers. This could suggest that as more consumers aim to improve life quality through incorporating wellness into their visit, the spa industry should continue to benefit from such. Burkholder (2007) says that spas are no longer strictly for use by the wealthy, and that the spa experience has become more accessible for the typical consumer, expanding the market potential. Horner and Swarbrooke (2016) declared that spas have an extensive role in the historical development of tourism, and although popularity may have declined in some countries, worldwide it is still a sizeable market. Burkholder (2007) insists that there will be a growing demand in the future for more tropical destinations, where more culturally based therapies originate.

What do consumers want from their spa experience?

Tressider (2011) states that consumers no longer use spas as a place to just undergo a treatment, but have become relaxation enterprises/venues which combine indulgence and wellness. Todd (2011) declares that consumers visit spas for indulgence, escapism and to work on one's physical and psychological wellness. Globe Newswire News Room (2020) stated that spas meet a new consumer demand for wellness and that while the spa offering may seem time-consuming, it articulates that there are three distinctive characteristics including wellness therapies, appearance developments and indulgent treatments. Wellness therapies remain a fundamental part of the consumer lifestyle, with the wellness paradigm shaping the sector and consumer behaviour influencing innovation in the market.

Bellaiche and colleagues (2010) state that the problems in today's world of luxury cannot be defeated overnight without operators having a better understanding of consumers' needs because consumers preferences have changed. The turn of the experiential economy (Kucukusta & Denizci Guillet, 2014; Pine & Gilmore, 1999) suggested that consumers' requirements have been thought of insufficiently, despite the growth and potential of the industry. In their findings, they stated that spa therapist qualifications, value and level of privacy that consumers receive have been found to be the most important characteristics when consumers are making their bookings. Keri and colleagues (2007) disagree as their findings showed that consumers are more interested in the quality of the product rather than the price. Mohanta (2019) reveals that customer satisfaction is no longer limited to the quality of the services that operators provide, and says that operators must now create an optimum customer experience. Based on the thoughts of Pine and Gilmore (1999) and the needs of the service-based concepts to offer and be of a more experiential nature, the experience which service provider's offer to guests could therefore be a necessity rather than a luxury. Nevertheless, Walls and colleagues (2011) suggest that consumers produce their own dynamic customer experience through the spa atmosphere, with the vendor as well as through other consumers. How can consumers make their own experiences psychologically luxurious? From the tangible or intangible services that they receive, which plays the most important role?

Bellaiche et al. (2010) states the importance of using customer relationship management, together with other business decisions, to gain a more profound understanding of consumer behaviour and improve the consumer insight function performance. Smith and Puczko (2009) found that spa consumers are mainly women despite an insurgence of male usage growth as they tend to be more interested in their physical appearance due to social expectations. Keri et al. (2007) agree, but learned that the number of male consumers visiting spas has increased partly due to the fact that more spas have developed themselves to be gender neutral as well as ethically and culturally neutral and taking into account that spas have initiated treatments specifically targeted at males including that of sports massage and other male dominated treatments. Burkholder (2007) states that spas are harvesting corporate consumers and companies, using spas to combine socialising and business, and more consumers are beginning to combine business with pleasure. Private companies and business owners are now incorporating workplace wellness visits to spas to motivate employees and cope with health, similarly it could be argued that such initiatives can be seen to be about team building and are using spa grounds for conferences, suggesting that spas have stepped beyond beauty and wellness treatments.

How do consumers see spas in luxury hotels?

Cohen and Bodeker (2008) states that spas have been developed as an ordinary characteristic of luxury hotels and resorts. Heyes et al. (2015) agree that a luxury hotel would have severe weaknesses against competitors if it offered no wellness activities to the guests, particularly now that spas are an anticipated and expected component. Trihas and Konstantarou (2016) explained that hotel and resort management should incorporate the word spa in the name of their hotels, as this may entice more customers. Bellaiche and colleagues (2010) state that luxury has mislaid its proper meaning, in that operators must manage financially the spa as a business and withhold their proper meanings when it comes to offering a wellness package. Horner and Swarbrooke (2016) reveal that including spas as a fragment of hotel design remains a moderately new trend, nevertheless the focus on in-house spas has brought bonuses to a number of hotel groups, and has sparked increased international hotel development worldwide (in which locations etc.). In addition, consumers will in the future be predominantly interested in traditional bathing benefits meanwhile budget airlines will enable these consumers to reach these destinations frequently. Trihas and Konstantarou (2016) believe that as more consumers take preventative measures to maintain psychological and physiological health, the demand for wellness products and services can only intensify.

What is luxury?

Luxury is something that is believed to be above and beyond everyday normality (Hoffmann and Coste-Marnière, 2012). While luxury has in the past been understood to be about excess, extravagance and prosperity, it has been noted and seen to be highly product related in regards to the purchasing of products to showcase wealth and prosperity (Hoffmann and Coste-Marnière, 2012). In today's experiential economy, consumers are now looking for something more than just "good" treatment in a manner of speaking — the essence of feeling fit, healthy and wholehearted are of high interest, suggesting that intangibility has an extensive part to play in the luxury domain. What was once seen as being tangible related in regards to products is now regarded as being more emotive feeling related– that is to say, there is a need for people to feel "special" parallel to what purchasing luxury is all about. The need to feel unique, successful and in high esteem are high on the agenda of many luxury consumers.

The query of luxury and spas

Questions are presently being asked about the alleged luxury aspect of spas as to the above suggestions. Historically, spas were and could be considered to be very much luxurious in their presence and consumption (Mintel Group, 2011; TNS, 2005), while others have begun to question whether spas are immediately seen to be the same as they were formerly. As time continues, great resources have been used to extract the necessities out of the wellness concept as well as moving it away from the prehistoric notions/beliefs that it is all about therapeutic beauty. The differences between the two, however, are astounding — where does one finish and the other begin still needs to be investigated.

Questions are asked; that is to say, luxury is based on one thing — "an exception to everyday normality" (Hansen & Wanke, 2011, p. 789) . In regards to wellness, one may assume that wellness is a part of everyday life; that is to say, in order to stay well and in some cases alive, we need to conform with an array of different wellness consumers throughout the globe. Is spa and wellness therefore still considered a luxury or in todays world a necessity is what could be asked.

The personal and interrelated nature of spas, in particular that of treatments, suggests that feeling, emotion and empathy are strong characteristics which spa consumers can relate to. Similar to the above, the intangible emotion-based nature of spas may be a strong indicator of their possible luxury status; the human connection or interaction is fundamental for its luxury image, along with a thoughtful and empathetic ear. Nevertheless, certain difficulties still arise.

The issue with luxury

What was once seen as a luxury could now be considered a necessity — and as Berry (1994, p. 147) says "luxury is an exception to the everyday normality of life". If therefore spas and wellness are to be introduced into everyday parts of life, how can this be an exception to the everyday normality? If wellness is seen as a necessity, surely spa and wellness should be a perfect opportunity for development? Certain cultures may establish spas to be in higher regard than others — with spas and wellness being at the centre of everyday life (Ellis, 2008). Therefore, are spas and wellness still a luxury concept? Are spas and wellness still considered luxurious depending on cultural backgrounds? Does culture play a part in the perceptions of spas and their luxurious reputation? Do certain cultures play a role in peoples perceptions of spas and how they are formulated? Does the integration of spas into everyday life effect one's perception of spas and their luxurious stance? In some cases, culture could already be seen to be playing a role in this equation, with spas and wellness being a relevant part of life in many countries across Asia.

Asian consumer behaviour and attitudes towards spas

The Asian systems of medicine such as Ayurveda and traditional Chinese medicine planted the seeds of the health and wellness concept (Wilkinson, 2020). Ancient China was renowned for using nature to heal the body and promote well-being, which could mean that wellness is a part of everyday life, and not seen as a luxury by consumers. (Tsang, 2015). Mirza (2017) found that consumers in Asia are becoming ever more conscious of their health. Rangsit (2013) agrees and specifies that the expectations of Asians are different from Europeans. Wilkinson (2020) confirmed that the Asian region is rediscovering its historical principles and enhancing them with 21st century medicine to extend consumers' life expectancy. Rangsit (2013) discovered the link between the medicinal and spa industries through medical spas, where Eastern and Western healthcare viewpoints are merging as consumers become more interested in their physical and mental wellness. Tsang (2015) found that as consumers age, they become more conscious of their physical and mental well-being. This may encourage them to travel to meet health demands due to long waiting lists for medical treatments. Due to the changes in the environment, Mirza (2017) unearthed that consumers are now trained to pay more attention to their health and general well-being, to protect themselves in an ever-changing world. Wilkinson (2020) found that the Asia-Pacific's demand for wellness trips is far ahead of the rest of the globe, which means an increase in wellness tourism expenditure. Tsang (2015) stated the importance of merging wellness and tourism for worldwide consumers, as healthcare and overall wellness are now viewed as a commodity and asset by today's consumer culture. However, Mirza (2017) says that the demand for luxury products is stable, as the objective for luxury purchases remains; therefore, the demand for luxury goods is predicted to maintain in peoples lives for the foreseeable future. Tsang (2015) learned that this new age tourism concentrates on overall physical well-being and satisfaction of consumers, and that China is superior in leading the way in wellness trends. There are new markets which are yet to be discovered. While previously tangible related in regards to facility use, it could be noted that the change in consumerism and humanity's preferences for luxury may now be intangible related, that is to say there is a need for emotions and feelings to resurrect themselves when using spas. Consumers are looking for improved experiences which promote health and well-being.

Conclusion

Spas have been used as a therapeutic means to deliver better health to consumers for centuries. The spa industry can be seen as a part of wellness, as the activities in spas are wellness related, therefore the research shows that if used simultaneously they can help individuals improve their well-being as more of a necessity rather than a luxury.

Certain treatments provided in spas could be considered a luxury, as these are not incorporated into everyday life by all cultures across the globe. Nevertheless, the need for more health related items is at the forefront of everyday life. Consumer attitude and approach towards lifestyle has caused the wellness movement to shift full circle, as wellness is now seen as a necessity for healthy living and a greater longevity of life it is hoped. The spa and fitness movement has built itself into the foundation for wellness in the 21st century, the modification is that using preventative care mixed with medicinal interventions could provide an optimum effect.

Spa consumers are mainly women, but men are starting to use spas more as they become gender neutral and initiate male-specific treatments. Spas have also introduced corporate wellness packages to combine socialising and business, which could mean that spas have stepped beyond beauty and wellness treatments. The so called movement of the corporate domain could ask multiple questions including whether spa is still considered luxurious.

Spas have had to diversify or modify their offerings to meet consumer's needs as they are looking for more of an intangible, emotion-based experience, as well as value for their money. Despite the growth and potential of the industry, consumer requirements have in the past been thought of insufficiently, which could mean that the spa market is not functioning to its full potential. Nevertheless, consumers visit spas for indulgence, which could be an indicator that spas may still be considered a luxury despite the fact that wellness should be implemented into every person's day.

Luxury hotels must offer both spa and wellness activities if they want to be more in demand than their competitors (Heyes et al., 2015). Spas have been developed as a characteristic in luxury hotels that may not be considered luxurious if they do not have one. But, if they contained the word spa, this may entice more customers . Hotel owners should incorporate spas into the offering to attract more customers and increase revenue.

More primary research may need to be carried out to establish the separation between spas and wellness concepts, as they may be different in different cultural settings, such as Europe and Asia Wellness tourism, however, incorporates both spas and wellness to meet consumer demands. Consumers are becoming more aware of their health and well-being, which could encourage them to travel to meet their personal wellness requirements. Providing that business owners present the new age tourism model in an attractive way to both primary and secondary consumers, the spa industry could continue to be advantageous and still retain luxury demand. As more consumers take preventative measures to maintain psychological and physiological health, the demand for wellness products and services can only intensify with growth.

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Do passengers perceive flying first class as a luxury experience?

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ABSTRACT: The definition of a single luxury experience has remained elusive to the airline industry, experts, scholars, and even luxury consumers. The duality of luxury suggests that experiences must provide a sense of prestige and hedonic well-being to be perceived as luxurious by consumers. This study proposed that consumers' feeling of prestige influences their hedonic well-being, as suggested by self-determination theory. Passengers derive a sense of prestige from their sensory and behavioural experiences. Meanwhile, they derive hedonic well-being from their sense of prestige and their sensory and intellectual experiences. Thus, the first-class cabin experience was confirmed as luxurious. The airline industry should enhance sensory, intellectual, and behavioural experiences in their first-class cabins to increase the luxuriousness of the first-class experience.

KEYWORDS: airlines, consumer behaviour, duality of luxury, experience, luxury

Introduction

The airline industry is essential for economic growth; it is a critical infrastructure for the tourism industry in the United States. In 2018, the total operating revenue for airlines in the US was US$187.5 billion with a net profit of US$11.8 billion (Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2018) and nearly a million passengers (The World Bank, 2018). First-class airline seats in the US generally account for only 5% of all seats; however, they produce nearly 50% of the total revenue (Mouawad, 2012). The reliability of first-class passengers to generate revenue has caused airlines to invest a large number of resources in their first-class cabins to improve passengers' experience (Mouawad, 2013). Airlines have improved the experience in their first-class cabins by offering personalised services, latest in-cabin technologies, and state-of-art designs (Bellamy, 2017). Passengers expect a luxurious experience from a first-class cabin because the premium price of a first-class ticket considerably exceeds the price of a coach- or business-class ticket (Hwang & Lyu, 2018). The word "luxury" originated from the Latin term "luxus" (Mootee & Goddard, 2004), which means that a luxury experience is characterised by extremely high quality and cost (Shukla & Purani, 2012). Although the importance of providing a luxury experience to first-class cabin passengers is critical for the highly competitive airline sector, a gap exists in understanding whether first-class cabin passengers perceive their experience as luxurious. Accordingly, the current study examined whether first-class cabin passengers perceive their experience as luxurious.

Previous studies on airline experiences have focused on how airline passengers evaluate the service quality of experience attributes and then they group individual attributes into categories. The attributes of cabin experience include the quality of food service (Ahn et al., 2015; Atalık et al., 2019; Bogicevic et al., 2017; Kim, Kim, et al., 2016), entertainment within the cabin (Ahn et al., 2015; Atalık et al., 2019; Bogicevic et al., 2017; Kim, Kim, et al., 2016), cabin facilities (Ahn et al., 2015; Kim, Kim, et al., 2016), overall environment of the cabin (Ahn et al., 2015), service provided by flight attendants (Ahn et al., 2015; Atalık et al., 2019; Bogicevic et al., 2017; Kim, Kim, et al., 2016), attractiveness of attendants (Ahn et al., 2015), and comfort of the seats (Ahn et al., 2015; Atalık et al., 2019; Bogicevic et al., 2017). For studies that group characteristics into categories, Lim and Lee (2020) categorised the individual characteristics of cabin experience into tangibles, reliability, empathy, responsiveness, and assurance. Comparatively, Olivero (2017) grouped the characteristics of cabin experience into concrete and abstract attributes, functional and psychological consequences, and instrumental and terminal values.

These recent studies on cabin experience have focused on passengers' evaluation of the utilitarian and concrete attributes of their experience, disregarding the emotional and physical responses stimulated by a luxury experience. However, the definition of a luxury experience has remained elusive for brands, luxury experts, and scholars. The characteristics of a luxury experience include exceptional quality, unique design, personalised, exclusive, and authentic; meanwhile, consumers have defined a luxury experience as one that is exclusive, hedonistic, provides access to rare quality, and authentic (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2019). The definition of a luxury experience also varies by culture and by personal point of view because an experience that is considered luxurious by one person or culture may be regarded as ordinary by another person or culture (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Other factors, such as gender, ethnicity, and age, also affect how an individual define a luxury experience (Nwankwo et al., 2014). The current study focused on identifying common emotional outcomes of

any luxury experience. These outcomes will then suggest if the experience is luxurious. The objectives of this study are
(1) to identify the emotional and physical responses of passengers during a first-class cabin experience; and
(2) to determine whether their responses cause them to develop feelings known to be associated with a luxury experience.

Literature review

Emotional outcomes of luxury

Motivational theories are psychological approaches for determining which factors inspire human beings to seek out certain experiences to satisfy their needs (Jeon et al., 2011). Motivation theory suggests that individuals seek experiences that provide them with extrinsic and intrinsic emotional fulfilment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic emotional fulfilment occurs when individuals are satisfied from external rewards; intrinsic emotional fulfilment occurs when people are satisfied internally. Vigneron and Johnson (1999) and Langer and Heil (2013) asserted that for an experience to be considered truly luxurious, it must provide individuals with the extrinsic emotional fulfilment of prestige and the intrinsic emotional fulfilment of hedonic pleasure, for which Kapferer and Bastien (2012) coined the term "duality of luxury".

The definition of the emotional fulfilment of prestige refers to consumers' feeling of status and self-respect, reflecting their need for social identification (Schiffman et al., 2008). Individuals desire prestige because they want to be recognised as part of an elite class (Nia & Lynne Zaichkowsky, 2000). Conceptually, the feeling of prestige invokes the dual concepts of social status and wealth (Dubois & Czellar, 2002; Tsai, 2005). Customers' sense of prestige derived from a luxury brand experience emotionally separates them from lower social classes because of the exclusivity of the experience (Mazodier & Merunka, 2014; Tsai, 2005). Moreover, when a luxury brand experience occurs in public, customers' feeling of prestige is heightened because people can witness that they belong to a higher social class (O'Cass & Frost, 2002).

The emotional fulfilment of hedonic pleasure is defined as feeling a sense of fun and fantasy among individuals (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Vickers and Renand (2003) suggested that consumers receive more hedonic pleasure from luxury brand experiences than from luxury goods because of their physical and emotional engagement during such experiences. A hedonistic brand experience makes customers feel good, develops positive emotions, and creates pleasant memories (Na et al., 2007; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). The "non-return effect" of luxury suggests that a part of the hedonic pleasure felt by customers during a luxury brand experience is that they deserve to have luxury experiences as part of their life experiences (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Conversely, if individuals are unable to maintain their consumption of luxury brand experiences, then they feel disappointment rather than hedonic pleasure (Gagné & Blanchard, 2007). A luxury brand experience also produces hedonic pleasure among individuals because it enables them to avoid people who are less worthy of such luxury experience (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

The current study suggests that hedonic pleasure produced by a luxury brand experience is derived when customers fulfil their need for pleasure and avoid things that cause them pain or disappointment during the experience; thus, the concept is better defined as hedonic well-being rather than hedonic pleasure (Kahneman et al., 1999). Hedonic well-being encapsulates all the characteristics of hedonic pleasure, including arousal (Campbell, 1987), feelings, and fun (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), and fulfilling personal desires (Gagné & Blanchard, 2007), while avoiding uncomfortable situations and feelings (Kahneman et al., 1999). Therefore, the present study suggests that the two elements of "duality of luxury" are prestige and hedonic well-being.

Self-determination theory suggests that passengers in a first-class cabin feel in control of their hedonic well-being because they choose to participate and can afford the experience (Tynan et al., 2010). Moreover, this previous study proposed that passengers' feeling of prestige derived from a first-class cabin experience also increases their sense of hedonic well-being. Although desiring to have prestige is considered outside the control of an individual because others must recognise your achievement or position in life, prestige also creates an intrinsic sense of life accomplishment and pleasure in a person by knowing that he or she is considered part of an elite group of individuals; hence, it affects a person's hedonic well-being (Lee et al., 2018). Thus, when passengers acquire a sense of prestige derived from a first-class cabin experience, prestige influences their internal feeling of hedonic well-being.

H_1: Passengers' feeling of prestige exerts a significant positive influence on their hedonic well-being.

Experience effects on the duality of luxury

A brand experience has two sides: (1) what is provided during an experience by the brand itself (i.e. stimuli); and (2) how consumers respond emotionally and physically to the experience. The characteristics of a brand experience stimulate a person's cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses (Hawkins et al., 1998). These broad classifications have been defined differently by experience scholars to provide clarity to these classifications. Dewey (2002) categorised a person's responses as intellectual, sensory (i.e. perceiving the experience through their senses), emotional (i.e. feelings during the experience), and physical (i.e. participating in the experience). Dubé and Le Bel (2003) suggested that an experience also stimulates individuals socially and provides them with physical pleasure, suggesting that individuals can respond to an experience intellectually, emotionally, socially, and physically (i.e. through physical pleasures). Pinker (1997) proposed that an experience activates the sensory perceptions, feelings and emotions, creativity and reasoning, and social relationships of individuals. Schmitt (1999) hypothesised that an experience activates individuals' senses, feelings, thoughts, actions, and relationships with others. Brakus et al. (2009) indicated that individuals' respond to an experience by using their senses, affective emotions, intellect, and behaviour. Five types of response dimensions have emerged among experience studies, namely individuals' five senses (i.e. taste, smell, touch, sight, and hearing), affective emotions, intellect, physical actions, and social behaviour. In Brakus et al. (2009), the social experience dimension was captured in four other dimensions. The current study used Brakus et al.'s (2009) experience dimensions (i.e. sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural) to measure the emotional and behavioural responses of first-class cabin passengers during their flight experience. The next step was to measure the effects of these experience dimensions on the passengers' sense of prestige and hedonic well-being.

Sensory experience

Sensory experience is defined as consumers' responses to experience stimuli that affect their visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile senses (Brakus et al., 2009; Hultén, 2011). A sensory experience is created through the aesthetic styles and themes of a brand, which provide context and meaning to an experience (Hultén, 2011). A personal in-flight entertainment console allows first-class passengers to watch videos (i.e. visual and auditory) on demand, listen to their favourite music (i.e. auditory), and play games (i.e. tactile) (Alamdari, 1999). Other features that appeal to passengers' five senses include light cabin colours, soft lines, cabin design, appealing aromas, first-class meals, design of flight attendants' uniforms, appearance of flight attendants, and surfaces/textiles, such as seats, tables, and blankets, that feel pleasing to touch and also reflect the quality of the design (Garcia, 2020).

A sensory experience can make customers feel prestigious when the experience is exclusive and exhibits high quality (Choi et al., 2017; Hwang & Lee, 2019; Kim, Chua, et al., 2016) because sensory experience enhances customers' status or self-esteem (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). Heide and Olsen (2018) suggested that customers feel prestigious because they perceive the experience as prestigious and interact with other individuals belonging to high social classes that reflect their own status in life. Dubois and Czellar (2002) supported the findings of Heide and Olsen (2018) because they found that brand sensory experience reinforces customers' desired view of themselves. Sensory stimulation provides aesthetic pleasure and excitement (Schmitt, 1999) that induce fantasies, feelings, and fun (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Baumgartner et al. (2006) found that congruent visual and musical emotional stimuli automatically evoke strong feelings of pleasure. Customers expect a high level of a sensory experience when expecting a luxurious experience that provides them with pleasure; otherwise, they become disappointed (Le Monkhouse et al., 2012; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999).

