

AN INVESTIGATION INTO  
IRISH LUXURY TRAVEL  
CONSUMERS AND THE  
DRIVERS THAT MOTIVATE  
THEM TO INVEST IN LUXURY  
TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

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Submitted to the National College of Ireland,  
August 2019

## **Abstract**

The luxury industry and its consumers have been heavily researched. However, most of the existing literature around luxury consumption focusses on luxury products, with little mention of luxury services, particularly luxury travel services. With the luxury travel industry set to be worth US\$8460 million by 2024, a need for understanding this realm of the luxury world deserves to be explored. In alignment with the majority of the existing research being focussed on luxury goods, the majority of the existing literature on luxury consumers does not consider those who invest in experiences, such as luxury travel. Therefore, this dissertation aims to fill this knowledge gap.

The literature revealed that there are two consumer groups relevant to this study; traditional luxury consumers and aspirational luxury consumers. Five in-depth interviews were carried out involving three traditional luxury travel consumers and two aspirational luxury travel consumers. These groups were noted in the literature to be motivated by opposing versions of the self, but the findings of this study found that they are indeed aligned in their internal drivers and in their motivating version of the self, i.e. the actual self.

Alongside of understanding their drivers and values, this study also aimed to understand what they expect from such services. Experiential marketing is at the core of tourism and in the context of luxury, an opportunity emerged from the literature to determine what is expected from luxury brands operating in this industry. The data revealed that luxury consumers invest in luxury travel in an attempt to achieve relaxation and escapism. They crave exceptional experiences, VIP treatment and favour those luxury brands who offer them ease, relaxation and a quiet environment on their holidays. They are in-fact, hedonistic, emotional beings who like to reward themselves with luxury getaways. While the research objectives of this project were met, the concluding chapter will detail opportunities for further research.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my supervisor Michael Bane for all his help, support and guidance throughout the process of writing my dissertation.

I would like to thank my husband Paddy for his endless support and encouragement over the two years of my Masters. Thank you for always encouraging me and pushing me forward, especially in the final months as I completed this research project.

I would like to thank my family, especially my parents for their continued support and encouragement over the past two years.

I would like to thank my employers, especially Mary McKenna and Veronica Flood for their continued encouragement throughout completing my masters and for the time they gave me to focus on my studies throughout the course.

Finally, I would like to thank all of those who helped me complete this dissertation with special mention to those who took part in my interviews and also my lecturers who helped me with advice and guidance along the way.

Thank you all so much for giving up your valued time to help me.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

*'Luxury should feel like a reward, like an escape  
from ordinary life'*

*(Participant 3, female, traditional luxury travel  
consumer)*

Considerable research has been conducted on luxury brands and the drivers of luxury consumption. Yet, the drivers of luxury consumption from a service perspective, and more specifically a luxury travel perspective remain mostly unexplored. The global luxury travel industry is currently worth US\$5200 million and is set to reach US\$8460 million by 2024 (Reuters, 2019). This phenomenal industry and its growth, has provided the opportunity for researchers to understand luxury travel consumers and their consumption drivers and values.

### **1.1 Understanding Luxury Consumption and Consumers**

Luxury as a concept is highly subjective and therefore difficult to define (Verissimo & Loureiro, 2012). Often associated with prestige, status (Husic & Cicic, 2009) and a materialistic lifestyle (Hudders & Pandelaere, 2012), luxury has historically been noted as a tool for showcasing your belonging to a higher class of society (Siu, et al., 2015). Because of this, luxury in the literature is heavily associated with luxury products and the consumers of such products.

This scenario presented the author of this research project with the opportunity to explore luxury in the context of travel, while also building an understanding of luxury consumers in this context. In an attempt to initially underpin the drivers of luxury travel consumers, the author had to investigate and understand the drivers of luxury product consumers first, as little research exists around luxury travel consumers to date.

While luxury consumption has traditionally been associated with the upper classes, due to increased affluence among the middle classes, it is now accessible to more than just the elite (Yeoman, 2011). The emergence of aspirational luxury consumers through the literature formed an interesting layer for consideration for this project.