H_{2a}: The sensory experience of passengers in a first-class cabin significantly influences them to feel prestigious.

H^2_b: The sensory experience of passengers in a first-class cabin significantly influences their feelings of hedonic well-being.

Affective experience

Shamim and Butt (2013) defined an affective experience as consumers' inner feelings and emotions toward the experience that lead them to either like or dislike the experience. At the subconscious level, consumers are attracted to experiences that make them feel good (Law et al., 2012; Williamson, 2002). The affective aspect involves customer commitment and enjoyment derived through experience (Cho et al., 2015; Esch et al., 2006; Faircloth et al., 2001; Low & Lamb, 2000). Several studies have examined affective experiences in first-class cabins. Examples of affective experiences include passengers being treated as valued customers and guests, welcoming passengers with a smile, passengers and flight attendants developing a warm and friendly relationship, providing passengers with a high sense of safety (JD Powers and Associates, 2013), the behaviour of other passengers (Tsang et al., 2018), creating a memorable experience (Tung & Ritchie, 2011), and inducing an ultra-comforting in-flight experience (Lin, 2015). Previous studies have shown that customers' affective experience of a brand influences their feeling of prestige toward the brand (Choi et al., 2017); such prestige also reflects their status to other people during the experience (Hayakawa et al., 2018). The affective experience of a customer has also been found to exert a positive influence on their hedonic well-being in integrated resorts (Ahn et al., 2019) and cultural heritage destinations (Sharmiladevi & Rameshraj, 2017), and when customers cocreate the experience (Ajitha et al., 2019).

H_{3a}: The affective experience of passengers in a first-class cabin significantly influences them to feel prestigious.

H_{3b}: The affective experience of passengers in a first-class cabin significantly influences their feelings of hedonic well-being.

Intellectual experience

Intellectual experience is defined as having analytical and imaginative thinking components (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2013). It is characterised by an experience's capability to arouse curiosity in individuals' minds (Jung et al., 2014). The term "intellectual" refers to individuals being stimulated creatively by being surprised and intrigued, producing long-lasting memories of the experience (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013). An intellectual experience also reflects individuals' creative thinking process because it predicts the creative use of the experience (Brakus et al., 2009). The intellectual experiences of passengers in first-class cabins include conversations among passengers and flight attendants (Gunarathne et al., 2017; Harrison, 2015), involvement with technology in the cabin (Avram, 2013; Rothkopf & Wald, 2011; Xinhui, 2008), and having time for reflection because the design of first-class cabins allows passengers to engage in deep reflection (Betsky, 2008; Deshpande & Lau, 2017). The ability of individuals to feel a sense of superiority in terms of knowledge during an intellectual experience causes them to develop a feeling of prestige because they feel superior to others (Choi et al., 2020) and choose an area of expertise (Heine et al., 2016). An intellectual experience also influences the hedonic well-being of passengers because such experience allows them to overcome boredom during their flight, which can lead to excitement (Brakus et al., 2009). Other studies have found that an intellectual experience enhances customers' hedonic well-being in integrated resorts (Ahn, 2018) and cruise trips (Ahn & Back, 2019).

H_{4a}: The intellectual experience of passengers in a first-class cabin significantly influences them to feel prestigious.

H_{4b}: The intellectual experience of passengers in a first-class cabin significantly influences their feelings of hedonic well-being.

Behavioural experience

The behavioural experience of customers is defined as their physical actions or bodily responses to a brand experience (Shim et al., 2015). In many instances, a behavioural brand experience creates a visible experience and promotes interactions with others (Wang, 2014). Moreover, customers' participation in physical actions can demonstrate their levels of expertise, abilities, and skills to others, reflecting a prestigious image of themselves to others (Tsaur et al., 2007). A study found that an onboard shopping experience stimulates passengers' behavioural experience because of their physical involvement when interacting with the showcase space, physically experiencing a sample, and physically interacting with a flight attendant (Park & Park, 2015). Another study determined that a favourable behavioural experience of passengers in a first-class cabin causes them to create a positive image of the experience and the airline (Lishan et al., 2014). The nature of most airline experiences restricts physical movement; in a first-class cabin experience, however, passengers have more legroom, larger seats (Zurcher, 1979), and in some instances, access to an onboard lounge to provide them with a better physical experience (Living Warbirds, 2019). First-class passengers can have more physical experience than those in other cabins, enhancing their wealth and status (Makkar & Yap, 2018). The behavioural experience of first-class passengers of eating food that is exclusively offered to those in first-class cabins demonstrates their sophistication and culture, reflecting their status (Kang et al., 2020). A food study found that consuming exotic cuisine influences a person's well-being because he or she is able to try something new and different, improving his or her quality of life (Wang et al., 2018). Airlines have unique opportunities to provide exotic cuisine because departure destinations are located in a variety of cities and countries. Other studies have determined that tourists who physically cocreate their experience in a tourism setting positively influence their hedonic well-being (Uysal et al., 2016), suggesting that first-class cabin passengers who are physically engaged in an experience enhance their hedonic well-being.

$H5_a$: The behavioural experience of passengers in a first-class cabin significantly influences them to feel prestigious.

$H5_b$: The behavioural experience of passengers in a first-class cabin significantly influences their feelings of hedonic well-being.

Experience-sense of prestige-hedonic well-being

Passengers in the first-class cabin feeling a sense of prestige affect their hedonic well-being because prestige affects the sense of life accomplishment and pleasure in a person by knowing that he or she is considered part of an elite group of individuals; hence, it affects a person's hedonic well-being (Lee et al., 2018). Previous research also connected that passengers' first-class sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural experiences affected their sense of prestige. Thus, first-class passengers' sense of prestige influences the relationship between their sensory (Choi et al., 2017; Hwang & Lee, 2019; Kim, Chua, et al., 2016), affective (Choi et al., 2017; Hayakawa et al., 2018), intellectual (Choi et al., 2020; Heine et al., 2016), and behavioural experiences (Kang et al, 2020; Makkar & Yap, 2018) with their hedonic well-being. Thus, when passengers acquire a sense of prestige derived from a first-class cabin experience, prestige influences their internal feeling of hedonic well-being.

H_6: Passengers in the first-class cabin feeling a sense of prestige influences the relationship between their sensory experience and hedonic well-being.

H_7: Passengers in the first-class cabin feeling a sense of prestige influences the relationship between their affective experience and hedonic well-being.

H_8: Passengers in the first-class cabin feeling a sense of prestige influences the relationship between their intellectual experience and hedonic well-being.

H_9: Passengers in the first-class cabin feeling a sense of prestige influences the relationship between their behavioural experience and hedonic well-being.

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study belonged to a random sample recruited between 15 September and 5 November 2019 at an international airport in a south-eastern city of the US who flew first class within the past 12 months and were at least 18 years old. The participants were given a URL code where they could gain access to an online survey. Among the 346 surveys completed, 294 were usable, resulting in an 85.0% response rate. The average age of the respondents was 37.76 years (standard deviation [SD] = 15.97), with 127 males and 167 females. A total of 125 respondents (42.5%) identified themselves as Caucasian, 94 (32.0%) as Asian, 49 (16.7%) as Hispanic, 11 (3.7%) as African American, 2 (0.7%) as Native American, and 7 (4.08%) as others. The respondents had an average income of US$116,092 ($N = 227$, SD = US$182,060). The participants belonged to an average of 1.99 frequent flyer programmes (SD = 1.78). Their average flying time in a first-class cabin was 38.58% (SD = 30.896) compared with flying in other cabin types, and they flew an average of 13.75 times a year (SD = 13.75).

Measurements

Table A1 (Appendix) provides the measures used in previous studies. We adopted a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) for all the measurement items for the different dimensions. The sensory (three items), affective (three items), intellectual (three items), and behavioural (three items) brand experience dimensions used in the current study were developed by Brakus et al. (2009). The duality of luxury dimensions of passengers' feeling a sense of prestige (Baek et al., 2010) and hedonic well-being (Diener et al., 1985) were derived from previous experience studies. Both dimensions used three-item measurements.

Common method bias (CMB)

The survey method is evidently appropriate for our research to cover the perception, intention, and psychological states of passengers who flew in first-class cabins (Conway & Lance, 2010). However, surveys can result in CMB because this collection method leads to shared statistical variance caused by the measurement method rather than the dimensions represented by the items (Podsakoff et al., 2003). A single factor test developed by Harman (1976) was used as a post-test assessment for CMB. None of the factors accounted for the majority of covariances among the items, indicating that CMB was not a limitation in this study.

Validity check, measurement model fit, and data analysis

Table 1 provides the relevant psychometric properties and correlation matrix of the dimensions. All the extracted variances exceeded 0.50 (Hair et al., 2018). Composite reliabilities and Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.70, indicating the good reliability and convergent validity of the dimensions used in this study (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). Discriminant validity was checked using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion, which suggests that the square root of the average variance extracted of individual dimensions should exceed the factor correlation. This criterion was met for all the dimensions. The fit indices met or even exceeded the minimum fit for the model suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999). These indices include the chi-square/degree of

TABLE 1. Validity of the model

Dimension	Cronbach's alpha	Average	Sensory	Affective	Behavioural	Intellectual	Prestige	Hedonic well-being
Sensory	0.918	0.790	0.889					
Affective	0.905	0.760	0.670	0.872				
Behavioural	0.905	0.761	0.489	0.651	0.872			
Intellectual	0.927	0.810	0.337	0.465	0.680	0.900		
Prestige	0.917	0.787	0.457	0.410	0.524	0.316	0.887	
Hedonic well-being	0.907	0.666	0.288	0.254	0.244	0.325	0.266	0.816

Note: The largest skewness was −1.484 and largest kurtosis was 1.930 for all of the measurement items related to the dimensions, which suggest normality since skewness and kurtosis were ±1.96

freedom (450.280/214 = 2.104) or <3, the comparative fit index (nearly higher than 0.948), the adjusted goodness of fit index (0.858), and the root mean square error of approximation (0.061).

Procedure

A two-step approach was used. The first step was confirmatory factor analysis by using SPSS Amos (version 20.0). The maximum likelihood method was adopted to validate all the latent dimension measurements and the structural model. The second step was applying user-defined estimates to calculate indirect relationships. This method utilised the bootstrapping procedure, confidence intervals (CIs), and 2 000 bias-corrected samples.

Results

Table 2 indicates that a significant positive relationship exists between passengers' sense of prestige and their hedonic well-being (H_1: β = 0.160, t = 2.133, and p = 0.033). In terms of the first-class cabin experience of passengers, significant positive relationships exist between sensory experience with sense of prestige (H_{2a}: β = 0.289, t = 3.691, p < 0.001) and hedonic well-being (H_{2b}: β = 0.162, t = 1.842, p = 0.066); intellectual experience with hedonic well-being (H_{4b}: β = 0.304, t = 3.520, p < 0.001); and behavioural experience with sense of prestige (H_{5a}: β = 0.468, t = 4.766, p < 0.001). The other direct relationships were insignificant, i.e. [$H3_a$] passengers' affective experience with their sense of prestige and [$H3_b$] hedonic well-being, [$H4_a$] intellectual experience with sense of prestige, and [H_{5b}] behavioural experience with hedonic well-being.

Table 3 shows that passengers' sense of prestige partially mediates the relationship between their sensory experience in a first-class cabin and their hedonic well-being (H_6: β = 0.047, 95% CI [0.011, 0.021], p = 0.022) and fully mediates the relationship between their behavioural experience and their hedonic well-being (H_9: β = 0.053, 95% CI [0.011, 0.0135], p = 0.030). Passengers' sense of prestige exerts an insignificant influence between their (H_7) affective and (H_8) intellectual experiences and their hedonic well-being.

Discussion

This study demonstrated that the first-class experience of passengers is a luxury experience because cabin experience significantly influences their sense of prestige (R^2 = 0.332)

TABLE 2. Direct path relationships

H_o	Path			β	S.E.	*t-value*	*p-value*
H_1	Hedonic well-being	<---	Prestige	0.160	0.063	2.133	0.033
H_{2a}	Prestige	<---	Sensory	0.289	0.095	3.691	<0.001
H_{2b}	Hedonic well-being	<---	Sensory	0.162	0.089	1.842	0.066
H_{3a}	Prestige	<---	Affective	−0.054	0.086	−0.583	0.560
H_{3b}	Hedonic well-being	<---	Affective	0.036	0.079	0.359	0.720
H_{4a}	Prestige	<---	Intellectual	−0.075	0.064	−0.957	0.339
H_{4b}	Hedonic well-being	<---	Intellectual	0.304	0.059	3.520	<0.001
H_{5a}	Prestige	<---	Behavioural	0.468	0.083	4.766	<0.001
H_{5b}	Hedonic well-being	<---	Behavioural	−0.149	0.080	−1.319	0.187

Prestige R^2 = 0.332
Hedonic well-being R^2 = 0.161

TABLE 3. Indirect path relationships

H_0	Indirect path	β	95% CI [LL, UL]	*p-value*
H_6: Partial mediation	Hedonic<--Prestige<--Sensory	0.047	[0.011, 0.021]	0.022
H_7: Not supported	Hedonic<--Prestige<--Affective	−0.007	[−0.045, 0.012]	0.434
H_8: Not supported	Hedonic<--Prestige<--Intellectual	−0.008	[−0.038, 0.004]	0.261
H_9: Full mediation	Hedonic<--Prestige<--Behavioural	0.053	[0.011, 0.135]	0.030
	Direct path			
	Hedonic<--Sensory	0.164	[0.003, 0.309]	0.092
	Hedonic<--Affective	0.028	[−0.101, 0.177]	0.687
	Hedonic<--Intellectual	0.201	[0.062, 0.369]	0.015
	Hedonic<--Behavioural	−0.106	[−0.272, 0.061]	0.277

and hedonic well-being ($R^2 = 0.161$), which are the two luxury outcomes of the duality of luxury required for all luxury experiences suggested by Kapferer and Bastien (2012). In the original definition of duality of luxury, the two aspects of this duality include a person's sense of prestige and hedonic pleasure. However, the current study suggested that hedonic well-being is a better predictor than hedonic pleasure because the former includes all facets of hedonic pleasure and also recognises that receiving a sense of hedonic pleasure avoids negative feelings. For example, previous luxury studies have suggested that a portion of an individual's hedonic pleasure is avoiding people who are less worthy of a luxury experience (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012) and non-luxury experiences; this phenomenon is called the non-return effect of luxury (Turunen, 2018). Figure 1 shows that passengers' sense of prestige affects their hedonic well-being (H_1). Although customers' sense of prestige is derived from other people recognising their social status, a portion of prestige is derived from customers' ability to control their ability to be recognised, e.g. ability to purchase a first-class ticket. The ability to control their social recognition increases customers' hedonic well-being, which is supported by self-determination theory.

Passengers' feelings of prestige were derived from their (H_{2a}) sensory and ($H4_a$) behavioural experiences. Meanwhile, their hedonic well-being was derived from their (H1) sense of prestige and (H_{2b}) sensory and (H_{4b}) intellectual experiences. This study validated the importance of a sensory experience because this is the only experience that significantly affects passengers' sense of prestige (H_{2a}) and hedonic well-being (H_{2b}). Luxury studies have suggested that a luxurious sensory experience signifies to customers that they are privileged and belong to an exclusive group of individuals who deserve and have the ability to have a quality sensory experience, reflecting their status and wealth (Radón, 2012). The intellectual experience of passengers in a first-class cabin improves their hedonic well-being (H_{4b}). This finding is supported by previous studies, which suggested that intellectual stimulation improves a person's hedonic well-being (Joshanloo et al., 2020). The ability of individuals to be in physical proximity to communicate with others (i.e. behavioural engagement) in an exclusive environment enhances their sense of personal prestige (H_{5a}) because they can socialise with people with a similar status or have the privilege of communicating with individuals from a higher social class (Zhan & He, 2012). The sense of prestige of first-class passengers exerts a significant influence between their sensory (H_6) and behavioural (H_9) experiences and their hedonic well-being. Thus, this finding confirms that passengers' sense of prestige is an important mediator between their experience and hedonic well-being. Moreover, passengers' sense of prestige and hedonic well-being are interrelated rather than independent outcomes of a luxury experience.

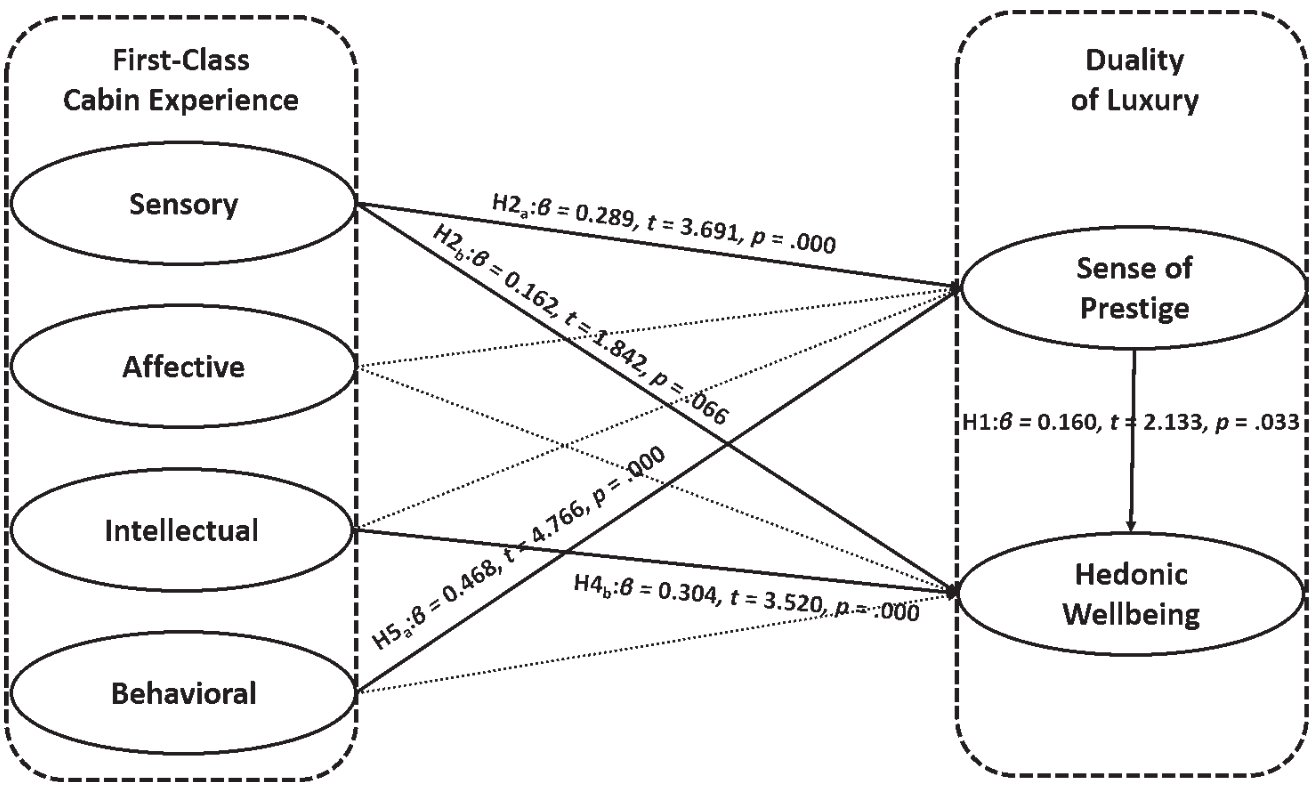

FIGURE 1. Luxury experience model of passengers in the first-class cabin

Conclusion

Theoretical and practical contributions

First, an experience in a first-class cabin is luxurious because such experience provides a sense of prestige and hedonic well-being to passengers, which all luxury experiences must provide. Second, passengers' sense of prestige enhances their level of hedonic well-being, challenging the concept that sense of prestige and hedonic well-being are independent outcomes of luxury experiences, as proposed by Kapferer and Bastien (2012). Third, the affective experience of passengers in a first-class cabin exerts no significant effect on their sense of prestige or hedonic well-being. This finding suggests that passengers seek personal tangible gratification by being recognised or improving their quality of life rather than feel an emotional connection with a brand.

In terms of practical contributions, airlines should focus on increasing passengers' sense of prestige and hedonic well-being by creating cabin experiences that affect their sensory, intellectual, and behavioural experiences. Additional emphasis should be placed on sensory experience because it is the only experience dimension that affects passengers' sense of prestige and hedonic well-being. Another suggestion is to focus on how to intellectually stimulate passengers in a first-class cabin. Flight attendants can be trained in areas such as wine/food, or be knowledgeable about the destination to engage in intellectual conversations with the passengers, and consequently, increase passengers' well-being by learning something new. Lastly, airlines should search for opportunities to allow passengers to increase their physical engagement during a first-class cabin experience. The additional ability of first-class passengers to move around provides them with a high sense of prestige because they feel special for having access to exclusive areas granted only to first-class passengers. This objective can be accomplished by providing a "standing lounge" or an "exercise area".

Limitations and future research

The major limitation of this research was that it focused on passengers from only one international airport in the south-eastern part of the US, restricting the generalisability of the study. Second, although the respondents were at the airport planning to take a flight, the researchers had no way of verifying whether they had actually taken a first-class flight over the past 12 months. This study focused on first-class cabin experience, restricting its generalisability to the airline industry. For future research, subsequent studies will conduct focus group discussions among first-class passengers to determine which onboard activities stimulate their sensory, intellectual, and behavioural experiences. Another research project can examine which types of experiences in airport lounges affect passengers' sense of prestige and hedonic well-being.

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Appendix

TABLE A1: Dimensions and measurement items

Dimensions and measurement items	Loadings
Sensory (Brakus et al., 2009)	
1. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines makes a strong impression on my visual sense or other senses.	0.840
2. I find travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines interesting in a sensory way.	0.903
3. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines appeals to my senses.	0.921
Affective (Brakus et al., 2009)	
1. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines makes me feel like I am a part of the first-class "family".	0.903
2. I have strong emotions for travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines.	0.879
3. Travelling first-class on luxury airlines is emotional.	0.833
Intellectual (Brakus et al., 2009)	
1. I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter travelling first-class cabin on luxury airlines.	0.905
2. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines stimulates my curiosity and problem solving.	0.927
3. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines makes me think.	0.867
Behavioural (Brakus et al., 2009)	
1. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines reminds me of actions and behaviours when I use this service.	0.872
2. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines results in bodily experiences.	0.875
3. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines is action oriented.	0.869
Prestige (Baek et al., 2010)	
1. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines is very prestigious.	0.883
2. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines has high status.	0.918
3. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines is very upscale.	0.860
Hedonic well-being (Diener et al., 1985)	
1. In most ways, my life is close to my ideal.	0.840
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.	0.854
3. I am satisfied with my life.	0.917
4. So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.	0.830
5. If I could live my time over, I would change almost nothing.	0.605

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The career paths of general managers in Dubai's luxury hotel sector

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to identify the career paths of general managers (GMs) of five-star hotels in Dubai through 20 face-to-face interviews. GMs see themselves as leaders and role models for their staff. Most participants have spent their careers working in the hospitality industry in operational departments and various locations around the world. The most important competencies to possess include strategic management, revenue management, and effective communication. The biggest challenges faced by GMs were missed opportunities and lack of support. Dubai-specific challenges related to the oversupply of hotel rooms, high expectations of owners and customers, and difficulties in talent acquisition and retention. In the future, GMs are expected to use and employ more technologies to tackle these issues and to stand out in the luxury hotel sector.

KEYWORDS: careers, career development, Dubai, five-star hotels, hospitality industry, UAE

Introduction

The hospitality industry plays a great role in many economies as a source of revenue and opportunities for employment and development (World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2020). That applies to Dubai, one of the seven emirates of the United Arab Emirates, with its world-class offerings and establishments in all hospitality-related sectors: hotels, restaurants, airlines, travel agencies, theme parks and more (Dubai Corporation of Tourism & Commerce Marketing [DTCM], 2020). As of October 2019, Dubai had welcomed 13.5 million international visitors, with the key source markets being India, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom. The total number of hotels in Dubai increased from 706 in September of 2018 to 716 in September of 2019, accounting for a total of 119 779 hotel rooms (DTCM, 2020). The travel and tourism sector accounted for 11.9% of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2019 (WTTC, 2020). The city's nominal GDP stood at AED398.1 billion (US$108.4 billion) in 2018 (Department of Economic Development, 2020). Moreover, the hospitality industry is known to be a fast-paced and every-changing environment with high pressure, long working hours, elements of servitude as well as part-time or seasonal workers (Davidson et al., 2011; Gebbels, 2019; Wang, 2013). The increase in tourism flows and consumer awareness as well as changing lifestyles among younger generations are key factors in fuelling the demand for luxury hotels worldwide (PR Newswire, 2015). Luxury offerings can be defined to be non-essential, high quality and associated with premium prices, providing social value and fulfilment for individuals (Wu & Yang, 2018). And though luxury itself may be more of a mindset than a necessity, it still provides value for individuals and companies alike (Wu & Yang, 2018), thereby further challenging the competence and flexibility of general managers (GMs) of five-star hotels to deliver their promises.

The purpose of this study is to identify the different career paths of GMs of five-star hotels in Dubai to better understand the skills needed to reach the GM level, and to be aware of the challenges they faced during their career development, in addition to determining the future trends in the luxury hotel sector and how hospitality professionals can prepare themselves for these. Therefore, the two research questions posed were "What is career development in the hospitality industry?" and "How are the career paths of GMs of five-star hotels in Dubai different or similar to those elsewhere?". Furthermore, six research objectives were defined: First, to define career development and its stages for hotel GMs; second, to explore the career paths of the GMs of five-star hotels in Dubai; then to determine the factors which impact the career development of GMs of five-star hotels in Dubai. Next was to explore the competencies required for career development of hotel GMs in five-star hotels, and then to analyse the challenges and barriers for hotel GMs of five-star hotels in their career development, and lastly to identify the new trends and challenges impacting the hospitality industry and GMs.

The five-star hotel sector was chosen because Dubai is known for its luxury offerings. The high expectations from customers and owners demand a lot from staff and management to offer customised products and experiential services. No research has yet been done in the Middle East, in Dubai specifically, on this, making it of interest for the researchers to explore.

Literature review

The role of general managers in hotels

The role of GMs as leaders and role models for their employees is crucial (Comfort & Franklin, 2014; Buecker et al., 2016). The specific leadership qualities needed by GMs are interpersonal skills, communication skills, mobility and adaptability, along with trustworthiness, enthusiasm, and a spiritual foundation (Akrivos et al., 2007; Burwash, 1999; Cassel et al., 2017; Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Ng & Pine, 2003). Folkman (2014) revealed the major success factors for top management are inspiration and motivation, facilitation of the growth of their employees, display of high integrity and honesty, powerful and effective communication, and development of strategic perspective.

Today, the role of female GMs is ever more prevalent in the hospitality industry. With 44% of its employees and 40% of its directors being female, Accor Hotels value this diversity and recognise its importance for the group's performance (Accor Hotels, 2018). This is higher than what was found in the banking industry, where 35% of the supervisory board at Deutsche Bank and only 18.3% of managing directors are females (Deutsche Bank, 2020). Hilton Worldwide and Marriott International, Inc. also focus on equality and employing minorities of all kind — whether it is people with a handicap, veterans, women and others — through their global inclusion and diversity programmes (Hilton Worldwide, 2020; Marriott International, Inc., 2018). In fact, 50% of the board of directors at Hilton are female (Hilton, 2019).

Career and career development

The concept of a career goes back to the 1950s. A career is "the pattern of work-related experiences that span the course of a person's life" (Greenhaus et al., 2010, p. 18). Wang (2013) defined career development as the accumulated activities and roles during a person's working life. A career usually consists of stages reflecting one's transition from one phase to the next and not as a mere sequence of jobs (SAQA, n.d.). This indicates that a career is a dynamic and subjective experience (Gebbels, 2019). The theories around career development have been categorised into five theories by Gebbels (2019). The theories of content focus on intrinsic influences from one's environment. The theories of process focus on the interactions and decision-making processes of individuals. This includes the developmental theories by Super (1990, as cited in Leung, 2008), who defined four stages consisting of exploration, growth, maintenance, and decline.

The theories of content and process, which are based on social learning theory, consider both one's characteristics and their developmental approaches. There are also theories that emerged based on the lack of theories on minority groups and gender roles, such as women's career development. Finally, there is the constructive route, which contributes to vocational theory and includes the boundaryless career approaches that are considered most prevalent in the 21st century.

Career development of general managers in hotels

Traditionally, GMs in the hospitality industry start by training or going to college, gaining experience in "food and beverage" and "rooms" departments, before becoming a GM (Li et al., 2007). Individuals would usually start at the bottom of the hierarchy and move up the ladder (Harper et al., 2005). Then, employees would remain loyal to the same company throughout their careers, due to promises made to individuals concerning their future (Ladkin & Riley, 1996). In this bureaucratic model, mobility was upward, and promotions were awarded based on competition (Creed & Hood, n.d.). The profile of GMs in the hospitality industry in the US in 1995 was relatively young, college-educated, male, specialised in hospitality or business and willing to stay in the industry (Nebel et al., 1995). Now, individuals focus more on career self-management or the boundaryless career in which one can enter certain levels of a specific career ladder if they possess the necessary competencies and qualifications, even if they have a different background (Greenhaus et al., 2010; Harper et al., 2005). However, Okumus et al. (2016) showed a similar profile of GMs in Turkey: dominantly male, aged between 30 and 49, 56% held a bachelor's degree, and half of the respondents majored in hospitality and tourism.

The competencies required for career development in hotels

Competencies refer to the attributes of individuals that enable them to perform their job in a proficient manner (Bharwani & Talib, 2017). These often incorporate the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for certain positions or industries (Bharwani & Talib, 2017; Walsh & Koenigsfeld, 2015; Wang, 2013). Bharwani and Talib's (2017) model in Figure 1 relates to four dimensions consisting of cognitive competencies (knowledge), functional competencies (skills), social competencies (attitudes and behaviour) and meta-competencies (motives and traits). Moreover, business acumen is needed to run multinational companies, such as being aware of local business practices, global politics, economic market conditions and knowledge of local customs (Smith et al., n.d.), alongside human relations and linguistic skills (Okumus et al., 2016).

In 2013, Wang devised a competency model for employees of the hospitality industry which examines the relationships among career competencies and career success from a career development point of view. Bharwani and Talib (2017) and Wang (2013) classify meta-competencies as the most influential among other skills.

Furthermore, Chung-Herrera et al. (2003) developed the leadership competency model since no specific competency model existed then for the hospitality industry. This model consists of eight factors (see Figure 2). Nevertheless, Chapman and Lovell (2006) criticised this model for not having a measurable scale for the competence levels. They believe that the hospitality industry is too complex to teach core skills to trainees.

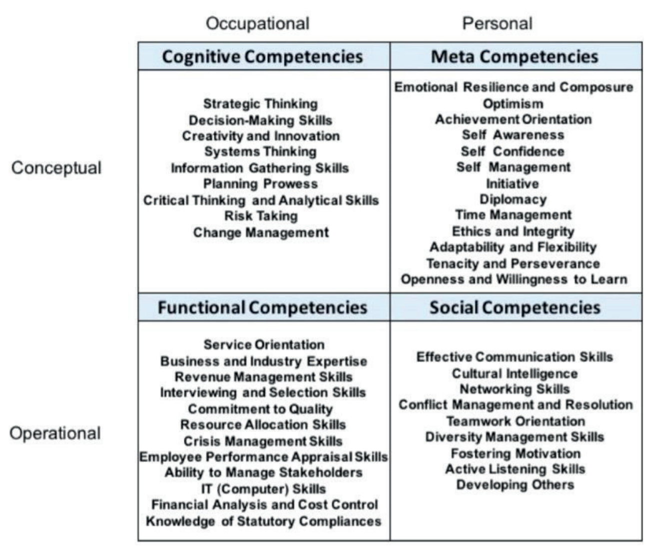

FIGURE 1: A competency framework for hotel general managers (Bharwani & Talib, 2017)

Leadership-competency model for the lodging industry

Factor	Mean	Dimension	Mean
Self management	4.32	Ethics and integrity	4.58[a]
		Time management	4.28
		Flexibility and adaptability	4.22
		Self development	4.12
Strategic positioning	4.17	Awareness of customer needs	4.39
		Commitment to quality	4.26
		Managing stakeholders	4.21
		Concern for community	3.67[b]
Implementation	4.16	Planning	4.23[c]
		Directing others	4.15
		Re-engineering	4.02
Critical thinking	4.15	Strategic orientation	4.24[d]
		Decision making	4.18
		Analysis	4.17
		Risk taking and innovation	4.03
Communication	4.12	Speaking with impact	4.27
		Facilitating open communication	4.14
		Active listening	4.06
		Written communication	4.06
Interpersonal	4.09	Building networks	4.20[e]
		Managing conflict	4.07
		Embracing diversity	4.01
Leadership	4.09	Teamwork orientation	4.25[f]
		Fostering motivation	4.19
		Fortitude	4.14
		Developing others	4.02
		Embracing change	3.98
		Leadership versatility	3.97
Industry knowledge	4.09	Business and industry expertise	4.09

FIGURE 2: Leadership-competency model for the lodging industry (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003)

While skills are proficiencies developed through training, abilities refer to the innate capacity to perform certain tasks (Werner & DeSimone, 2012). Kay and Moncraz (2004) revealed that employees in different managerial levels should have basic knowledge in human resource management. More technological competencies were seen to be used and needed in the entry level and middle management, while financial competencies were most important for upper management along with formulating plans and delegating tasks (Okumus et al., 2016).

Garavan et al. (2006) assumed that a certain level of education is important for enhancing individuals' career prospects. Ladkin (2002) showed that those with a master's degree got to the GM position almost two years faster than those who had a vocational background. Harper et al. (2005) predicted that in the future, having a master's would be the key differentiator when competing for managerial positions in hospitality firms.

Factors impacting career development in the hospitality industry

GMs' personalities and attitudes were key influencers in their career development (Ng & Pine, 2003). Ladkin (2002) mentioned that people's career ambitions are based on their values and needs and determine their career direction. Others (Akrivos et al., 2007; Garavan et al., 2006; Gebbels, 2019) have stressed the following characteristics: spirituality, self-motivation, tolerance, taking risks, commitment, common sense, strong memory and sentimental stability. Physical stamina, and especially immaculate appearance for female GMs, were considered important by Akrivos et al. (2007), as well as honesty, loyalty, goal orientation and hard work (Okumus et al., 2016). While Gebbels (2019) also mentioned the factor of personal relationships.

When it comes to work-related factors, it is expected that as individuals progress, they will take on more responsibility, gain knowledge and skills (Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000), learn new languages (Inkson & Myers, 2003) and develop their self-confidence (Inkson & Myers, 2003). Career mobility is often used as a strategy by individuals to progress faster, especially when self-initiated (Benson & Pattie, 2008; Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000). Mobility can happen internally (within a company) or externally (between companies). However, individuals may be resistant to relocate due to the fear of losing promotional opportunities back home or due to potential burden on their families. Furthermore, international assignments do not always guarantee increased compensation, benefits, or promotion (Benson & Pattie, 2008), and can reduce time for personal development (Buecker et al., 2016). Having connections in the industry seemed to also have a great effect on managers' careers, especially having a mentor (Garavan et al., 2006; Gebbels, 2019; Okumus et al., 2016). Gebbels (2019) also mentioned that factors like cultural, economic, or political environments can influence the career choices of individuals.

The challenges for hotel general managers in their career development

GMs can also face challenges in their career paths or the environment in which they operate. Brownell (1994) was the first to capture the perceptions of male and female hotel GMs. Women seemed to view the existing networks of their male colleagues as the most challenging aspect in their career development, followed by conflicts between family and work. Ng and Pine (2003) also examined the perceptions of Hong Kong's GMs on career development issues, highlighting that female GMs lacked a support system at work and unfairness in promotions, while male GMs had greater challenges with inadequate job knowledge and lack of support systems at work. Both agreed that sexual harassment at work, being married, and childcare responsibilities were the least of the problems. Challenges resulting in a GM leaving a property, as per Birdir (2002), relate to management's conflict with the property owners and lack of respect from stakeholders.

New trends and challenges impacting the hospitality industry

Only a small number of GMs emerged from sales and marketing, accounting and finance, and human resources (Ladkin, 2002; Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000; Ladkin & Riley, 1996; Li et al., 2007; Nebel et al., 1995; Okumus et al., 2016). This is predicted to change considering new industry trends regarding better talent acquisition and commitment, optimising efficiency and maintaining a firm's brand image (Davidson et al., 2011).

Furthermore, social media and the implementation of new in-room technologies are seen to impact the luxury sector when it comes to branding the property, attracting customers, staffing, and delivering unique services (PR Newswire, 2015). Other trends in the hospitality industry include the introduction of value-added taxes (VAT), the increase of sharing economy options, the emergence of experience seekers, and tech-savvy millennial travellers (Bharwani & Talib, 2017; Gerdeman, 2018; Jauncey & Nadkarni, 2014). The usage of smartphones and social media are expected to increase when making travel decisions (PwC, 2017). Innovative start-ups and new technologies such as blockchain and virtual reality are already being adopted in the hospitality ecosystem in the UAE, with an increase in pace to be expected in the coming years (ITP Digital Media Inc., 2018). Firms venturing into these new technologies are expected to benefit from promoting the destination, safer transactions, automated loyalty programmes and time savings (Divecha, 2017; ITP Digital Media Inc., 2018).

The expected increase in hotel rooms, stimulated by the upcoming developments and events in Dubai, may pose further challenges for current and future GMs to sustain the competitiveness of the properties they manage and retain their customers (Jauncey & Nadkarni, 2014).

The localisation initiative in the UAE, "Emiratisation", requires all industries to employ a certain percentage of Emirati nationals in their businesses. Here, firms need to pay special attention to accurately representing themselves and understanding the perceptions and expectations of the workforce (Pennington, 2017).

Research methodology

Secondary research

The literature review lays the foundation for the article by summarising the existing approaches, concepts, and findings around the topic. The information in each section is presented in a reverse chronological order to explain how the topic has evolved and which major contributions were noticed. Relevant works were found by searching for the key words or phrases through relevant Boolean searches like "career paths" or "career development", "general managers" or "hotel general managers", "five-star hotels" or "luxury hotels", and "general manager" and "competencies" and "hospitality industry", using online databases, in addition to journals, periodicals, and publicly accessible reports from sources like Hotelier Middle East and the World Travel and Tourism Council.

Primary research

Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data gathering were applied in previous research, however, this study utilised only the qualitative approach, because it is less time consuming than mixed methods, but more exhaustive than quantitative research (Cooper & Schindler, 2014; Creswell, 2009).

Population and sampling

The population consists of all the possible subjects that could be studied and analysed for the specific research. Since the entire population cannot always be accessed, a smaller sample, with similar and generalisable characteristics, can be studied (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The population for this study consisted of all 106 GMs of five-star hotels in Dubai. The focus was on five-star hotels because they were considered to provide a wide range of sophisticated services (Bundhun, 2012). As of March 2018, there were 106 five-star hotels in Dubai according to the hotel directory on the Dubai Corporation of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) website.

Non-probability purposive sampling was utilised for this study. Therefore, the 106 five-star hotels were sorted alphabetically, and then we contacted every second hotel to obtain the contact details of their current GMs. In order to reach the desired number of 20 participants, additional hotels were contacted, and interviewees were asked to recommend other GMs of five-star hotels who may be interested in participating. In total, 72 hotels were contacted, of which 14 declined, 23 agreed and 35 either never replied, did not have a GM or were only available after the allocated research period.

Data collection and analysis

Emails were sent out to potential participants introducing the purpose and aims of the study, along with a form to be signed providing consent to be interviewed. Participants were asked for their permission to be recorded in order to transcribe the interviews at a later stage. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and only five interviewees explicitly asked for notes to be taken.

The semi-structured interview consisted of two sections. First, the demographic information, such as gender, age, nationality, marital status, and current position were requested.

Second, insights from the participants relevant to their career development and paths were obtained through clear open-ended questions. For questions 10, 11, 13 and 14, flashcards were presented to the interviewees. These were based on previous findings from studies around the world regarding the subject matter asked in the questions. Though flashcards are known to be used mostly when conducting focus group research, as per Bryman and Bell (2015), they proved to be beneficial in this study as thought triggers for participants.

A pilot study was carried out with a GM in April 2018. The GM was male, 45+ and had 26 years of industry experience. He had been a GM in the hotel for three years, and four years prior to that was an executive assistant manager in the food and beverage section at another property. This means he followed the traditional path when it came to his career development. He is managing an airport hotel of 579 rooms and values interpersonal skills and relations in the hospitality industry over a degree.

After transcribing the pilot study's interview, the findings were critically analysed, with changes made to the instrument before the actual interviews took place. As a result, the pilot interview was not kept as part of the final interview sample. The changes we made included:

- Age of the participants: these were changed to start realistically from 25 onwards. Since it cannot be expected for an 18-year-old to run a multi-million dollar business, given its demands. Moreover, the age groups were ranged to nine years;
- Demographic information: a question about the marital status of the participants was added, as it opens the conversation about the role that their partners and children had in their career choices;
- The word "host" was replaced by "domestic" in question 15 because the pilot study showed how the participants could mistake the question to mean Emirati GMs as opposed to GMs native to a certain location and the potential advantages or disadvantages that they may have over their international counterparts; and
- The time allocated for the interviews was reduced from 45 to 30 minutes, since most of the information was obtained in that time.

The interviews were conducted over a period of around one month, mid-June to mid-July 2018. An interview schedule was devised according to the number of respondents and their availability. The data collection period took place during summer and the holy month of Ramadan. As a result, some GMs were either on vacation or busy with other projects. All interviews were held in quiet and convenient areas at the respective properties so that the recording and note-taking were done smoothly.

The qualitative data was analysed using the grounded theory approach by deriving abstract meanings and theories from research participants' contributions based on the steps suggested by Creswell (2009). As a result of the data analysis, in total six themes and 18 subthemes were identified.

Findings and discussion

All 20 interviewees were general managers of five-star hotels in Dubai, with some of them even being complex or regional GMs. All GMs were expatriates with none being Emirati. Eight GMs were from Europe, five participants came from other Arabic countries, three were Australian, two Turkish, while one was Indonesian, and one a US citizen. All GMs of this study were middle aged, ranging between 35 and 54 years old, with only two being over 55 years old. Interestingly, only two interviewees were female. Most GMs were married, and some had at least one child, while two were single and one was in a partnership. All GMs had over 18 years of experience in the hospitality industry, with one having worked in hospitality for 40 years. Three GMs had only recently started working in Dubai, while one had been working in Dubai for over 15 years. Many participants had been GMs before their current role, either with their current company or with other firms. For participant 17, it was his first GM position, which he had held then for four years.

Six main themes emerged from counting the frequently mentioned key words and phrases by the interview participants as depicted in Table 1. Any subtheme that was mentioned less than five times was not considered significant enough to be a main subtheme.

Theme 1: Components of a GM's career path

This theme consists of three subthemes: *operational background*, *education,* and *international work experience*. When comparing the profile of GMs of five-star hotels in Dubai with those of previous studies on GM career paths, similarities were seen in the findings of Okumus et al. (2016). These similarities showed male dominance with the majority holding a university degree in the field of hospitality and tourism. The participants of this study, however, were somewhat older than those of Okumus et al. (2016). Furthermore, five out of 20 hold an executive or master's degree, one had a bachelor's in accounting and only one had no formal education beyond middle school. It was evident that all participants spent most of their training and work experience in either or both the food and beverage and rooms departments. Interestingly, seven out of 20 participants spent an extensive time of their career in the sales and marketing department, three of which worked as revenue managers as well. This supports the findings of Greenhaus et al. (2010) and Li et al. (2007), who highlighted that the GM level can be reached so long as one possesses the necessary competencies and qualifications. The traditional path though was more prevalent in this study, which contradicts Gebbels (2019), who believes that there is going to be a shift in the stereotypical paths and roles due to hospitality organisations adjusting their policies and offering more opportunities for their employees. The participants of this study obtained their first GM position between seven and 21 years after they started working in a hotel. Some GMs in our research saw no value in their degrees, e.g. Participant 11, while Participant 14 recognised its value only after starting to work. Participants 2, 11 and 15 agreed that university education can help in terms of understanding the terminology and legal aspects on their careers. And Participant 6 saw education as a way for an individual to be aware of his or her own strengths.

Most interviewees argued how domestic or home-grown GMs may have an advantage over expatriate GMs, who still need to learn about the market they go into, which can take then around six months (Participant 2). Participant 2, 4 and 10 mentioned the benefits of knowing the local language when doing business and obtaining connections, because this enables them to do business in an easier manner, which is in line with what Inkson and Myers (2003) have said. On the contrary, Participant 16 highlighted that owners may prefer expatriate GMs for their experience, yet they come with higher expectations such as the cost of the overall package and benefits, including for their families. Participant 4 also added that if there were more hospitality institutions in the UAE and other countries, then there would be more GMs working in hotels in those countries.

Theme 2: Tasks and responsibilities of GMs

This theme includes the following subthemes: *ensure stakeholder satisfaction*, *financial performance*, *operational performance*, and *leadership management*. Most study participants agreed that there will always be a need for GMs in hotels, regardless of the description or job title. Participant 9 also highlighted the importance of a GM over a hotel manager, who may be able to run the business, but not grow it. The hotel was compared by Participant 8 to Rubik's Cube, with the general manager constantly manging the different sides and colours. On the contrary, Participants 1 and 2 did not view the GM position as an achievement, but more as an inevitable result from the years of input and grit that were invested into the profession, coupled with their performance and capabilities. The GMs role in building relationships, being a motivator, and exercising great leadership supports the findings of Folkman (2014) and Akrivos et al. (2007). All GMs recognise the important role of their colleagues when it comes to implementing the firm's vision and delivering service to guests, stressing the importance of choosing the right people for the team because they must have the same passion to serve the guests. Participant 2 stressed the welfare of her subordinates and the importance of being genuine in order to serve the guests well. Participant 6 also expressed his level of commitment toward his staff, by interviewing each person who wants to work in his property, adding: *...because I share the responsibility and that makes me a partner in your success*, in addition to guiding them in their career progression. The interviewees also agreed with Ng and Pine (2003) on the importance of one's personality and attitude, and they mentioned the need to obtain experience in the sales and marketing and revenue management departments.

Theme 3: Factors impacting the career development of GMs

The following subthemes were derived in this theme: *individual traits* and *work-related factors*. As per the literature, individual traits or personality-related factors that are predominantly fundamental for GMs to possess are very much about emotional intelligence and passion (Ladkin, 2002; Ng & Pine, 2003). Something that was supported by the interviewees of this study, not only because the hospitality industry is viewed as a very tough and demanding industry, hence not suitable for everybody, but also because GMs hold higher levels of responsibility which may lead to some fearing the position. This becomes evident when events such as the health condition of Participant 16's parent also impacted on the decisions he had to make in the process of defining his career. For Participant 7, making certain compromises with the help of his significant other was seen as necessary to ensure their children's stability. Participant 2 had actually been offered the GM position 12 times in her working career before she decided to take on the role, justifying her decision as follows:

> *I received my first GM offer when I was in the industry for 14 years. For about six or seven years, I didn't want to be a GM, because I have two kids and a family. And knowing myself, I will spend even more time in hotels if I am GM, so I didn't want to take the position.*

However, a couple of participants came to terms with being far away at important times. The role of family was further seen as the reason to join the hospitality industry. For Participants 5, 6 and 12, becoming a GM was their career goal in their teenage years. Particularly, Participant 12 stated: *I watched my uncle who was a GM when I was four years old*. From that moment onward, he knew he wanted to do the same thing. The parents of Participant 8 convinced him to opt for hospitality rather than his field of interest, mathematics. And Participant 1 grew up in a family that owned a lodging establishment. One's passion and self-drive was another important factor. In fact, six participants stressed the importance of continuous learning and development, with Participant 14 saying: *I learn from everyone*. Participant 13 also stressed that throughout the hardship, he never lost his passion because he did something he liked, though training was seen to be offered less over time as they progressed. Nonetheless, the self-initiative to participate in courses or accepting training opportunities was regarded as vital by the interviewees. This is in accordance with Li et al. (2007).

The study participants agreed with Benson and Pattie (2008) on mobility being a work-related factor which either positively or negatively impacted them. The decision for participants to move was almost always coupled with a new promotion or career opportunity. This supports the study by Buecker et al. (2016) on the advantages of going on international assignments and being open and creative. In addition, having a mentor was for some of the current GMs a crucial part of their path, supporting the findings of Gebbels (2019) and Garavan et al. (2006) and contradicting the findings of Okumus et al. (2016). The mentors of the GMs in our study not only gave them professional advice, but were considered more as good friends, even if there was a considerable age difference. Overall, the advantage of having connections in the industry is something that the interviewees advise should be maintained. Economic or political influences were not revealed by the participants, contradictory to Gebbels (2019).

Theme 4: Competencies required by GMs

This theme includes the following subthemes: *cognitive*, *functional*, *social*, and *meta-competencies*. When comparing the competencies required by GMs from the latest framework by Bharwani and Talib (2017), the study participants emphasised the cognitive, functional, and social competencies of strategic thinking, effective communication, adaptability and ethics. Furthermore, the interviewees emphasised the importance of understanding the overall environment in which one operates in terms of the culture, market trends, consumer preferences, politics, and the global market, adding to the complexity of the job. While the GMs in the study of Okumus et al. (2016) considered their main tasks to be formulating plans and delegating tasks, these were things that the participants of our research had been practising at earlier stages in their careers. At the GM level, revenue management skills and industry expertise were vital. Participant 2 valued being proactive by stating that "*...many things can be forecast ahead*".

Innovation and creativity were further reasons for the success, along with integrity and hard work, supporting the findings of Wang (2013). Most participants disagreed with Wang (2013), however, valuing hands-on experience more than training and education, without disregarding the importance of education in general. For most GMs, their industry experience and capabilities were more impactful than education to accelerate their progress. Nonetheless, education did play a role in their career development, especially in the later stages in which some firms asked them to do executive-level degrees to prepare for the GM role. This is in accordance with Herr et al. (2014), who mentioned that the individual would continue developing within the workplace based on the employers' requirements. Four participants took part in management-related courses offered by Cornell University in the United States. For the interviewees of this study, the speed in which they reached the GM level depended on several factors like education, prior experience, time, changes in careers choices, and family. One participant mentioned how working for a branded firm facilitates a faster career path since the structures are standardised worldwide. One interviewee added that if there were more hospitality institutions in the Middle East, more GMs would emerge from these regions. It is evident that a certain type of personality that can withstand pressure and develop others is crucial. Participant 6 expressed the need for a sense of humour and stamina when dealing with different situations, saying: *You need to have some thick skin, because it's not always gonna go your way.*

When it came to social competencies, most participants stressed the importance of interpersonal skills, including effective communication and listening skills. These skills are crucial for translating the owners' and managers' visions through the service delivered to guests by the employees. Participant 13 values his open-door policy for his staff, expressing clearly: *I'm happy to lead the team, but we are together in the challenge… come to me and I will be there to help and support you.* In addition to that, fairness plays an important role, because GMs are being watched as role models. Knowing the local language was not seen as substantial by the participants, as opposed to the findings of Okumus et al. (2016). For those who worked in different destinations around the world, the Middle East included, they spoke mostly English. Although translators were sometimes needed.

Theme 5: Challenges faced by GMs

This theme consists of two subthemes: *lack of career growth* and *Dubai's hospitality environment*. Interestingly, most GMs said they did not recall any specific challenges in their career development. At most, they were self-made challenges, such as being scared or not accepting certain opportunities, according to Participants 2 and 12. In agreement with Ladkin and Juwaheer (2000), challenges were faced when choosing to move, though it did not apply to each participant, especially in relation to the strain it may bring on their families. This supports the findings of Benson and Pattie (2008).

The study participants expressed the value and scarcity of female GMs in hotels yet mentioned how this is changing in real time. The study by Ng and Pine (2003) focused more on the differences in how female and male GMs rated the challenges they faced. It was clear in this study, however, that both genders viewed similar issues as equally difficult, mostly relating to the perceptions and negative opinions of colleagues, management, or the owners. Most GMs agreed with the findings of Birdir (2002) that the conflict of interest between the different stakeholders is challenging to manage. Lack of respect was not an issue in our study, more so the mistrust that some owners or even previous GMs had against the capabilities of the current GMs. According to Participant 14: *Every country has its reputation.* Some owners seemed to think that this participant GM would not be able to deliver the luxury service because of his country of origin, yet he proved them wrong through his capabilities. Participants 12 and 14 also mentioned that the perceptions of others made the shift from being a specialist in a certain department to a generalist difficult, especially for those with a background in the sales department who had to obtain more knowledge in the operations or specifically food and beverages. Yet, the support and knowledge of their colleagues were also the reason for their success. Moreover, Participant 9 strongly advises young beginners to *stay away from politics*… [and] *gossip*. Other challenges faced by general managers related to the chances and opportunities they have missed or that were not offered to them. Participant 19 also believes that it is the *company's role to provide opportunities*.

Several challenges for GMs of five-star properties were identified, revolving mainly around the current oversupply of hotel rooms in Dubai's hospitality market. This translates to higher competition that drive down the prices that can be charged on products and services. Participant 17 was optimistic, saying that *business in Dubai is getting more structured, yet more mature…there is business*. Other GMs, however, were more pessimistic, yet they have plans in place to mitigate the challenges such as tapping into new markets and continuing to deliver the service level as promised. More so, it is important to keep updated, remain relevant and authentic. Both Participants 6 and 12 also stressed the need to *think outside the box*. This is crucial for the luxury sector, since the experiences and expectations of customers vary (Harkison et al., 2018).

Theme 6: Future trends in hospitality

This theme includes three subthemes: *growth of the hospitality industry in Dubai*, *use of technology* and *advice for future hoteliers*. Five out of the 20 participants had a pessimistic outlook about industry changes being too quick. Along with an increase in hotels of different star ratings opening in line with mega events like the World Expo 2020 in Dubai is the pressure from corporate regarding the operational and financial performance of the property. The way business used to be conducted is also expected to change, as hotels need to operate with more limited budgets, according to Participant 16. The impact of the sharing economy, like Airbnb, on the hospitality industry was only considered a threat by one GM. This can be linked to the fact that these types of lodging options do not compete on the same level as five-star and luxury accommodations. Some GMs see a change in tourists' travel patterns and decision-making, especially millennials, due to new technology. They may seek new locations, seeing Dubai as too expensive, especially for luxury experiences. Therefore, it is important to remain focused on a property's competitive advantages and service levels. Participant 8 added how only big chains will survive in the market.

Some interviewees see the possibility for utilising artificial intelligence and robots in the future as already being implemented by some in the UAE and around the world, as mentioned by ITP Digital Media Inc. (2018). These aspects may come in handy when wanting to appeal to tech-savvy millennials and experience seekers, as mentioned by Gerdeman (2018) and Bharwani and Talib (2017). Since the organisational hierarchy seems to get flatter, the job of GM may also be comprised or fused with that of an operations manager. In general, Participant

16 sees that GMs nowadays need to be more independent and do without a secretary and/or an executive assistant manager because the work of a GM is facilitated by easier processes, structures and technological devices, such as using WhatsApp group chats for quick coordination among staff. Participant 11 agreed: *GMs need to be hands-on*.

With regard to the difficulties of attracting and retaining the right labour, most GMs saw that issue as very prominent, supporting Gebbels (2019). Participant 6, however, confidently stated: *I personally have never found it hard to attract talent… If you become the leader others want to follow, you'll never have it difficult to attract people who want to work with you.* Millennials are and will be the future GMs and staff members working in the hospitality industry. They are also the customers that will be catered to. There still seems to be some confusion or irritation regarding their different mindset compared to that of the current generation of GMs, yet many current GMs recognise the importance of trying to understand and adapt to them. Participant 2 was the only one who expected more tasks to be outsourced to subcontractors in the future.

In a closing remark, the GMs shared some of their advice — based on their years of work experience in the hospitality industry — with young professionals who would like to become GMs in the future:

put [have]… *reachable goals* — Participant 2
be yourself — Participant 10
ask a lot of questions…never fear to be judged — Participant 19
it's a lifestyle…not a job — Participant 11
It's not for everyone — Participant 7
take your time — Participant 13
Do not fight for it…attract it — Participant 14
Participants 3, 4 and 6 valued staying *humble*.
It's a fantastic industry…that can bring [take] *you all over the world* — Participant 8

Conclusion

This article gives a perspective of the paths and experiences faced by GMs of luxury properties in Dubai and their important roles for the success and continuous performance of the business. GMs have been recognised as father figures to their subordinates, in addition to being leaders who can encourage their staff and satisfy the main stakeholders (Buecker et al., 2016; Folkman, 2014). These qualities are substantial to the hospitality industry since it is a very demanding environment (Davidson et al., 2011; Wang, 2013). Therefore, GMs must ensure that all aspects of the business are properly planned, executed, and monitored. Over the years, each GM has been through several steps to reach their current esteemed positions, including their education, work experience, refining their competencies, and facing opportunities and challenges (Wang, 2013). Since no previous research examined GMs of five-star hotels in Dubai specifically, this study aimed at closing this gap in the literature.

In this study, 20 out of the then 106 GMs of five-star hotels in Dubai were interviewed between mid-June and mid-July 2018. Most participants had a European background and only two of them were female. Their ages ranged between 35 and 54. Most of them were in committed relationships, and three had children. Most GMs followed the traditional career path, spending a significant amount of time in both the front office and food and beverage departments. This is something that previous researchers have predicted to be different, like Greenhaus et al. (2010). Most participants held a business or hospitality degree, while one held a degree in accounting. The GMs reinforced the importance of skills like strategic management, revenue management, effective communication, adaptability, willingness to learn, creativity, and ethics, along with understanding the market, culture, and laws under which they must operate. The study further encompassed the challenges faced by GMs, which mostly related to the perceptions of others, not taking every opportunity and the differences in the speed of reaching their positions. Most participants predicted a faster progression for the next generation of GMs through the compressed educational programmes and new internal structures of hotels. Dubai-specific challenges were the then current oversupply of hotel rooms, continuous high expectations of owners and customers, and effective talent acquisition and retention. In the future, GMs are expected to employ new technologies to face increased competition and changing consumer demands such as ways to better market their properties and ease processes. All participants expressed their overall joy working in the hospitality industry. Dubai, being a luxury destination, demands that GMs possess the right competencies and mental abilities essential for running luxury properties. Knowing about the nature of the hospitality industry, the context of Dubai and the important characteristics needed in the business, individuals can plan their careers more competently in order to reach their goals and stand out.

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Changes in pre- and post-pandemic pricing decision factors: An overview of South Africa's luxury accommodation sector

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ABSTRACT: Large-scale events such as a worldwide pandemic impact multiple areas of the hospitality business, including the factors that influence luxury pricing. As pricing cannot be done in isolation, changes in trading environments need to be identified and pricing approaches adjusted to keep access to luxury products in the hospitality sector in line with changing consumer expectations and access to disposable incomes. An investigation was conducted using a qualitative method by collecting insights from 50 experts in pricing roles in the luxury hospitality sector in South Africa to determine the changes in pricing levels and approaches in the last decade and the expected future changes based on the current status of the economic and public health environment. The results from this investigation have shown a continuous increase in luxury accommodation price points with expected decreases in accommodation and events and catering revenue streams in the future, but no major change in food and beverage and auxiliary revenue streams due to the current global pandemic. The investigation has also shown, based on opinions of 50 key pricing decision-makers in South Africa, that service and product offerings, customer segmentation, location, forecast demand and the competitive environment remain the strongest influences in pricing decisions, with price sensitivity/elasticity, online presence strength, cost of hygiene practices and technological advancements becoming more relevant.

KEYWORDS: digitalisation, hospitality, influencers, luxury, pricing, profitability, revenue management, technology

Introduction

Pantelic (2017) has established pricing as one of the four factors in hotel selection factors that influence guest decision process and purchase. Equally, Kapferer and Laurent (2016, p. 333) suggest that "price is central in the perception of luxury", with expensiveness argued to be the first characteristic consumers look for when defining luxury (Dubois & Paternault, 1995; Groth & McDaniel, 1993).

As pricing has a direct impact on the revenue achieved and, combined with costs, will result in the overall profitability of the organisation. This was also found in a study by Al-Shakhsheer et al. (2017). While reducing room rates will improve room occupancy, it is not an effective strategy to maximise hotel revenue. Similarly, it could be suggested and thought of that lowering pricing can also be an indication of business difficulty or in some regards a change or depletion in quality. This makes the pricing strategy critical for long-term organisational success. Enz (2013) mentioned that pricing plays a key role in shaping the market share of a firm and elicit firms' responses more than other types of competitor activities, which highlights the critical nature of correct pricing.

Price decision-makers should consider and understand various elements, including consumer's purchasing behaviour (especially in the luxury accommodation segment), competitive environment, distribution mix, demand and supply elements in the market, demand forecasting and the establishment's overall image in the market to manage pricing more effectively to increase the overall profitability of the hotel.

Turner (2016) mentioned that the luxury consumer has a unique need for exclusivity and the promise of decadence. These elements have a direct impact on the price elasticity of the luxury consumer/guest and must be considered just as strongly as the actual price point when making a pricing decision in this unique segment.

Evolution in the hospitality industry is resulting in better technology that opens many more channels for reaching a new segment of guests. This allows marketing methods that are based on channels that are integrated with various online platforms (Williams & Levitt, 2019). These channels present new opportunities for the pricing strategy and new restrictions with pricing parity requirements. For luxury hotels, however, this may cause challenges if not approached cautiously as Yang et al. (2015, p. 1) have observed. They state that their

> results indicate that consumers who are high in NFS exhibit less favourable attitudes towards the luxury hotel and a lower likelihood to return on having learned that the hotel plans to implement price promotions through discount websites. Therefore, luxury hotels that traditionally attract consumers high in NFS need to be aware that using price promotions via discount websites might have a detrimental effect on consumers' perceptions of the hotel.

Turner (2016) stated that luxury compares with extravagance, opulence and social rank which can explain the above impression that discounts have on luxury value for some. Luxury consumers see the reduction of price for luxury hospitality offerings as a reduction in their value and prestige.

New members are entering the rank of luxury and represent a group that is often called "new money". The dawn of the millennium could not only have been called the turn of the experiential economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) but also the start of the new luxury period. Frank Schab, co-founder of 6 Degrees, states that more people than ever are spending money on luxury brands. Some will buy for personal enrichment and experience and others will buy to signal they have joined the upper class, and some will buy for both reasons (Schab, 2020). This indicates the evolution of the luxury traveller profile.

Turner (2016, p. 3) states that

> [i]n spite of the global recession, luxury seems to be everywhere. Luxury is a term that is routinely used in our everyday life: a promise of decadence and a dream of an exclusive lifestyle, a key component of marketing management and a tagline in commercials and advertising campaigns.

This indicates the global perspective that luxury still has.

Literature review

The essence of luxury: Uncompromising service and product offerings

Luxury has always been synonymous with a high level of service and products as confirmed by a statement by Chris Fradin, Vice-President of Europe for *Forbes Travel Guide* in Godfrey (2017, p. 1): "around three-quarters of the 526 standards that the influential *Forbes Travel Guide* uses to evaluate hotels around the world are based on service". That indicates the importance of service for this well-known travel guide. With many hotels currently in the market claiming to be luxury and providing high levels of service, the measurement can become difficult. Changing customer expectations need to be considered when updating service standards and product offerings.

If we then consider the quality of our service in our pricing decision, what impact does that have on the establishment and the guest buying behaviour for a luxury brand? A study done by Ye et al. (2014) discovered — by reviewing 43 726 online surveys covering 774 star rated hotels — that price has a significant impact on perceived quality for higher-star, luxury hotels. Ye et al. (2014) also found that higher pricing has a positive impact on perceived quality, but has a negative impact on perceived value. Perceived value is driven by the customer's impression of the benefits they will get from the product or service. So, to maximise perceived value, luxury hotels must keep their service and product levels in line with the price being charged. It could be argued that the higher the price, the higher the expected quality that the consumer expects.

Reasons for high prices are debatable; however, it is seen that the human element remains important in service delivery and emphasises the need for continuous staff training. Higher staffing levels and possibly higher salaries all can contribute to the need for luxury hotels to charge higher prices. Service can further be enhanced by applying AI and robotics to apply a new service concept, by providing services focused on a reduced-touch approach, which will add value in a pandemic environment (Jiang et al., 2020). The challenge in a luxury environment remains to reduce physical touch points with guests, but to not lose connection at the same time.

Using customer segmentation to meet the needs of the luxury traveller and track the evolution of this segment

Forgacs (2017, p. 117) provides the following reasoning for customer segmentation: "To better understand the characteristics of different people, the market can be divided into groups that have common needs and distinct buying habits". Lynn (2011) elaborates that

> you may differentiate your customers on the basis of demographic variables (such as age, gender, education, and income), geographic variables (such as nation, state, region, and neighbourhood type), psychographic variables (such as attitudes, opinions, interests, and values), and behaviours (such as media habits, purchase frequency, brand loyalty, and channel usage).

Crafting services in line with customer segmentation is especially relevant in the luxury hospitality sector as guests have very high and, at times, specific needs that need to be met to create the best value perception. Another important reason for customer/market segmentation is to guide your marketing activities and assist with pricing decisions (Kimes, 2010). Market segmentation can guide package creation to ensure guest needs are met. With a clearly defined market segmentation in place, additionally, price elasticity evaluation becomes easier. Lynn (2011) mentions the STP (segmentation, targeting and positioning) approach which suggests that the mass market consists of a number of relatively homogeneous groups, each with distinct needs and desires. He explains further that STP marketers attempt to identify those market segments, direct marketing activities at the segments which the marketers believe that their company can satisfy better than their competitors, and position their product offering to appeal to the targeted segments. Luxury hotels which have at their core goals to provide a high level of service and guest experience can benefit from the STP approach.

The luxury traveller profile is also changing with the emergence of the millennial traveller. Fromm (2016) states that the millennial traveller is changing the face of affluence as they are gaining more wealth at an unprecedented rate, which is changing the profile of luxury travellers. Pricing and marketing need to be made accessible to this growing segment of luxury traveller.

Evolution of technology in hospitality and the effect on pricing

Technology is always evolving in the world as we know it and the hospitality industry is not immune to this evolution. Technological advancement remains constant and swift and must be taken into account when strategy discussions are done. Technological enhancement can have a positive effect on the guest experience in various ways. "Smart technology, like remote check-in and mobile room keys, cater to guest wants and expectations" (Bradley, 2019, p. 1).

Further benefits of implementing better technologies in the hospitality sector include a hotel being able to maintain their presence globally (Moro et al., 2017) and selling their rooms easily through online travel agencies (Dominique-Ferreira & Antunes, 2019).

The internet makes hotels' prices more transparent (Nagle et al., 2014), customers can easily compare the prices offered for similar services (Moro et al., 2017) and they are more informed about products and services alternatives, benefits, qualities and prices (Al-Mamun et al., 2014). This should be a key consideration in pricing decisions to make sure that price parity is maintained to protect the luxury brand's reputation and guest loyalty. Guests can have alternatives in an instant if any confusion arises from inconsistent or confusing pricing structures. As services can now be easily communicated and marketed through these new technologies, the prices of these luxury services can be better supported with the vast amount of luxury product information at the guest's fingertips to speed up the buying process. "Specifically, in the luxury hospitality sector, authentic and tailor-made service is key to success and this makes the need clear for further digital transformation of the industry in order to meet the level of personalization that guests demand" (Les Roches, 2020).

As the industry finds itself in the grips of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has never been a more important time to assess guest needs and find solutions to be able to stand out from the competition. Hotels are likely to adopt "unmanned" devices and provide contactless services in the near future (Jiang, 2020). The challenge for luxury hotels will be to physically be as far as possible from guests to ensure guest and staff safety, but to keep as connected as possible to deliver the high level of service and personalisation expected.

The "new normal" under Covid-19 seems to have made the sector realize that investment in innovative technology must have a clear ROI (return on investment) where the impact can be measured by looking at the RevPar (room revenue per available room) or TrevPar (total revenue per available room (Les Roches, 2020).

This ROI is directly driven by smart pricing decisions that deliver the maximum number of guests at the best possible price point to maximise RevPar and TrevPar performances consistently.

Digitalisation and emergence of social media

As the world embraces digitalisation, social media becomes a bigger factor in people's social lives and a stronger marketing platform for organisations. No business can ignore it, especially not the luxury hospitality sector that sells experiences. Due to the constant increase in users on online platforms, it becomes more critical to incorporate a very strong online marketing strategy alongside the pricing strategy. It is important to include search engine optimisation (SEO), search engine marketing (SEM) and social media in your online marketing strategy to develop a strong online presence (Atwal, 2017).

Further, Atwal (2017, p. 27) states that

> [l]uxury travellers' first source of information is always online. They look for inspiration on Instagram, experiences at destinations on the hotel's own website and travel blogs for practical information to plan their perfect trip.

Due to luxury hotels' often exotic locations, they must maximise this element to inspire travellers through visual platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and Tumblr. Research by Travolution shows 40% of millennial travellers chose a destination based on how "instagrammable" it was, bypassing the cost and availability of alcohol (24%) and the opportunities to explore local cuisine (9.4%) (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017).

InterContinental Hotels and Resorts has revealed — through an in-depth study done in the luxury travel segment by analysing 7 083 survey responses — that there is an increased focus on travelling "for the 'gram" and a continued focus on social media for travel inspiration as well as gratification in posting on social media while travelling (Lane, 2019). Further results from this study showed that in 2020, 39% of global luxury travellers will put more focus on social media when travelling in the coming year, and 55% of global luxury travellers believe capturing social media content while travelling increases their ability to have a meaningful experience. This indicates the value that social media is gaining for luxury travellers in their planning and travelling phases.

Vakaris et al. (2017) report from their study on the influence social media has on the customer's decision journey that social media help users accumulate information about products and services, evaluate alternatives, save time, make their decisions easily and select the most appropriate accommodation. Even if pricing is right, but the online brand is lacking, a traveller might choose one of the alternatives instead.

When a strong online brand is established and regular engagement occurs with guests through social media, brand loyalty is the result, and this enables a brand to become more confident in their pricing strategy, which in turn increases revenues and overall profit.

Problem identification

A study was conducted by du Plessis & Saayman (2011) that determined the factors influencing pricing in the accommodation sector in South Africa from the accommodation provider perspective by gaining insights from various South African accommodation establishments through the databases of three major associations in the accommodation market. The findings indicated that the following ten factors were the most relevant through the respondents: (1) Environmental qualities (natural surroundings, location, climate, quality of air and water); (2) Amenities (lifts, casinos, tennis courts, children's facilities and recreation facilities); (3) Image (uniqueness of facility, status, total experience offered, and target market); (4) Management (costs incurred to develop facilities, demand, quality of basic infrastructure); 5. Positioning (included factors such as what competitors offer); 6. Quality service (product quality, quality of food, hygiene and safety); 7. Infrastructure service factor (basic infrastructure of establishment); 8. Location (distance from airport, distance from the beach and quality of the beach); 9. Marketing (marketing plan expenses); and 10. Product quality factor (facility's grading status, services like air-conditioning, digital satellite television, internet, room service, en-suite rooms and the privacy of rooms).

The above research, while relevant at the time, does not include perspectives of crucial developments in technology, revenue management and luxury traveller profiles which influence pricing decisions. The current pandemic (Covid-19) also presents some drastic changes in customer expectations and supplier responsibilities that need to be taken into account for successful pricing structures.

More research is needed to understand the current considerations for commercial leaders in charge of luxury hospitality pricing decisions as these considerations need to remain in line with technological and consumer buying behaviours.

Research methodology

A qualitative research methodology was followed in this investigation with an exploratory questionnaire being used. Questionnaires were used to gain insights by asking for opinions on a selection of possible factors and open-ended questions on the drivers of the change of factors supported by literature reviews. According to Hammarberg et al. (2016, p. 1), "qualitative methods are used to answer questions about experience, meaning and perspective, most often from the standpoint of the participant".

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was set up in an electronic GoogleForm with three questions and distributed electronically to targeted members. The survey was used to gain insights into the changing factors influencing pricing decisions in the luxury hospitality market in South Africa and expected changes to price points in the next one to five years. The first question looked at the factors that influence pricing decisions in the luxury hotel market and provided 18 factors. Respondents were asked to select up to ten factors in the three different periods: in the last ten years; in the last two years; and in the next ten years. The second question was aimed at establishing what the respondent's opinion was on the movement of four revenue streams, including accommodation revenue, food and beverage revenue, events and catering revenue and auxiliary revenue. Respondents needed to indicate their opinion of the price/revenue movement from four options for the revenue streams mentioned above. The options included: significant increase (15% or more), insignificant increase (15% or less), significant decrease (15% or more) or insignificant decrease (15% or less). Both of the above questions had an area where the reasons for the answers were requested. Both of these questions were mandatory. A third, optional question was added asking respondents if there were any other factors that they felt were relevant that were not covered in the first two questions. This question was not mandatory to complete the survey.

Sample

Invitations to take part in the survey were communicated to hospitality and tourism professionals who currently hold or held commercially orientated roles (in the last ten years) in luxury and premium establishments in South Africa. Commercial roles included sales, marketing, catering and revenue management disciplines. Invitations were communicated via email, mobile devices and through commercially orientated professional network groups online.

A total of 150 invitations were sent out and 50 responses were received on the electronic survey, providing a good sample size. Due to the current uncertainties in the industry due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many respondents expressed their reluctance to complete a survey. While only 50 responses were received, respondents included pricing experts from international hotel brands in regional roles and independent luxury hotels, revenue management and digital marketing specialists, independent hotel revenue and marketing consultants and travel agent representatives who book luxury travel.

Secondary analysis/archival study

Data on luxury hotel price performance was acquired from Smith Travel Research (STR) for the last ten years (2010–2019). STR is a third-party data collection agency that independently collects revenue and occupancy performance data from hotels globally and safely analyses this data to supply hotel operators, owners, asset managers, and researchers etc. with benchmark data to compare their performances to their predefined competitive sets. Various rules are followed by the collecting agency and data contributors/hotel operators to ensure data is handled, stored and distributed in a way that meets the requirements of all competition commissions and anti-price fixing initiatives. This data was used to review and identify the price movement of the select set of hotels in the luxury segment in the last ten years. STR allocated 150 hotels to this set based on their qualifying selection criteria.

Results

Movement of price points in the luxury hotel category between 2010 and 2019

A review of the latest STR data for the "luxury class" selection of hotels in South Africa in their data set revealed an increase year on year, with no decline observed except for 2011 which was after South Africa hosted the FIFA World Cup (Figure 1).

Six out of ten months had an increase of over 9%, with three out of ten months recording a growth between 0% and 8.9%, and only one month showing a decline. This indicates the continued willingness of luxury travellers to pay for luxury accommodation services at growing rates in South Africa in the last ten years.

Expected price movement in the next one to five years

From the survey (question 2) that was sent out, the question (Figure 2) was asked and below is a summary of some of the more popular replies received. This question was asked after Covid-19 was declared a pandemic, meaning that was a strong influencer on the perspectives shared. It is clear there was a general opinion that accommodation revenue will drop significantly (more than 15%), while food and beverage revenue is expected to increase insignificantly (below 15% increase), events and catering revenue and auxiliary revenue is expected to decrease significantly (more than 15%) as well.

Some of the reasons provided by respondents for the above responses included:

- Remote working will decrease the need for unnecessary international business travel which will in turn decrease demand for accommodation and have a negative impact on pricing for accommodation services to maintain current market share;
- Potential short-term evolution of segment changes may occur in the luxury hospitality sector by targeting lower-rated business to cover basic costs until international demand returns to previous levels;
- While more electronic meetings will happen, high-end business meetings which are normally associated with luxury hotel guests will still be taking place due to the importance of these meetings;
- Food and beverage prices will increase as operational costs will need to be covered with increased hygiene costs and new government regulations on restaurant capacities;
- Local utilisation of outside food and beverage outlets will remain strong until international travel returns, while these guests will not be able to afford significantly high prices, which will need to be taken into account when setting prices, especially in the short term;

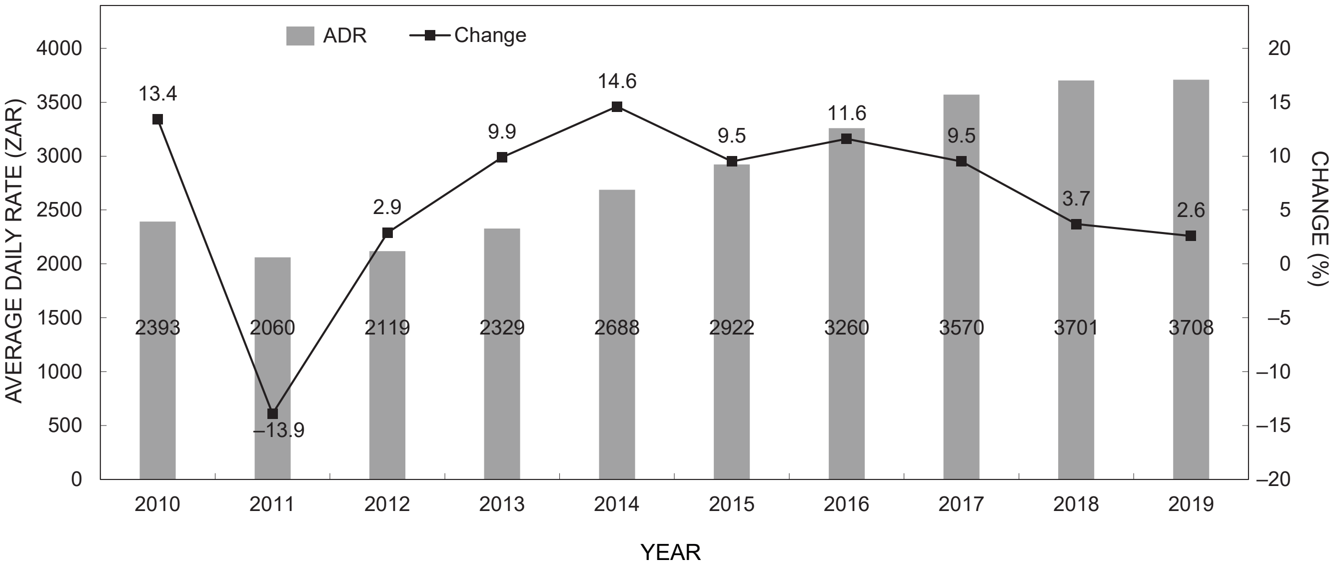

FIGURE 1: Average daily rate performance for selected luxury class properties in South Africa (author's analysis based on data from STR Trend Report)

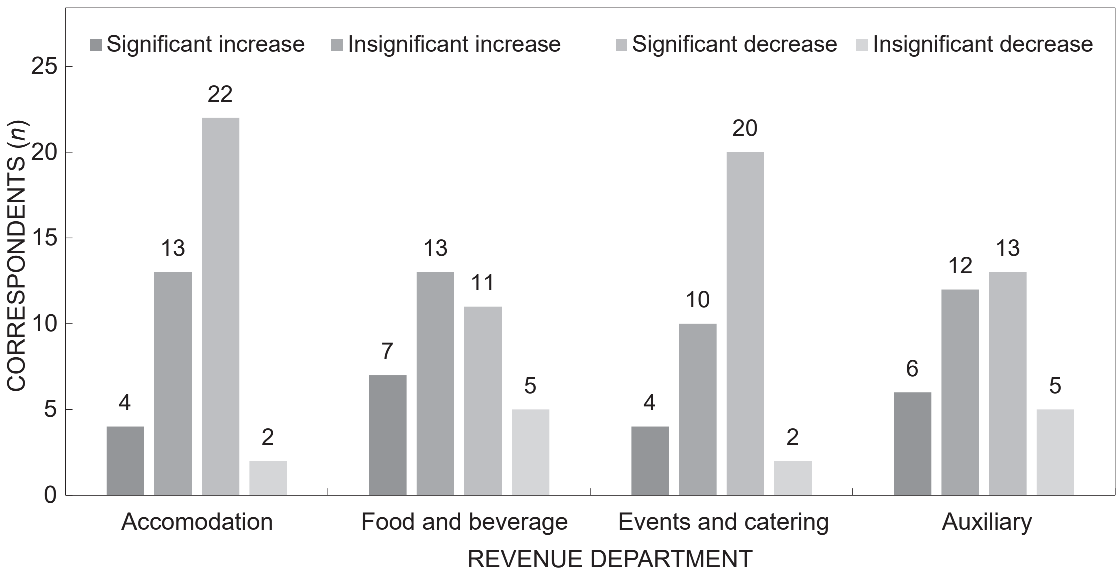

FIGURE 2: Results from the survey on change in pricing patterns in the next one to five years

- Due to social distancing regulations and technology advancements, many events will be held digitally until a vaccine is created, which in turn will significantly decrease event and catering demand, which will push down pricing to gain market share in this highly competitive market; and
- Auxiliary services will remain a guest's choice to use or not and will keep the same relationship to accommodation demand, while the change in price point on average will not see much change compared to the past.

Changing factors that influence pricing decisions in the luxury hospitality market in South Africa

The results from the survey (question 1) have shown that the top ten factors that will be the main considerations in pricing decisions in the next ten years show some significant changes compared to the main considerations from the last ten years. Factors that remain important include quality of service offering, customer segmentation, the presence of a competitive environment and forecast demand. Considerations that will become more important include price sensitivity, an establishment's online presence (or not), cost of hygiene practices, and technology and social media. Full survey results can be viewed in Table 1.

Additional considerations that can affect pricing decisions during and after the current pandemic

The third question in the survey was an open question that allowed respondents to share their thoughts on any further considerations in pricing decisions in the current pandemic. Some of the thoughts provided by respondents included:

TABLE 1: Rank of influence factors according to the survey

Rank	Factors in the last ten years	Factors in the last two years	Factors in the next ten years
1	Forecast demand	Quality of service offering	Quality of service offering
2	Competitive environment	Competitive environment	Price sensitivity
3	Quality of service offering	Forecast demand	Establishments online presence strength
4	Quality of product offering	Customer segmentation	Cost of hygiene practices
5	Locations (access to attractions and services)	Quality of product offering	Customer segmentation
6	Historical demand patterns	Locations (access to attractions and services)	Technology and social media
7	Customer segmentation	Technology and social media	Competitive environment
8	Price sensitivity	Establishments online presence strength	Forecast demand
9	Establishments value proposition	Price sensitivity	Quality of product offering
10	Public image of establishment	Availability of growing booking channels	Locations (access to attractions and services)
11	Establishments online presence strength	Establishments value proposition	Public image of establishment
12	Current exchange rates	Amenity offerings available	Current exchange rates
13	Quality of infrastructure	Historical demand patterns	Establishments value proposition
14	Amenity offerings available	Public image of establishment	Availability of growing booking channels
15	Technology and social media	Current exchange rates	Value of marketing spend
16	Availability of growing booking channels	Value of marketing spend	Amenity offerings available
17	Value of marketing spend	Quality of infrastructure	Quality of infrastructure
18	Cost of hygiene practices	Cost of hygiene practices	Historical demand patterns

- Changes in company travel policies, consumer willingness to travel and structural changes to demand (the option of video conferencing instead of in person events);
- Special events planned before the pandemic will be difficult to cancel and will very likely still go ahead, for example, the British and Irish Lions Rugby Tour to Johannesburg in July 2021;
- A more detailed classification of luxury is needed to identify a premium luxury traveller and a mid-level luxury traveller as their needs may be different in the current economic situation;
- Available airlift to destination and travel restrictions in place that may increase the journey to destination that could add costs to overall travel expenses;
- Cancellation and booking policies can affect pricing due to fencing on lower rates and more flexibility on non-discounted rates; and
- Changes in supply as the economic environment could have devastating effects on various accommodation suppliers.

Discussion

Considerations remaining important

Competitive environment and demand forecasting

As customer demand can vary due to changes in demand and supply in the market, economic downturns and changes in guest booking behaviour, hotels need to remain aware of the environment they operate in and adjust pricing to stay competitive. This is as important now and the future as it has been in the past, with the current pandemic, which was declared a public health emergency of international concern on 30 January 2020, providing a very useful example of an economic downturn resulting from a global event and which could change the competitive environment. Pricing may need to be adjusted in such situations, but it may be unclear what to do with the pricing. The best aid to guide your pricing strategy is to undertake a focused approach to demand forecasting, but what is demand forecasting?

"Demand forecasting asks how much of a good or service would be bought, consumed, or otherwise experienced in the future, given marketing actions and industry and market conditions" (Armstrong & Green, 2017, p. 3). This is the value of an accurate demand forecast. The price has a direct impact on the number of rooms that will be booked. Demand forecasting uses a combination of historical data and the current booking pace to determine the likelihood of historical patterns to re-occur. Due to the current pandemic, historical patterns have become somewhat irrelevant and demand forecasts will need to depend more on assumptions of possible outcomes supported by currently observed trends. Historical data that may serve some purpose though would be, for example, the trends observed during the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) pandemic in 2000, as this may provide some trends that may be useful in the Covid-19 pandemic These forecasts should guide pricing decisions in these uncertain times, while traditional demand patterns may not.

In any business environment, being aware of competitor movements remains critical, especially in a time of uncertain demand. The view is shared by (Riavoglou, 2019), who states that as it happens in every other business, hoteliers have to closely observe their competitors in order to be able to remain attractive and competitive. They should understand that the goal is not to constantly observe every action of their competitors, but to ensure that they neither underestimate not overestimate their hotel rooms' prices."

Quality of service offering and customer segmentation

As the luxury segment is uncompromising when it comes to service, service levels should be kept at expected levels irrespective of changing market conditions. The relationship between the service level and pricing remains a direct one as the luxury customer segment, in general, is happy to pay a fair price for impeccable service. Service would include pre-arrival services such as booking, arrival services such as arrival at the hotel and check-in, occupancy services such as housekeeping, food and beverage and other revenue-based services during the stay, and departure services such as check-out and departure from the hotel. One can say that during a pandemic, service processes may poses many more health risks that should be considered during the delivery of service. Hygiene practices during service procedures and the costs associated with these practices should be considered in pricing decisions as well. Customer segmentation would be critical in these times with lowered demand, and hotels may have to relook at their market mix to establish if they should extend their focus to new emerging markets seeking the luxury experience. These markets could come in at a different price point though, which will be a key consideration when creating the sales strategy.

Considerations becoming more important

Price sensitivity

Price sensitivity measured by price elasticity, which is the percentage change in quantity demanded as a result of one per cent change in price (Fibich et al., 2005), will be more important going forward according to the survey. In the perspective of this article, the product would refer to the accommodation, food and beverage and events and catering facilities, along with the associated services that come with these facilities.

In the luxury segment, it is normally believed that these customers have more access to disposable income which results in a lower sensitivity. This was also found by Dominique-Ferreira & Antunes (2019) who mentioned in their study of estimating price ranges and the effect of price bundling that five-star hotel customers have a larger range of acceptable prices, so managers can increase prices with less risk of losing market share. Levels of sensitivity should, however, not be taken for granted as new entrants such as millennials are coming into this segment and may have a different perspective of a fair price for luxury.

Pricing has a critical role in the hospitality industry as it has a direct impact on profitability and demand. Hotel managers must understand consumers' price sensitivity to achieve their profitability goals (Dominique-Ferreira & Antunes, 2019).

Cost of hygiene practices

While hotels, especially luxury hotels, have always had a responsibility and usually a brand promise to provide their services in the most hygienic fashion possible, this has become an absolutely critical issue in a time of a declared pandemic. Jiang and Wen (2020) state that "hygiene and cleanliness issues have been considered in pandemic outbreaks as a culprit of disease". P&G Professional™ (the away-from-home division of Proctor & Gamble) discovered through research that 78% of hotel guests believe cleanliness is the most important factor affecting their choice of where they stay (Cresswell, 2019). This indicates the importance that hygiene played already in 2019 before the start of the global pandemic. The significance of this during and after the pandemic is even more relevant in 2020 and beyond.

Ralph Hollister, a travel and tourism analyst at GlobalData, comments that "[p]ost-Covid-19, consumers will be likely to place as much importance on hotel hygiene standards as they will on price and location. Fears over contracting the virus will live on far after the pandemic is over" (Hospitality Net, 2020).

As these hygiene practices become critical, the costs associated with them will need to be known and discussed and taken into account in the pricing structures as they would have an impact on the hotel's profitability. Either the extra costs need to be absorbed into the current pricing structures by reducing other operating expenses, or the costs need to be worked into a new pricing structure where it is passed on to the guest directly. This is a difficult task in itself as demand may very well be affected by current travel restrictions or fear of travel by guests, although the segment of guests willing to pay for luxury accommodation might very well be willing to pay extra for peace of mind received from these extra measures.

Technology, social media and an establishment's online presence strength

As indicated in the literature review above, the importance of online reputation and presence is becoming more important for all hotels, irrespective of the guest segment served. The reason for this is the increased use of social media and technology by consumers. The luxury traveller segment, which is very specific about their expectations from a hotel, could place even more importance on this as they would research the service levels and experience promised to make sure it meets their unique needs. Another reason for better online presence would be the need for customers to do research regarding safety and hygiene promised by hotel brands during the current pandemic and this would be best communicated digitally via brand websites and social media platforms. The level of technology offered with a unique focus on contactless offerings to further ensure guest safety could be a very important consideration for pricing as safety is seen as the new top amenity and hotel guests may be willing to pay more for a hotel that has technology that ensures their safety.

Conclusion

The results of the research into luxury class accommodation price points in South Africa has shown continuous growth in the last ten years, with a divided opinion on future changes. While accommodation and event and catering revenues are expected to fall sharply, food and beverage and auxiliary revenues are expected to remain in line with recent years, irrespective of the current pandemic.

Based on the opinion survey, the strongest influencers on pricing decisions in the luxury hospitality sector remain forecast demand and the competitive environment which will always remain important for any business to set up appropriate pricing structures. Further influences are service and product offerings as these are synonymous with luxury brands. Customer segmentation continues to be a central influencer as well due to the price points in the luxury class and the type of customer who can afford this. The segmentation mix may, however, shift in the coming years due to the rise of more affluent millennials and demand pressures experienced by the hospitality industry as a whole due to the current pandemic which the luxury class may not be spared. Influences that have increased in importance in the last few years and expected to continue in the coming years include customer price sensitivity, the strength of the online presence of the establishment, cost considerations for better hygiene practices, and technology advancements and social media.

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Recruiting for luxury: Case studies of luxury hotel brands and their co-operative activities for recruiting

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ABSTRACT: This article shows success criteria for joint HR projects of hotel companies and universities for recruiting and retention management. Influenced by demographic developments and a changed preference system, employer branding and recruitment are gaining importance, so that joint structures represent a solution-oriented instrument for responding to market developments in a strategically innovative way. The typology matrix with ten different co-operation models, the "factor phase model" for the definition of development processes and the ASP Trialogue are used as reference models. This results in the three success factors of privileged educational partnerships — attractiveness, safety and personality — with which co-operation models generate sustainable economic advantages, so that education is interpreted as the core brand of an attractive employer.

KEYWORDS: education, employer branding, hotel industry, people development, recruiting

Introduction

Demographic developments and a comprehensive change in values make personnel recruitment through branding a central competitive parameter of the hotel industry in Europe. Committed staff development and marketing is required to meet this significant challenge. This is one of the reasons why different co-operation models have emerged between hotel companies and universities, on the one hand to meet the needs of the hotel industry, and on the other hand to meet students' expectations (Von Freyberg & Zeugfang, 2014). This development leads to qualitative competition both between universities and between hotels, because only agile providers of trainings or jobs are attractive in the long term for demanding young generations. Innovative universities with interesting co-operation ideas offer themselves as sensible partners for sustainable staff recruitment, retention and development. Various models are useful for this purpose, depending on the intensity of the partners' commitment (Von der Oelsnitz & Hahmann, 2003). For the hotel industry, practical study models for the changing expectations are a priority in order to successfully position themselves in the market in the ever tighter junior staff market (Hotelverband Deutschland, 2017; Meier, 2015).

The hospitality industry has a very high proportion of practically trained professionals and thus offers a wide range of such persons different deployment options. However, conveying the attractiveness of the sector to small and medium-sized companies is particularly challenging, especially for academics (Hennige, 2015; Henschel et al., 2013). The selection of their source markets for employees is just as relevant as domestic qualification offers for people without specialist training. In order to exploit this potential, a qualitative positioning of the hotel industry is urgently required, because the differences between the self-perception and a critical external image are great. The situation makes it necessary to overcome traditional hurdles by linking and sharing. However, traditional values and the small-scale structure of the industry and its complexity make professional coordination all the more difficult (Bohne & Luthe, 2014; Hennige, 2015). Strategic human resources development is rarely carried out systematically and the qualitative restructuring of work profiles and a step-by-step approach to the expectations of students or graduates of hotel-specific courses of study is not carried out consistently. The changing demands on jobs in the hotel industry could be taken into account and used to create innovative opportunities for further developing job profiles that suit both sides (Bohne, 2018; Hotelverband Deutschland, 2017; von Bonin, 2013).

A realistic shift from a primarily vocational perspective to an educational qualification that is also academically oriented could release innovative impulses for the entire sector. At the same time, this area of tension shows the importance for the industry of a rapprochement between university and company and at the same time makes the competitive situation for dual vocational training clear (Hennige, 2015).

Close links between hotel operations and educators

Especially for ambitious applicants, the "dual studies" construct offers a first degree with an integrated practical component, which is equivalent to the practical phases during vocational training. This is in line with the perspective of the universities offering the programme, whereas companies in the hospitality industry point to the quality and advantages of more comprehensive specialist training. This leaves it up to market developments and the preference of applicants to choose one of the two models. It represents an important element in enhancing the attractiveness of hotel companies in their role as dual practice partners, so that in a medium- to long-term perspective, i.e. in 15 to 30 years, it cannot be ruled out that the application profile of a dual bachelor's graduate represents an entry position in an operational department, which is still taken up today after dual vocational training (Hennige, 2015; Soller, 2012).

It is a challenge to prepare companies, universities and graduates for this development. At the participating universities, it must be checked whether study programmes are geared to the needs of the labour market and whether graduates are actually prepared for the diverse tasks in the hotel industry. In addition, the trend towards dual studies must be taken into account. This integrated study structure consists of a learning part at a university and a practical part in a company and offers interfaces in line with the generational preference scale (Akkreditierungsrat, 2010; Wissenschaftsrat, 2013). The integration of in-company project phases means that almost half of all dual study programmes in Germany are offered with a focus on a business-oriented degree. This duality of practice and learning centre leads to a great need for professional agreement and coordination in order to guarantee the high, quality standards of a degree by means of a meaningful structural and content-related link. For this reason, it is recommended that at least 40 per cent of the teaching be provided by professors or equivalent teaching staff and that the teaching units be spent at the university location for at least half of the time (Akkreditierungsrat, 2010; Wissenschaftsrat, 2013).

A challenging workload and regular alternation between the learning and working phases are intended to benefit both partners. The basis is the high academic standard required to obtain a degree and, at the same time, a suitable practical orientation and the integration of the economic project phases. The participating company as well as the university have clearly defined supervision and support tasks in order to make the model successful for the student as well as for both co-operation partners. Reliable financing as the sixth dimension of the infrastructure to be coordinated is a decisive factor for the calculation and feasibility considerations of the participants (Wissenschaftsrat, 2013). The dual study programme, B.A. International Hospitality Management, at the Dresden School of Management is a successful and, at the same time, innovative model. Within the framework of this course of study, almost 100 students in a good 60 companies are prepared for their career entry at middle and higher levels of responsibility within seven semesters, alternating between practical work and study phases on campus. An exchange semester is also possible through a number of hotel-specific partner universities in order to strengthen intercultural skills. Partner companies are chain hotels, e.g. Andaz Munich, or medium-sized hotels, e.g. Hotel Provocateur Berlin. It is clear that different conflicting objectives have arisen between the actors, employers, human resource practitioners, policy makers and training providers. Employers primarily strive to fill vacancies on a long-term and cost-effective basis. Financial aspects, personal development and a balanced relationship between work performance and time spent in the social environment are important to the trainees and skilled workers that are targeted. Education providers act as competitors for school leavers and increase the pressure on the hotel industry to make itself more attractive than it has been in the past. A rising number of graduates of higher education courses also increases the pressure on the hotel industry. Due to the service-oriented training, the hotel industry is also exposed to the risk that graduates with degrees related to their sector are being wooed away by other sectors of industry (Gruner, 2014; Hennige, 2015; Simmeth, 2013; von Bonin, 2013). This results in a comprehensive management challenge for the hotel industry with the strategic approach to successfully implement employee-oriented measures in the long term (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, 2014; Maack et al., 2013).

With the help of adequate criteria, co-operation models between hotel chains and universities can be successfully designed and developed in the area of staff recruitment in order to achieve positioning advantages. Particularly in view of the rising number of students and an increase in the number of courses of study with a simultaneous and serious decline in the number of people with vocational training, co-operation models offer interesting options for reacting to market developments.

Strategies for recruiting future talent

Partnership concepts and structures are the result of different considerations and company traditions. Therefore, the motives for educational co-operation are also inhomogeneous.

Private educational institutions focus on economic aspects and long-term business relationships. New business fields have to be developed as well as additional business partners in new industries have to be acquired. Private educational institutions, in particular, hope that a change in the supply and demand structures in the personnel sector of the hotel industry will lead to additional business in other areas, e.g. in part-time further education and in-house training for hotels. For private providers, the structural perspective also shows the option of more efficient lecturer utilisation and the need to find practice partners for dual study programmes. This can also help to build up or maintain a practice-oriented image and thus play a more important role in the long term as an influential player in the tightening labour market. The activities of state universities are geared to providing reliable basic information combined with new strategic impulses. This is intended to stimulate innovation and to promote sector-specific innovation. In addition, the intensive placement of students and graduates and the resulting network building are to be supported in order to bind graduates to their training university. Long-term retention and strong reliability are essential for state institutions (Bohne, 2018).

For the hotel industry, entering into co-operation means reacting to external influences, especially the quantitative effects of demographic change and the changing demand preferences of applicants. Internal quality requirements are primarily derived from the need for management training. At the same time, the hotel groups hope to find new recruitment sources and instruments through co-operation models. It is precisely the increasing demand for dual-study places that has changed the awareness of the changing values of young people. Hotel chains that have addressed this issue are turning specifically to universities with dual-study programmes to sound out precisely tailored co-operation models. Graduates of renowned universities in particular are conspicuous for their above-average qualifications, so these universities use this for their advertising. In addition, many companies are aware that too few managers come from the classic dual training system, so university co-operation brings with it the hope of developing and retaining additional managers in the long term. In this economically difficult starting position, strategic partnerships open up new perspectives, and for strengthening the employer brand too (Bohne, 2018).

Cases of successful recruitment through sustainable collaborations

Given the wide range of options, co-operations represent an interesting way to cover part of the demand for skilled labour more efficiently and effectively. However, a long-term process of change towards the unagitated integration of academically educated people in the hotel sector requires intensive monitoring and evaluation, because changing educational profiles also require adapted job profiles and a structured networking of classically trained specialists and young hoteliers. The wide range of co-operation possibilities offers an insight into this creative option of combining entrepreneurial strengths and being successful in the competition for junior staff. The guiding principle of the medium-sized hotel industry in setting up co-operative structures is to achieve competitive advantages, because the required competences and resources do not have to be built up by the hotel itself but can be integrated temporarily by experienced partners. These advantages can be achieved by bundling previously separate activities, e.g. in the area of staff acquisition (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Technologie, 2011; Dyer & Singh, 1998).

The selection of the hotel groups was made following either their national classification of at least five stars, and/or the fact that these brands are ranked among the top 25 luxury hotel brands worldwide (Bruning, 2020). Furthermore, their description of hardware and software, services and guest-orientation signals a mixture of outstanding furniture and equipment as well as a very high ratio of staff per room (Hotelverband Deutschland, 2020; Ransley, 2004). In addition, their market positioning symbolises an exclusive tradition and extravagance, underlined by their extraordinary designs, colours and symbols as well as their locations, heritage, architecture and language (Bruning, 2020).

Dresden School of Management and Hyatt Hotels and Resorts

The international hotel chain Hyatt Hotels and Resorts has also become aware of the Dresden School of Management as an educational partner. With 14 dual students, the hotels of this chain are the strongest single partner of the degree programme, B.A. International Hotel Management. In addition, there are regular practical projects in all study programmes, and trainee places in almost 15 different hotels of this group worldwide, e.g. Delhi, Kuala Lumpur or Dubai. In 2018 and 2019, two students were allowed to participate in the Hyatt Student Prize (Hochschulcampus-Dresden, 2018). In 2019, the participant from the Dresden School of Management won first place and was accepted into the worldwide junior management development and mentoring programme (DNN, 2018; OpenPr, 2018).

Steinbeis Business Academy and Hotel Traube Tonbach

The privately owned and operated five-star Hotel Traube Tonbach, in co-operation with the Steinbeis Business Academy (SBA), offers a dual bachelor's programme in Business Administration with additional industry-specific specialisation. The traditional hotel attaches great importance to competent employees in hotel management and administrative areas and therefore strives to promote them individually. Professors and lecturers of the SBA hold subject-specific lectures in the hotel in a fixed rhythm so that students can be intensively supervised. Lectures, projects and the learning environment are authentic, so a link between practice and theory is guaranteed. In addition, a large part of the tuition fee is paid by the hotel, and admission with an A Level (normally required to start any studies) is not compulsory. This new course of studies complements and rounds off the previous operative training courses (AHGZ, 2018; Cision, 2017).

Peninsula and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University

For more much than 50 years, the School of Hotel and Tourism Management has been offering educational programmes in the hotel sector and, as a faculty of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, it is an icon of hospitality education in Asia. Courses with MBA, B.A. and M.A. degrees in hotel management are focused on academic expertise and a robust link with the hotel industry. Therefore, Peninsula Hotels, the icon of Asia's luxury hotels, established a close relationship with the faculty, its professors and students in order to become the hotel group of choice for students and graduates. This extraordinary hotel group has discovered the opportunity for strategic recruitment co-operation in order to meet the demand for modern, trained specialists and managers. Consequently, the company participates in various courses as practical partners or through expert lectures, and hosts students and organises projects. At the same time, it offers attractive management positions for graduates or placements worldwide. The co-operation is based on an intensive personal contact, is long term and offers an expandable range of application options.

Swiss Education Group and Kempinski Hotels

In October 2020, Kempinski Hotels and the Swiss Education Group SEG signed an agreement for closer co-operation. The agreement includes the preferential placement of internships for students from the universities belonging to the SEG and training in the area of human resource development. The aim is to create closer links between the students and the hotels and to provide quicker access to entry-level positions. In addition, a joint competition for young talent is to be held to identify the best talents and retain them at Kempinski (HTR, 2020; TopHotel, 2020). The strategic co-operation is intended to meet the growing demand for young talent in the expanding hotel group and to help both companies position their brands. To what extent this co-operation also applies to Kempinski's subsidiary brand NUO Hotels by Kempinski or can also be used by other partners of the Global Hotel Alliance, of which Kempinski is a founding member, was not disclosed (Kempinski Hotels, 2020; FM-Online, 2020).

Kempinski had already established a strategic co-operation with a university between 2010 and 2015. The Berthold Kempinski Scholarship was awarded in 2010 for a study programme, Bachelor in Hotel Management, for the best apprentices at Kempinski Hotels. This in-person study programme was offered at the IUBH campus in Bad Honnef, and Kempinski was one of the first European hotel chains to enter into such a connection. Due to a change in company policy, this scholarship was no longer awarded after 2015 (AHGZ, 2010).

It can be seen that the existence of a scholarship programme as an element of co-operation between a university and a hotel group leads to a strong positive identification effect, a specific correlation between the company and such an offer is considered to be of high quality and therefore employees feel confident to apply and motivate themselves (Bohne, 2018). As part of strategic recruiting, a scholarship programme can be a unique selling point, because this offer creates attention and is attractive. Above all, the reputation of a hotel, the quality level and the diversity of the training are decisive in the selection of the practice company (Bohne, 2019). The use of a scholarship by an employer as an effective and outstanding tool for branding and employee promotion is an opportunity to develop a strong position in the tightening market of junior employees. This includes the founding of a company-related graduate network of all dual students and similarly funded graduates. It is relevant for the participating university to offer both professional assistance as well as generous accessibility and flexibility of time. The large network of the university, the career tips and personal development options — in addition to the previous employer — are also regarded as a helpful service and quality feature (Bohne, 2019).

Four potential levels can be derived from these activities. These are

- the brand/image of the employer and the co-operative partner;
- the individual measures of recruiting and people development;
- the resulting employee loyalty; and
- innovations regarding recruiting activities and innovative working environments.

An innovative co-operation between an educational partner and a hotel chain will increase the "market value" of the graduates if there are concrete offers and instruments that are made known and professionally designed. At the same time, a consequent guidance, structured processes and the anchoring in corporate management secure the success of such a programme in the long term (Bohne, 2018).

But also, without a co-operative partner the luxurious hotel, groups are activating differentiated measures in order to be attractive and to gain awareness as reliable employers.

Althoff Hotels

The German hotel group, Althoff Hotels, offers extensive further education opportunities for graduates, but also for career changers. In the Althoff Academy, 2 100 participants are trained annually in all areas of the industry. In order to guarantee a high quality of the courses Althoff co-operates with the International University Bad Honnef (IUBH). Additional co-operations exist with language schools, management coaches and management consultants (Althoff Hotels, n.d.).

Dusit Thani Hotels and Resorts

As a perfect example of academically oriented recruiting and retention management, the Dusit Thani College has been the university of applied sciences of the Asian hotel group Dusit, based in Bangkok, which specialises in hotel, restaurant and catering management. Dusit Thani College is known for its high standard of education and its co-operation with peer universities to promote young talent in the hotel industry worldwide, including SRH Dresden School of Management, Institut Paul Bocuse Écully/Lyon, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and EHL Lausanne (Dusit Hotels, n.d.). It is a successful example of outsourced and optimised training and education services for applicants, employees and graduates. Dusit Hotels requires a bachelor's degree and excellent English language skills for most of their positions. Graduates are also offered a lead management trainee, who is supported by the current staff (*Bangkok Post*, 2020).

Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts

Experience in the luxury hotel industry, relevant professional experience and local language skills are just some of the requirements Four Seasons places on its employees. Although offers for the development of management or other measures for recruitment are not apparent (Four Seasons, n.d.).

Jumeirah Hotels and Resorts

The Jumeirah Hotel Group offers greater transparency in the area of recruiting. In addition to internships, a graduate management programme is offered for the successful further training of employees. After the online application, a talent identification process and post selection are carried out. To address employees positively, Jumeirah works with image videos and various testimonials (Jumeirah Hotels, n.d.).

Mandarin Oriental Hotels

The south-east Asian hotel group promotes its career website with videos and testimonials from current or former employees. Activities in various departments are shown, as well as assessments of internal structures and processes. Potential employees can apply directly via the website, and an application via LinkedIn is also possible. With the slogan "Your opportunity awaits", Mandarin Oriental also offers management trainees in various departments (Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, n.d.).

Oberoi Hotel Group

The Oberoi Hotel Group, headquartered in Delhi, takes a slightly different approach. The hotel group operates 31 luxury hotels around the world. In contrast to the other groups, Oberoi places a very high focus on graduate hiring. Graduates with a degree in hotel management or similar subjects can apply directly for a position as an assistant or supervisor. An additional condition is that applicants must be between 19 and 25 years old. Oberoi therefore conducts annual campus visits to co-operating universities, such as the Indira Gandhi National Open University, and informs potential applicants. Young professionals are systematically recruited directly from the campus and trained for the company through a variety of development programmes. Programmes can be completed in operations as well as in the kitchen. Unlike other development programmes, the focus is very practical and free of charge (Oberoi Hotel Group, n.d.).

Oetker Collection

The German hotel group, Oetker Collection, uses its own career website for the recruiting process. Central criteria are professional training in the upscale hotel industry, knowledge of German and English and a high level of service orientation. New employees are to be recruited in accordance with the slogan "We stay united" (Oetker Collection, n.d.).

Rocco Forte Hotels

New employees at Rocco Forte Hotels start directly with a two-day induction programme to learn about Rocco Forte hotels' history and culture. Further recruiting measures such as a specially programmed app and leadership programmes are designed to ensure that Rocco Forte hotels are able to attract suitable young professionals. Success stories from employees underline the effectiveness of the programmes and give applicants a feeling for what it means to work for Rocco Forte (Rocco Forte, n.d.).

Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts

The Shangri-La Hotel Group, headquartered in Hong Kong, is the largest Asian hotel chain and defines itself as a luxury hotel with the highest standards. Although no co-operation with universities is practised, the requirements in the area of recruiting are at a very high standard. Above all, the potential employee must have internalised a luxury attitude, as well as knowledge of various location-specific languages. In order to ensure the ongoing availability of professionally competent employees, the Shangri-La Academy is used instead of co-operation with universities. This academy focuses on leadership development. The recruiting process takes place via a separate career website (Shangri-La Group, n.d.).

Taj Hotels, Resorts and Palaces

In contrast to other hotel groups, Taj Hotels use the more extensive umbrella organisation, The Indian Hotels Company (IHC), to address more potential employees. The IHC offers a wealth of information about different hotel brands and therefore a wide range of career opportunities (Indian Hotels Company, n.d.).

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This collection of international luxury hotel brands shows the challenging needs and expectations as well as the opportunities for young talent, students and graduates in this industry. It gives an overview of the similarity of offers, the wide range of expectations and also shows the strong competition among those luxury brands.

Expectation management and success factors

The long-term existence of co-operation is due to the fact that factors have to be identified that make such an alliance a success from both perspectives. Basic and satisfaction factors are identified, which are determined by key figures, e.g. graduates or applicant numbers, for the fewest hotel chains, but are influenced by reliable and professional co-operation. It can be seen that a constant and competent, decision-making contact person plays a key role, and equal values and priorities are also essential. Hotels derive the success of their co-operation from practical teaching content and the usability of the graduates. The focus is on communicating realistic ambitions, practical qualifications and strengthened personal skills — the participants should be satisfied and associate this with their employer (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2013; Friese, 1998).

In addition, positive experiences with employees found through the co-operation strengthen the economic results and justify a continuation. The combination of a commitment to the company, a healthy career, a high rate of the cooperation's beneficiaries (e.g. graduates or at least proud partcipants) and a strengthened employer attractiveness make up the success from the company's point of view. Hotel chains have a high demand for innovation and hope for new ideas and more commitment. The expectation of a high level of employee satisfaction is also associated with ultimately affected guest satisfaction and provides high referral rates (Bohne, 2019; Freiling, 1998).

Based on the areas of tension and challenges of the three actors, i.e. education providers, hotel chains and employees, their most important positions can be classified with six market-relevant criteria. A similar prioritisation can be seen in the assessment of co-operation in the field of education, as this should develop and present the qualification of the employee as well as the training centre more advantageously. A high demand on the content to be learned goes with the quality of the infrastructure and the "usability" of the material or the

TABLE 1: Success criteria for recruiting alliances (Bohne, 2018, p. 127)

Success criteria
Reliable, structured, professional, modern and fast communication
Leading cultures and structures have to support the liaison
Co-operation has to be developed continuously
Long-term competent and trustworthy contact person with decision-making power
Stable high-quality approach
Passion for the hotel industry and development perspectives for young talent

TABLE 2: Spectrum of expectations of the actors in educational co-operation (Bohne, 2019)

Level	Hotel chain	Stakeholders	Universities
Image	Raising image and attractiveness	Success in competitions, additional qualification	Recognition as an industry-specific education provider
Loyalty	Assumption of costs and attendance	Strengthened and leads to high motivation and loyalty	Contractual and ideal towards hotel chain
Workforce	Qualitative and quantitative demand coverage	Appreciation and adequate remuneration	As a reference for the preparation of managers
Profit	Reduced turnover and recruitment costs, investment in motivation and commitment	Knowledge growth, certificate/degree, no costs, recognition secured by employers	Exclusive contracts and follow-up offers, synergy effects for similar offers for other hotel chains
Content	Company-specific, customised and mediated by partners to retain access to employees	Professionally relevant and personally interesting, partly individual module selection for preference sharpening	Variable offers within the accredited teaching framework according to the type of degree
Competition	Unique selling points regarding content and structure	Increase in the value of the CV, acquisition of additional skills, positive demarcation from other employees	Building competitive advantages, increase in market share

appreciation by the employer. Therefore, all agents strive for a better positioning compared to their respective competitors and use their individual starting situations to gain an economic as well as ideal advantage over other companies looking for employees in this tense situation (Becker et al., 2005).

Summary and perspectives

Educational co-operation makes it possible to create economic benefits with learning and knowledge and to improve the image of the hotel industry. Education is thus interpreted even more as the core brand of a good employer. Building on this, the idea of personnel development is perfected by the approach of continuous employee training. The loyalty of employees through modern educational offers is a key to sustainable economic success, provided that suitable partners are identified and a mutually suitable co-operation model is developed. As a result, the promotion of young talent becomes a strategic means of retaining employees and securing their livelihoods (Brass, 2004).

From the perspective of the hotel industry, it must be a goal of strategic personnel policy to develop suitable offers for applicants and existing employees through high-quality educational co-operation with universities, in order to remain attractive through this networking, to offer modern content through the combination of theory and practice and thereby to form a stronger employer brand. By involving education, training and training experts, the hotel industry can better allocate resources, focus on the core operational competencies of accommodation companies and at the same time generate added value for the participants, but also for the hotels themselves. In this way, a professionalisation impulse can be sent into an entire industry in the long term, which will improve the economic basis for many companies and thereby help to secure their existence (Theling & Loos, 2004). These positive effects are also an opportunity for universities to offer co-operation with hotels and thereby market their own study programmes, while at the same time focusing their attention on higher education in the long term. The innovations of higher education can be transferred directly to the operational of hotel practice and, conversely, universities can adapt their curricula to the changing requirements of the hotel industry, e.g. in the field of foreign languages, digitalisation or innovation management (Bohne, 2019).

As a result of the multifaceted challenges, co-operation management is a management task based on fairness and trust, so that a co-ordinated co-operation strategy can be implemented. By involving the management and all employees, comprehensible decision-making structures as well as incentives for innovation can be constructed. In addition, the combination of the management levels of the now partnered actors creates additional impulses for a mission statement process and the common vision (Bamford et al., 2003; Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Technologie, 2011; Dyer & Singh, 1998).

The wide range of opportunities clearly shows the great potential for more collaborative innovations and joint activities as well as an even better mutual understanding for networking on HR management level between the hotel industry and universities. Individualised co-operation models open up a perspective for more creativity, unusual partnerships, new business models and a closer setting of educational institutions and the gastronomic industry in order to achieve different goals for mutual satisfaction (Von der Oelsnitz & Hahmann, 2003). The understanding of co-operative educational structures as a benefit for sustainable recruiting management will be a big advantage for the hotel industry and related educational institutions.

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The service semiotics of luxury events: An exploration for future research and events management industry practice

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses the implications of the role of semiotics in the design and delivery of luxury event-attendees' experience. Within the contemporary industry and sector, the place of semiotics within the field of design will be established and its importance examined, with reference to future professional practice. Future research opportunities will also be identified.

KEYWORDS: customer service, event design, experience design, brand experience, luxury service, luxury experience, service design, service management

Introduction — a semiotic approach to luxury event design

"Semiotic" is derived from the Greek *semesion*, which means sign, *semainon*, which means signifier, and *semainomenon* meaning signified or indication (Yakin & Totu, 2014). Semiotics has been explored in numerous contexts, but less so in its wider relationship to contemporary service design and provision of luxury hospitality, events, and tourism. Understanding the role of semiotics in luxury event attendee experience design is important because it can potentially lead to greater levels of perceived customer authenticity in the service encounter (Brown & James, 2004; Bladen et al., 2018; Culler, 1981; Frow, 1991).

The semiotics field of enquiry

Todorov (1977) stated that semiotics issued from the four traditions: semantics, logic, rhetoric, and hermeneutics. Semiotics is the study of sign processes, related to the production of meaning and, unlike linguistics, includes any sign which communicates, mainly using non-language means, particularly through the senses, i.e. visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory or gustatory. Such signs are used by event designers to engineer the stimulation of the senses of events attendees in order that attendees may infer meanings, which they in turn use to form their event experiences.

The underpinning theory of semiotics dates as far back as Plato and Aristotle, who related signs to an individual's experience of the world. The study of such signs developed as a branch of medicine in relation to symptoms as diagnostic signs of illness, popularised in English medicine through John Locke, who termed *Semeiotike* as "the doctrine of signs", explaining it as "… the nature of signs the mind makes use of for the understanding of things, or conveying its knowledge to others" (1823/1963, p. 175). Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) began the study of signs as part of social life, and Thomas Sebeck (De Gruyter, 1969) launched the first international journal dedicated to the study of signs called *Semiotica*.

In the nineteenth century, it was Charles Sanders Peirce (1931) who first defined the term "semeiotic" in relation to the social sciences as the "formal doctrine of signs" as philosophical logic used by "an intelligence capable of learning from experience" (Peirce, 1931, p. 227). This development began the study of the philosophical relationship between the external object as signifier and its internally signified (or interpreted) meaning. The latter involved the role of the internal representation machine. The key interest in experience design of Peirce's work is his recognition of the roles of *interpretant* and *interpreter* in the formation of meaning. The interpretant can be related to the internal representation image of the object (the design stimulus) to the interpreter (the event attendee), which is the individual making the meaning of the object using their own internal representation.

A simple example of the practical application of Peirce's theory of semiotics to the design of the luxury event experience is the way the most popular music from different generations is used by DJs at luxury wedding events to elicit emotional engagement from different ages of attendees through the stimulation of memories of particular times in their lives. Such a theory helps to explain how attendees at an event are in themselves a community who agree on a collective meaning of communication codes regarding their understanding of objects encountered in events, whether they be dress, behaviour, symbols, colours, language, or other aspects of design which enable the content of the designed experience to be interpreted.

Therefore, event designers require an understanding of how event attendees process cognitive and emotional cues. Pictorial semiotics are also relevant as much of our roles as interpreters are based on the heritage of art and its pictorial representation throughout history. In the present day, it could be argued that films and other faster forms of media have a greater influence on interpretant development than classical artworks. However, it should also be respected that traditional cues may be being disrupted by the role and pace of technological change, which is likely causing interpreters to develop and adapt new representations at a faster rate of change. Other important drivers of such change include culture and globalisation.

Semiotic research in tourism, hospitality and events

Semiotics is still of current interest to the research community, as evidenced by Mello and Netto's (2020) study of the success of Air France's "Air France, France is in the air" advertising campaign as an example of tourism semiotics in the expression of brand hospitality. However, this study highlights the general focus of semiotics research on cultural symbols as semiotic communicators of hospitality service and cultural authenticity. While such focus on cultural cues is recognised and used extensively in the planning of themed events, many of which are delivered at a level of high luxury, such a management-centred rather than attendee-centred approach is limited. Another example of such culture-focused research is the study by Uyzbayeva et al. (2019) of the semiotics of traditional Kazakh food.

Even the more recent attempts to elucidate events design as a theoretical field, such as the generic literature review by Orefice (2018), continues to confine it more to a method of strategic stakeholder management, rather than a more design-artistry approach recognised by other authors (Berridge, 2007; Bladen et al., 2012; Brown & James, 2004). This ongoing tension between the art of the event and the management systems perspective, and the ongoing calls for new paradigms with which to approach the field (e.g. Orefice, 2018) highlight the continuing, gaping contrast between the practice of events designers and researchers in this field.

What are luxury events?

What is meant by the term "luxury events" varies widely across the sector and its associated academic discourses. Eventia describes itself as "the official trade body of the events and live marketing industry providing leadership and representation on important issues to Government, regulators and the corporate community" (Eventia, 2020). A "luxury event, by definition, is meant to have a significant amount of elegance and grandeur. This type of event involves larger budgets and tons of creativity" (Hazeltone, 2020). This simplistic definition leads to industry recommendations to focus on the choice of a flexible venue, creation of an unforgettable ambiance, and a reminder that every little detail matters. The experience-related recommendations, which are attention to sound, sight, lighting, décor, touch, and taste, provide little insight into the production of memorable event attendee experiences with no reference to personalisation.

There is little evidence that academicians have attempted to define luxury events, but instead they have fixed their emphasis on the more traditional idea of "Special Events", as one of the traditional event taxonomies. Goldblatt, an early pioneer of special events, says "a special event is a unique moment in time celebrated with ceremony and ritual to satisfy specific needs" (Goldblatt, 2002, p. 6). Similarly, another early attempt to define special events by Getz (1997, p. 4) stated that

a special event is a one-time or infrequently occurring event outside normal programs or activities of the sponsoring or organizing body…[and] to the customer or guest, a special event is an opportunity for a leisure, social, or cultural experience outside the normal range of choices or beyond everyday experience.

In an attempt to review literature about luxury events, there is mainly a focus on brand experience of luxury consumer fashion brands, with one article making reference to the use of events to promote luxury brand experience, using special events as a novel way to augment marketing strategy (Grigorian et al., 2014). Outside of events management operational academic literature, brand marketing specialists tend to regard events as useful items in a general marketing toolbox of communication tools, rather than the main brand experience itself.

The qualities of what "luxury" is in relation to events management remain vague at best. The marketing community suggests "luxury" can be defined in rather difficult to apply terms, such as "premiumness" (Kapferer & Bastien, 2008). There is also "legitimacy in luxury", which includes an exceptional production process (often based on craftsmanship, uniqueness, and exclusivity), a product of the highest quality (often design-based, instigating consumers' emotions and self-expressive motivations), and a tradition or history associated with the brand (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

Grigorian et al. (2014, p. 5) demonstrated the difficulty of applying marketing theory to event management in their primary discussion of the definition of "luxury experience" itself:

What is luxury experience? Conventional wisdom suggests that luxury experience is achieved by offering the highest quality in any of the elements that mass brands also offer. For example, the product offered should be of exceptional quality. The service added to the offering should be delivered impeccably. We believe this is not enough to design luxury experience. This is because we believe that luxury experience goes beyond extreme premiumness.

However, earlier research (Berry et al., 2002; Meyer & Schwager, 2007) do begin to recognise the notion of semiotics in customer experience by suggesting that a company should orchestrate an integrated series of "clues" that will, collectively, determine how customers experience the brand.

The widely recognised, all-encompassing definition of "events" is: "The temporary and purposive gathering of people" (Bladen et al., 2012, p. 3). It is therefore proposed here that "luxury events" are defined as follows: The temporary gathering of people for the experience of abundance, great comfort and elegance.

The main semiotic, sensory components of luxury events, in particular, are therefore categorised under the main headings of abundance, comfort and elegance and will likely be developed in accordance with the innovation of the market at the time and the theme for each designed event. In line with the foregoing discussion of some industry views about what luxury entails, there is a general approach synonymous with expectations of luxury event attendees.

O'Toole (2011, p. 183) defines events design as "a purposeful arrangement of elements of an event to maximise the positive impression on the attendees and other key stakeholders", and Ferdinand and Kitchin (2012) state that events design relates to the activation of sensory and emotional experiences. Similarly, the variety of works in the events' literature also often implicitly allude to notions of semiotics in design. For example, Liu et al. (2017) found that event attendees form experiences by adding their individual life history to the sensory, cognitive, affective, emotional and social experiences at an event. Such life history will likely include the use of memorial cues by attendees, many of which may be unconsciously applied.

Although experience design within the events sector has gradually become better documented, mainly due to the work of Berridge (2007), what is less well acknowledged among event management specialists is the importance of products and services, only as "supports" to the overall event attendee experience. While in the previous decade there has been greater inroads into the popular recognition that events are ultimately designed experiences, there has still been more focus on service quality management, rather than the design components that stimulate the formation of the attendees' experiences.

Pine and Gilmore (1999) stated that brands should provide differentiated and personalise-able experiences for customers. Bladen et al. (2012) proposed that customisable services and standardised products were vital supports for this design. This therefore placed services and particularly products in a subordinate role to requirements for event designers to engineer scope within each design-driven event, for attendees to personalise their own experiences, in addition to their consumption and products within what has been termed a "servicescape". It is suggested that this potential oversight has led event businesses and hospitality organisations to concentrate on innovation and differentiated advantage mainly in the category of zero defects service delivery which, while of primary importance to mass-produced services such as fast-food and some retail hospitality businesses, would not of itself facilitate event experience, and would be particularly ineffective in the production of luxury events.

It is the goal of sensory design in luxury events to provide semiotic symbolism which denotes top quality, obviously, as there are so many different definitions of quality, from fitness for use (Vlăsceanu et al., 2007) through to more that have high-end and luxury emphases. All these apply to the luxury event experience, which should have zero defects in relation to attendees' expectations and yet also deliver beyond expectations in the realm of customer delight (Kasambu & Sritharan, 2018). Luxury symbols of quality, such as the best-sourced luxury foodstuffs for event catering, have long been used by event planners to convey a sense of opulence to attendees.

It is also worth noting that semiotic symbolism overtakes quality with luxury (Audrin et al., 2017), as consumers use intrinsic and extrinsic cues to set preferences and make purchase decisions. The authors found that this tendency changes in relation to materialistic values, which in application would perpetuate opportunities for brand alliances between brand producers, for example in the provision of event technology, sound, visual systems, lighting used in events staging, through to branded catering products.

Relationships between the people and event attendees will take on new dimensions and will need to be interactive, within the scope of the current health guidelines, in order to arrive at predicted or expected outcomes, as discovered by Lu et al.'s (2015) study of staff-customer relationships in luxury hotels. That study found that although mirrored in terms of expectations, attendees and service providers likely use different language to describe them.

Service blueprinting, scripting, and front and back of house customer journey mapping are all required for event service design and management, with service-experience augmentations, beyond core provisions. While failure-avoidance and customer-recovery will still be required, real value, reflected by premium pricing, denoting value (Lu et al., 2015), will need to be made tangible by the semiotics of customer relationships. Such relationship semiotics will incorporate customised, formal interactions, which will include adaptations to changing and individual customer needs, wants, demands and preferences. All delivery will likely embody designed cues in addition to customary service standards such as politeness, staff grooming, uniforms, etc., which denote exclusivity of customer experience.

Event design theory

The place of personalised experience in the production of luxury events

The present shortage of adequate industry practice and academic definition in the production of luxury event experience can possibly be traced back to a view that popular project planning tools, including management by event objectives, are commonly used by event planners and taught on events management training and degree programmes. There is still less emphasis on the steps required to ensure the production of meaningful event experiences. Naturally, there is popular focus on event themes (e.g. Getz, 2007; Goldblatt, 2002; Monroe, 2005), which in turn assists the drive towards many of the common characteristics of recognised event designs. However, such focus can easily overlook the need for designers to place importance on the personalisation by each luxury event attendee on their own event experience.

Pine and Gilmore (1999) expounded an early view of branded service provision within the realm of the personalised customer experience, which was able to augment consistent products, through service delivery and experience design, to command meaningful and differentiated brand-experiences, which customers were prepared to pay premium prices to purchase. This foundational perspective was developed by events academicians (e.g. Berridge, 2007; Bladen et al., 2012; 2018; Brown & James, 2004) to encompass an application to design-driven events, which saw proposed development of event management practice beyond the more popular staging of event logistics, in order to meet the planned management objectives of the event. Thus, while event cycles and project planning practices remained relevant, the essence of the delivery of unique and personalised event attendee experiences began much more to be articulated in terms of sensory stimulation through sensory cues. These cues are semiotics and their design and provision form the basis of attendees' luxury event experience.

Content versus experience-driven luxury events

Berridge (2007) differentiated between content- and experience-driven events. Content-driven events are those which mainly emphasise programming of a systematic selection of scheduled occurrences which fill time and are the popular industry approach for planners of conferences, meetings and other staged occurrences. This article does not really consider these events, because they tend not to involve much experience design and therefore are not particularly relevant to the luxury events industry.

Conversely, experience-driven events are those which seek in their concept to derive experiential outcomes for their attendees. Such events are often luxurious and comprise high-end, often premium priced staging elements and are popularly applied to corporate, music, festival, museum and other events, including large-scale hospitality events such as banquets and weddings. Their outcomes often focus on affective, or emotional achievement and to this end rely on the intricate and sophisticated use of sensory stimulation through ambiance, décor, service provision and technology, to promote attendee memory and other psychological personalisations.

Psychological design of experience-driven events

A three-stage event design model was proposed by Bladen et al. (2012) in an attempt to augment event managers' understanding of event planning, including design, in order to reconsider some of the shortfalls presented by the popular event project planning models of the time (e.g. Shone & Parry, 2010), which although particularly useful for content-driven event projects, tended not to best serve experience-driven event producers.

This three-stage event design model focused sequentially on the origination of event concept and theme, followed by event design and resulting in the logistical delivery of the event through staging. As the previous attempted elucidation of this complex process by Hazeltone (2020) from the leading UK professional body of events management (Eventia) suggested, the current emphasis of much of the industry on staging elements, such as venue, details and other staging aspects, remains at risk of overlooking the necessity of event conceptualisation in favour of more practical staging features, thus possibly risking inadequate attendee experience personalisation and formation. It is therefore evident that a more attendee-centred approach, using semiotic-based design, will be more likely to elicit more successful, managed event attendee experience formation.

The current situation

Luxury events are a segment of the experience economy. Recent changes due to the global pandemic and its implications to wider global and national conditions make consideration of this phenomenon a timely priority for these experience sectors. While the Covid-19 pandemic so extensively impacted the events sector in 2020, of the events that emerge from the national and local lockdowns of industrial activity, in what at the time of writing is being termed "the new normal", it is predicted that event producers will continue to embrace the view that luxury events are personalised event attendee experiences, even if future practice has to accommodate new, pandemic-related regulatory requirements.

Future implications

From the foregoing discussion, future directions for theoretical and empirical research, which invariably function to inform and support industrial practice, the following recommendations are offered here for consideration by the wider academic community.

1. A semiotic-based approach to event experience design should be adopted to further develop a more event attendee-centred approach, to continue away from the more producer-orientated one which to date dominates the theoretical field;
2. An examination should be made of the relationship between Peirce's (1931) roles of interpretant and interpreter in relation to event design objects; and
3. An examination of the changing representational roles of technology, generation, media and social media, culture, globalisation and environmental messaging should be made in relation to their influences on the formation and change of event attendees' interpretant formation and change.

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A reflection on the story, current positioning, offerings and the darker side of the luxury gastronomy book, the *Michelin Guide*

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ABSTRACT: This article gives some personal reflections on the luxury status of the most famous gastronomic bible — *The Michelin Guide*. The question being addressed — Is the Guide still considered a luxurious commodity? By using secondary data, the findings show that it is still recognised internationally as the symbol of "la haute cuisine" world and its epicurean experience. Importantly, being awarded stars has significant impacts on the pricing and visibility of restaurants. Besides, given the dualistic nature of the Guide, its offers become more present and accessible. However, many controversies are gravitating around Michelin: decrease in quality; unsuitable selection processes; secrecy and perceived unfairness in the evaluation system; restaurants and chefs refusing to be featured or awarded; the consumption of alcohol and drugs in Michelin-starred high-end kitchens; and chefs' suicide due to strong pressure.

KEYWORDS: beverages, consumers, food, luxury, Michelin

Introduction

When it comes to luxury establishments such as high-end eateries or luxury hotels, the *Michelin Guide*, also known as the "Red Guide", has undeniable authority and power in the luxury cuisine world. It can be suggested that the guide is referred to as the absolute hallmark of a fine dining experience, the most desired accolade of many of the world's top chefs, and a reference or supporting mechanism for consumers. It is considered as the living proof of high quality, the ultimate source of luxury cuisine, and represents the dominance of the upscale sphere when it comes to culinary excellence (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2019). The *Guide* has been influential since the early 20th century. It can make or break a reputation, create or destroy careers (Kelly, 2018). However, according to Kelly, these days and for more than one century, it has been receiving many criticisms and seems to struggle with controversies and loss of reliability in recommendations for travellers.

This article questions if the French "bible of gastronomy" still deserves its luxury status while also discussing some of the more taboo aspects which Michelin brings to the gastronomy industry, including that of loss of business and, in the worst cases, suicide. To do so, it is necessary to define the concept of luxury and to review the history of the *Michelin Guide*. The following is a critical analysis of the guide to assess first the exclusive or inclusive accessibility of the guide, second to evaluate its place in the new luxury economy, and third to analyse how the *Guide* can positively or negatively affect businesses and individuals (i.e. its darker side). Last but not least, it sums up all the reflections and gives direction for future research about the culinary world's most prestigious guidebook.

What is luxury?

In order to have a deeper understanding of the place of the *Michelin Guide* in today's world, it is necessary to go back and define the concept of luxury, what it stands for and how Michelin is situate in this process. This is because when evoked, the *Michelin Guide* is automatically associated with luxury, exclusivity and expensiveness (Barrière et al., 2010).

In terms of defining luxury, an exact definition of this term cannot be outlined due to the multiple variables of the word. However, even though an exact definition is not easy to provide due to its subjectivity, some traits can be associated with the term, and this is how our definition of luxury will be built. According to Kapferer et al. (2014), a simple definition of luxury refers to rarity, hedonic items and experiences beyond the necessities of everyday life, therefore accessible mostly to those who have surplus money.

Terms such as rarity, quality, expensiveness, know-how, status and desire are specific values that can be associated with luxury (Wiedmann et al., 2009). Rarity, exclusivity or uniqueness are usually associated with this concept because it indicates the exceptional characteristic of a luxury product or service.

Superior quality is often associated with luxury brands and its goods or services (Lipovetsky & Roux, 2003; Roux et al., 2017). This is because luxury brands provide quality by the best people and with the most refined materials. A good example would be a Chanel bag, which if taken good care of can last more than ten years (Olivares, 2020).

The third point is of course expensiveness. According to Bagwell and Riordan (1991), a first-class product is more costly to make and as such more expensive to buy. Therefore, it must be introduced at a high price because the production cost is higher, and the volumes of the product can be limited in number. Luxury is usually not associated with something that is cheap, rather with something more expensive but unique, and with extraordinary traits. Examples of luxury companies are many. For example, to celebrate the 110th anniversary of Bugatti, the company has created a hyper-car *La Voiture Noire* [The Black Car] and sold it for $18.7 million, which made it the world's most expensive new car (Chang, 2019).

The next trait is know-how, or tradition and craftsmanship (Batat, 2019). This is because luxury is related to specific savoir faire and expertise, therefore tradition and the search for excellence are very important when defining this concept. In luxury, a watchmaker or a leather tanner are recognised as craftsmen, artisans, belonging to a small and experienced group of people. A good example of a luxury good with a long tradition would be Rolex, which has been manufacturing watches since it was founded over a century ago (Rolex, 2019).

The fifth point is status, and when one thinks of luxury, we think status. This means that, by having a certain item or by consuming a certain product or experience, it makes the consumer feel part of the privileged few who can afford such goods. For example, the flawless and legendary Wittelsbach-Graff diamond was sold for US$80 million to the Emir of Qatar in a private auction in 2011 (Arts Cash, n.d.). "Today, anyone can buy a purse, a watch, or a pair of shoes, yet specific brands of purses, watches, and shoes are a distinguishing feature for certain classes of consumers" (Han et al., 2010, p. 3). This conspicuous perception of luxury reflects elitism, wealth, distinct social status or membership of a reference class (Veblen, 1899; Wiedmann et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, according to Batat (2019), the conspicuous aspect of luxury has gradually transformed into a more experiential one, meaning emotions are at the heart of luxury goods and services consumption (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Atwal and Williams (2009, p. 50) defined new luxury as "products and services that possess higher levels of quality, taste, and aspiration than other goods in the category but are not so expensive as to be out of reach". Hence, customers, rather than showing wealth or social status, seek unforgettable experiences. Among the luxury sectors, tourism and hospitality is a domain where services are strongly experiential (Hemmington, 2007). Batat (2019) believed that in upscale hotels, gourmet restaurants especially Michelin-starred ones, experience is not only linked to the product quality and know-how, but also to the authenticity, storytelling, the physical place, the overall atmosphere and the chef's creativity, and employees' professionalism and kindness complete the customers' immersion. In short, the whole restaurant experience is a set of several elements: the quality of food; the chef's creative work; the physical environment; the scents; the aesthetics of the place; its layout; its lighting; its ambience; the way tables are set; and the service provided by the staff (Bouty & Gomez, 2013; Ryu & Han, 2011).

A history of the *Michelin Guide*

Dating back to 1900, the history of the *Michelin Guide* has been described in detail in Stephen L. Harp's book (Harp, 2001). It was, in the beginning, simply a 400-page advertising guide created by André and Edouard Michelin, who were also the founders of the tyre factory. The *Guide*, which was widely circulated with the purchasing of tyres, was coloured red. 35 000 copies were printed when there were only 3 000 cars on the road. It allowed drivers to be informed about their journeys (how to repair their vehicle, stock up, change a tyre, or where to find accommodation, food or a doctor). It was thus intended to make the travellers' lives easier.

However, after André Michelin learned that a tyre dealer was using the guide as a foot wedge for his workbench, he decided that the *Michelin Guide* would start charging in 1920 (*Michelin Guide*, 2020b). According to the belief that "man only truly respects what he pays for", the guidebook became available for a price of seven francs (*Michelin Guide*, 2020b). The primary objective was not to make a profit but to ensure that it was respected. Unfortunately, sales were successful, and there were a lot of unsold items. Despite this failure, the *Guide* continued to publish annually. Today, more than one hundred years after its birth, the *Michelin Guide* remains an essential and indispensable work for travellers and gourmets around the world (Harp, 2001).

Since its first publication in 1900, the *Guide* had its own historical classification. In 1920, Michelin created the famous star rating for restaurants across France's territory and which has become the world's leading evaluation system (Harp, 2001; Miklós, 2019; Nice Matin, 2020). The purpose of the star is to distinguish the food service of the best establishments. The first star *de bonne table* [of the good table] was born in 1926, and the second and third star completed in 1931. What differentiates the stars are the following qualities:

> *a good table in the locality;
> **excellent cuisine, is worth the trip;
> ***one of the best tables in the country, is worth the trip
> (Poullennec, 2011, p. 38).

The first three-star restaurant in France dated back to 1933 (France Info, 2016). Eugénie Brazier of the restaurant *La Mère Brazier* won the first three stars as well as the brothers André and Jacques Pic of *La Maison Pic* (Guestonline, 2020).

Over the years, the criteria have remained more or less the same: the inherent quality of the raw materials (vegetables, meats, etc.); the culinary personality of the chef; the mastery of cooking and flavouring; value for money; and what is known as regularity, for example, the ability to offer consistent quality throughout the year irrespective of the dishes on the menu (*Michelin Guide*, 2018). In order to keep this consistency, it is important that reviewers anonymously visit the restaurants several times a year to sample all segments and price categories (Miklós, 2019). In 1933, the profession of inspector was created (Karpik, 2000). Their job was to criss-cross the world in pursuit of the best addresses to provide a repertoire — from typical inns to luxury palaces, from small bistros to exceptional tables — to satisfy all desires, even the most demanding "globe-trotting gourmets" who are determined to collect the world's shining Michelin stars (Farrer, 2020; *Michelin Guide*, 2020b).

The *Michelin Guide* also has an international impact. Because the guide was working well and in keeping with its vocation as a leading expert, it quickly sought to establish itself in other countries with the aim of having a transnational influence. The aim was not to sell the French edition abroad, but to produce guides for territories other than France (Poullennec, 2011). Guides for other regions were established in the same manner but were modified for other nations. Belgium was the first in 1904. Other editions were published in Italy, the United Kingdom and other European countries. Since 2006, editions have been published in the USA, including cities like New York, San Francisco, Las Vegas or Chicago, and also in China and Japan (Statista, 2020).

This legendary *Guide* has inspired art, particularly in French and American filmmaking. This is especially the case with the movie *L'aile ou la cuisse* [The wing or the thigh] with Louis de Funès, which was a hit with 6 million views in cinemas (Sens Critique, 2020). The tale is about Charles Duchemin (Louis de Funès), the owner of the popular *Duchemin map*, who gives or takes away the stars. It embodies gastronomic justice. His everyday life consists of the uncertainty of eating in restaurants to assess them without their knowledge. Following this film, the *Guide* sold more than a million copies per year between 1970 and 1980. In the 2000s, the French market decreased marginally but is still considerable at several hundred thousand copies a year (Poullennec, 2011). In more recent times, the movie *Burnt*, starring Bradley Cooper, examines the high-pressure nature of a chef who is desperate to achieve three Michelin star status, however, his ways of running his kitchen through what could be considered bullying proves to be insufficient in allowing his team to perform (Rasquinha, 2015). It was only once he changed his attitudes and behaviour that they then began to respect him and eventually they win three Michelin stars. Such a movie showcases the sheer pressure and, in some cases, bullying or harassment which may be present in a Michelin-starred kitchen.

A revaluation of the *Michelin Guide*'s luxury status

Michelin-starred restaurants have always been associated with "fine dining" as opposed to convenience dining and regular restaurants (Miklós, 2019). It represents expensive and hedonic consumption (Pacheco, 2018). In the specific case of starred restaurants, access is limited to an exclusive pool of customers who expect high standards of food service in which a single meal is transformed into a unique "experience". The *Michelin Guide* has established an elitist paradigm (Lane, 2013).

Obviously being awarded Michelin stars can have advantageous pricing implications based on increasing prices (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2019; Shin, 2018). Many restaurant managers believe that a high price is usually an indicator of high quality, and therefore consider increasing prices as an effective strategy to enhance prestige (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2019). The economic impact is not negligible: a star brings in on average 20% to 30% more bookings (Henderson, 2017). According to Jean-Baptiste Lavergne Morazzani, who received his first star in 2016 for his restaurant La Table du 11 in Versailles,

> [w]e were already lucky enough to have some success but now we are full two months ahead of schedule compared to only two weeks before. The *Michelin Guide* star has enabled us to increase menu prices by five euros and we are considering raising them again (*PressFrom*, 2017).

Some tasting menus' prices can be up to $500 and a single sitting at the most expensive restaurant in the world costs $1 761 (Trejos, n.d.). In addition, restaurants aiming for the *Michelin Guide* have been increasing meal prices steadily, mostly due to the increase in costs associated with increasing service quality to please the *Guide*'s inspectors.

However, the luxury status of the "Red Guide" can be debated. Firstly, the guide has a dualistic structure: on one hand, the high-end gastronomic segment, and on the other hand, a wide group of more regular restaurants, not eligible for evaluation (Pacheco, 2018). At the end of the day, it could be argued that the guide is specifically a marketing tool, used to promote hotels and restaurants but more importantly the company of Michelin and their products and services. Indeed, today Michelin-starred restaurants are globalised. In the analysis of countries covered by *Michelin Guide*, there were around 15 572 restaurants featured in the *Guide*, including 2 813 Michelin-starred restaurants across 33 countries (My Offers, 2019). Among them, Japan, with 731 Michelin stars, surpasses both France (with 621 stars) and Italy (with 367 stars) to become the "Michelin cuisine centre of the world" (p. 9). According to My Offers, it has only taken a century for the guide to extend its influence all over the world. As a result, there are more Michelin-starred restaurants than ever before. Gourmet experiences are countless.

Secondly, even though they are more costly than average restaurants, more and more people can afford to eat in these establishments (Millington, 2018). The distribution of wealth has arguably become more diverse and spread across multiple areas of society, with the middle class now having more disposable income than ever before (Kharas, 2017).

Therefore, the guide is not, as said above, for a specific audience. The *Michelin Guide* makes it more affordable by adding cheaper starred restaurants to its collection. For example, some Michelin-starred restaurants located in East and Southeast Asia cost less than $3 per meal (Trejos, n.d.). With the concept of luxury based on a high price (McKinsey and Co, 1990), evidence suggests that this example is obviously out of place — arguably making the luxury more accessible to more people. However, these are exceptions because this includes street food, a special category discussed later in this article.

Even if there are more starred restaurants than ever before, the prices are also becoming more expensive. Certainly, more people can have access to these kinds of establishment, but that group of people is still limited. The accessibility is mostly reserved for the less than 1% of elites who have 41% of global wealth, and for 50% of middle-class people (Kharas & Hamel, 2018; Wike, 2014). The 735 million people who are living in extreme poverty, i.e. on less than $5 per day, are unlikely to even know about the existence of the *Guide* (Oxfam International, 2019). From this perspective, it can definitely be said that the fine-dining experience offered by the "bible of gastronomy" is still the ultimate representation of luxury, expensiveness and elitism.

Nowadays, rather than saying Michelin does not adhere to the luxury definitions discussed, it can be suggested that the future of the *Michelin Guide* be considered as "New Luxury" in response to the experiential economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Indeed, the guide has always been boasting about "the best of the Michelin Experience" (*Michelin Guide*, 2020a). Hence, it can be implicitly interpreted that the guide's recommendations are also based on the quality of experience, which is the centre of New Luxury.

It is important then to discuss first the experiential economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). While the dawn of the millennium may well have been known to be the beginning of the experiential economy, others could also argue it was the dawn of a new luxury period which showcases a need for luxury companies to provide a more exciting array of products and services matched with creating unforgettable experiences. This economic model revolves around the high value that customers place on experience. Consumers are not only looking for a material aspect, but also at an experiential aspect of their purchases. Thus, providers charge a premium price in exchange for offering a unique experience. People are in search of new and meaningful experiences and gastronomy is one of them (Alcoba et al., 2020;

Gilovich & Gallo, 2020). According to Kivela and Crotts (2006), for these kinds of people, the consumption of food and beverage is an essential, pleasurable and memorable part of their holidays, lifestyle, and personality. Life is meant to be lived. Meal experiences are a combination of food products, atmosphere, the senses and the environment. It includes sight, hearing, fragrance, taste and touch (Przymus, 2019). In this context, restaurants are competing with each other to remodel and boost the "experience factor". Chefs' menus and front-of-house design are evolving to meet customers' expectations which are beyond just a good meal (Miklós, 2019).

At *The Fat Duck* in Bray, in the United Kingdom, the "World's Best Restaurant in 2005", chef Heston Blumenthal questions traditional cooking techniques, introducing molecular cuisine using science, and which explores all the senses to enhance the meal experience (Lutrario, 2017; WocomoCOOK, 2016). His signature dish *Sound of the sea"*is accompanied by a seashell providing the sound effects. His variation of the Black Forest cake is served with a cherry aroma, sprayed in front of the guests' noses as an additional stimulator.

In addition, given the dualistic aspect of the guide, experience can also be found in what is called by Michelin "simple restaurants", especially in the particular sector of street food. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO; 2020, p. 1) defines street foods as "ready-to-eat foods and beverages prepared and/or sold by vendors or hawkers especially in the streets and other similar places". It is usually cheap and accessible for everyone, especially people with low incomes. It is also a regular source of revenue for people with limited skills. Street food is very common in Southeast Asia and is part of the local culture. It is becoming trendy in Europe and USA. Therefore, street food has been increasingly associated with socio-economic importance. It is also used to gain credibility and respect on social media platforms.

The category of street food appeared for the first time in the 2016 edition of the *Michelin Guide* for Hong Kong and Macau (Henderson, 2017). Recognising this modest kind of eatery is considered by the Michelin's director as a milestone which represents the guide as a true reflection of the restaurant scene. In 2018, a Michelin star was given to *Jay Fai* in Bangkok (Agmapisarn, 2019). It is the world's third street food restaurant to receive a Michelin star. While it could be assumed that these types of restaurants are unique in their offerings and tick the experiential box of luxury, others could debate whether these types of establishments are in actual fact dampening the original image of the *Michelin Guide*.

However, the recognition by the guide brings opportunities and positive impacts on sales for these hawker businesses, but also a sudden surge of attention that they are not used to. In the case of chef Jay Fai, even if she was very honoured to receive a Michelin star, it has also been quite tricky for her business (Agmapisarn, 2019). She has been dealing with unwanted attention from the Thai government, pressure from the new-found fame, diverse crowds, long queues, the loss of regular customers due to the waiting times, as well as unfair and bitter online criticism.

In short, according to Henderson (2017), the *Michelin Guide* offering a street food category is debatable. First, the simple foods and less formal settings cannot be described as a proper restaurant. It is unclear if they satisfy all the criteria for star grading since one star means "a very good restaurant in its category". Perhaps the conventional method of the *Michelin Guide* may not be applied to evaluating street food, especially when there may be major concerns linked to food safety (FAO, 2020).

Henderson (2017) recommended that a separate guide with a different criterion of evaluation is needed for this category. Yet, its diversity may defy the rating system and selection. Henderson suggested that the positive impacts from receiving the stars may not be sustainable in the long term and questioned whether hawkers/owners have enough knowledge regarding the guide to use it.

Clearly, the *Michelin Guide* has the power to create competition, opportunities, and build careers and fame. It invites its audience to the world's most famous tables. But what can explain the considerable sales drop of the guides by 70% since 2007? In fact, the sales decreased from 144 900 in 2007 to 43 238 in 2019. Is it because the guide has attracted a lot of negative attention in recent years?

This was certainly the case with the famous chef, Marc Veyrat, who decided to appeal to the courts because of the loss of a star for his restaurant *La Maison des bois* in Manigod, France, which he considered unjustified. More recently, after the death of Chef Paul Bocuse, who was considered one of the greatest chefs of his generation and who had owned 3 Macarons since 1965, the *Michelin Guide* decided to take away his third star. According to the guide, the quality of the establishment remained "excellent" but "not anymore at the level of a three star". Gwendal Poullennec, the new president of the "Red Guide", justified himself by explaining that "[n]ow, the stars of the *Michelin Guide* are not inherited, they are deserved" (Europe 1, 2020).

However, everyone does not think that way. Pierre Orsi, a chef, ironically congratulated *Michelin Guide* for the extraordinary buzz and marketing they were able to achieve with the loss of Paul Bocuse's third star. Poignantly, according to a former director of the *Michelin Guide*, Jean François Mesplède, these decisions were made with the aim of recovering readers because "the guide is currently experiencing a crisis of youths, everything that is in the tradition is good to throw away" (BFM Lyon, 2020). To which Gwendal Poullennec justified himself and replied that

> there can be excellence in both tradition and modernity and that the *Michelin Guide* has the capacity to evaluate tables with the same rigour and the same benevolence... whatever the age of the chef, whatever the type of cuisine he proposes, *Michelin* has the capacity to enhance it.

Moreover, equity is, according to him, of prime importance for the *Michelin Guide*, no matter who you are: "Paul Bocuse is indeed an icon but the stars of the *Michelin Guide* are recommendations and their purpose is to be relevant, current, fair...all tables must be evaluated on an equal footing" (Europe 1, 2020).

According to Lane (2013), the vagueness and opacity that veil the evaluation process in secrecy is part of Michelin's mystical quality which calls into question the Michelin Guide's judgments of taste because chefs are not provided with any information or explanation about why they gained or, especially, lost stars. It is difficult for them to understand, learn or improve from the inspectors' judgments.

The darker side of Michelin

But what is the dark side behind Michelin-starred kitchens? The glory and reputation after receiving stars come with a price. The hard work, stress, pressure and sacrifice are inevitable in Michelin-starred kitchens to obtain the highest level of perfection (Johri, 2014). According to Giousmpasoglou et al. (2018), to release stress and cope with unsociable working hours, combined with the high adrenaline, and physically and mentally demanding nature of their work, Michelin-starred chefs have the tendency to consume alcohol known as "sweat pints" and marijuana. In many high-end kitchen teams, the use of illicit drugs such as cocaine or amphetamines is normalised to keep the pace needed at work and to maintain job performance. This coping mechanism used by chefs and teams to deal with the stress in the high-end kitchen environment can be detrimental to their health and well-being. But their own desire for and drive towards excellence make them susceptible to such harm (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2018).

Chef Daniel Boulud once said that "[t]o become a young chef, you must look inside yourself and find desire, because if you have it then you will make the time sacrifices and endure the criticisms" (Eburne, 2010). But where is the limit of such sacrifice? Does it have to be the thin line between life and death as in the case of Bernard Loiseau, a key international figure of French haute cuisine? Bernard Loiseau was a very talented and perfectionist French chef. He opened his own restaurant *Côte d'Or* in Burgundy in 1977. He gained the first star from the well-known *Michelin Guide* two years later. Then, in 1991, he obtained his third star. Those three stars shone constantly for 25 years (Loiseau, n.d.).

However, in February 2003, the culinary giant took his own life. Bernard Loiseau's death startled the whole gastronomic world. He was known to worry obsessively about his cuisine and to put himself under tremendous pressure to always be the best. But what is the part of the famous *Guide* in this story? What drove a chef who was at the peak of his career to a sudden death?

Apparently, the *Michelin Guide* did not appreciate that the chef appeared in the media without bothering to visit the Michelin headquarters for years. In fact, Loiseau was warned that he could lose a star during an appointment in 2002 with the *Guide*'s management (*L'Express*, 2013). If that had happened, his business might have lost 40% in revenue. He had been working under pressure and coping with depression to keep his stars. Even though he knew before his death that his restaurant had not been downgraded, he took his life. According to a source, what may have happened here is that Loiseau, whose career and status had grown, could not think of losing a star (Echikson, 2003). While people have said that Loiseau suffered from long-term depression and that that was what truly killed him (Danancher, 2013), it has been suggested that the pressure from Michelin and the threat of losing his cherished third Michelin star was a contributing factor to his death.

If the previous hypothesis is true, then what is so critical here is the fact that the *Michelin Guide* might have been seen to have threatened the chef and put pressure on him for not giving more importance to the *Guide* itself. It could be considered as abusing their power of influence. Can it be that by downgrading *Côte d'Or* from a three- to a two-star restaurant in 2016, the *Guide* tried to remind people of its notoriety in the gastronomic world? However, Clauzel et al. (2019), in their research, suggested that based on hedonism and subjectivity, consumers may tend to not follow negative expert judgments. In the case of Loiseau, a majority of customers (55%) expressed disagreement with the *Guide* and questioned the expert judgments. They found the star loss unjustified and chose to actively support the restaurant.

Similar events in the gastronomic world include the suicide of Benoît Violier, a 44-year-old Swiss chef in 2016, or the death of chef Homaro Cantu in 2015 (Severson, 2016). Therefore, can it be said that the pressure from the system of the *Michelin Guide*, the pressure to constantly be excellent, may be an external factor that affects chefs' mental health.

As chef Heston Blumenthal said, "[t]he professional kitchen is not creative. It is a manufacturing line". Measures, precision, and consistency, even though needed, are the enemy of creativity. As a chef, "you need the freedom to fail" (Lutrario, 2017). However, does Michelin give you that? Does Michelin give you the freedom to fail? Maybe the *Michelin Guide* is limiting chefs' independence, their right to fail, their chance to reflect on quality and to recreate themselves and their cuisine. At this stage, we believe that the pressure coming from the *Guide* should be a positive pressure, like an external motivation that pushes the chefs to move forwards rather than hold them back. The revaluation of Michelin-starred restaurants should focus more on helping and informing its users with less marketing focus.

Most of all, the cuisine and the concept of food nowadays are so different. "La Nouvelle Cuisine", with leading figures such as Paul Bocuse, disregarded the "Classical Cuisine" of Escoffier, and introduced exotic ingredients and products (Monin & Durand, 2003). Molecular Cuisine uses a scientific approach to introduce new cooking techniques and knowledge (This, 2013). In the past, food consumption was merely the extension of food habits that people formed at home; it was only a supporting element in the consumer experience (Quan & Wang, 2004). Today, food is a multi-conceptual phenomenon, incorporating emotions, and multiple senses, and bringing societies together from far and wide. Food is poetic, a celebration (Van Oudenhoven & Haider, 2015). Food is a creation, yet also science. More than just a meal, food has become a transformational experience which creates and bridges emotions and attachments (Hsu & Scott, 2020). Surely, the *Guide*'s strict, unchanged, sometimes unclear and inadequate criteria of evaluations cannot fully assess a chef's work. Is that why many famous chefs are refusing to be recognised or awarded stars by the *Michelin Guide*?

Final reflections

This article aimed to revaluate and question the luxury status of the *Michelin Guide*. In this process, we went through the definitions of traditional luxury to new luxury. We highlighted the milestones in the history of the most famous guidebook ever to exist and also highlighted the darker nature which the guide has.

In short, this symbol of distinction, part of the high-end sphere, no longer appears too daunting to obtain. Was it more coveted to have a star before than to have a star today? Why would a three Michelin-starred chef such as Marco-Pierre White give back his three Michelin stars? (Puranik, 2019). The influence it once had to seduce travellers now has become an enormous source of pressure for many chefs. The concept of Michelin cuisine and what the *Michelin Guide* should provide have transformed immensely over the past two to three decades, yet certain traditions still remain. "Haute Cuisine" remained high on Michelin's agenda in the past, however, now even street food can be considered to reach those standards. Questions remain about whether the boundaries and criteria which Michelin are looking for are shifting, from traditional sous vide cooking to the new molecular approaches. What was once small fine-dining dishes on crisp porcelain now comes in large portions served in take-away plastic. There are now starred gastronomic restaurants providing menus for a much affordable price. This is a way to soften its criteria, but which can leave others perplexed regarding the quality and the exclusivity that this guide advocates. Despites its openness to other types of modern or less-traditional cuisine, the *Michelin Guide*'s criteria and standards remain unchanged, while different categories of restaurants need different systems of evaluation due to their specificities.

This article has its own limitations. A lot of what has been discussed here is based on the opinions of the two authors who have tried to provide evidence in support of these opinions. Others may have different opinions to what has been discussed. While this article has critically looked to question the *Michelin Guide*'s luxury status, it should be noted that the concepts of Michelin are luxurious to certain people in society — namely those who do not experience Michelin cuisine on a regular basis. For those who are accustomed to eating in Michelin-starred restaurants, and again with luxury being an exception to normality, questions could be asked about whether regular diners of Michelin-starred restaurants still believe and perceive Michelin standards of food to be compared to those who do not regularly dine at such establishments. The *Michelin Guide* can still be considered luxurious to some people, however, in regard to certain others, is this still the case? Nevertheless, Michelin can be argued to be doing one thing — marketing and opening up its followers to different types of experiences ranging from street food to 14-course fine-dining tasting menus. The future of luxury dining no doubt is changing — how far Michelin will go is still to be seen? Will there be a McDonald's in the *Michelin Guide* in the future? Who knows?!

The purpose of this article was also to potentially provide future research opportunities and create discussion about the current status and issues of the *Michelin Guide*. It is hoped readers and future researchers will explore the concept in more detail.

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