Aspirational luxury consumers are defined as non-traditional luxury consumers, who invest in luxury brands (Canziani, et al., 2016). They are noted to enjoy heightened emotional satisfaction through five-star experiences (Hudders, 2012), thus making them a very important consumer group for this industry. With both traditional luxury consumers and aspirational luxury consumers found to be investing in luxury travel experiences (Walley, et al., 2013), a need to understand their drivers, their similarities and their differences arose.

Building upon this, key studies on luxury consumption by Vigneron & Johnson (1999) noted that consumers are either extrinsically or intrinsically motivated to invest in luxury and this proved to be an interesting point to pursue in the context of luxury travel. The motivating self-concept became a core focal point to assist in filling this knowledge gap around luxury travel consumers. The self-concept is a cognitive and affective understanding of who we are and for each person, it can take two forms, the actual, present self or the ideal, future self (Hudders & Pandelaere, 2012). Unlike consumers of luxury products, luxury travel consumers are entirely motivated by their actual self and their intrinsic needs. In fact, the findings of this study revealed that they refrain from showcasing any connection to elitism or status seeking among society. They simply invest in luxury travel experiences in an attempt to satisfy their own, internal hedonic needs as a form of self-reward and escapism from their hectic lifestyles. Therefore, the importance of enjoying an exceptional experience emerged as crucial for these consumers.

## **1.2 The Importance of Experiential Marketing**

Experiential marketing was highlighted in the literature as being the cornerstone of the travel industry (Atwal & Williams, 2009). At the heart of experiential marketing is emotional desires and sensory gratification (Wiedmann, et al., 2012), meaning the experience is everything. Experiential marketing studies by Pine & Gilmore (1999) are considered to be the most important, however as their model focusses on a sweet spot between entertainment, educational, esthetics and escapism, it was evident in the findings that the luxury side of the travel industry may be the exception to their model. Schmitt (1999), another important author in the realm of experiential marketing created a similar model but he took into consideration the importance of the consumers psychological processes, past experiences and cultures that they bring to a service encounter, as being importance ingredients in creating the ultimate experience. These points by Schmitt (1999) proved to be important in the context of luxury travel with both, past personal experiences, and the need to escape a stressful everyday life, emerging as two intertwining key aspects for investing in luxury travel experiences.

Therefore, experiential marketing was an important topic for investigation as part of this study due to its close alignment with the drivers of luxury travel consumption.

## **1.3 Gaps in the Literature**

While the luxury travel industry continues to grow from strength to strength, the existing literature lacks a focus on this industry and its consumers. While some research papers touch upon luxury travel in the hospitality sense, the existing literature failed to offer an overarching understanding of who luxury travel consumers are, what their drivers and values are and what they expect from investing in such high-end experiences. The existing literature also alluded to the differences between traditional luxury consumers and aspirational

luxury consumers by highlighting their motivating self-concepts as different, but again, this has not been studied to the best of the author's knowledge, in the context of luxury travel. The importance of experiential marketing and the ingredients required to create exceptional luxury experiences has also been under researched to date. These research gaps led to the following research questions as they have not yet been addressed in existing papers:

1. What are the drivers that motivate traditional luxury travel consumers and aspirational luxury travel consumers to invest in luxury travel experiences?
2. How important is the role of experiential marketing in a luxury travel context and what factors of the experience are most important?

#### **1.4 Research Rational**

The identified gaps in the literature and the resulting questions outlined above guided this research project. Luxury consumption has shifted from just being about status, to being about experience and authenticity (Yeoman, 2011) and this belief warrants the exploration of the luxury travel industry and its consumers. In an attempt to truly understand the internal drivers of luxury travel consumers, the research conducted was from the view point of luxury consumers and not luxury brands. This approach allowed the researcher to assess the drivers of luxury, directly from the view-point of luxury consumers and without bias from luxury brands, who may have a particular view on what they perceive consumers to want from a luxury travel experience. Qualitative research was identified as the best option for this project as qualitative methods allow for greater detail and in-depth discussions around a phenomenon such as luxury travel. Due to the nature of the topic and the expense that travelling in luxury requires, in-depth interviews were chosen as the desired research method due to their intimate nature (Hair, et al., 2010). The

interviews provided excellent insight of which will be discussed throughout the document.

## **1.5 Overview and Structure of the Research Project**

### **Chapter One: Introduction**

The introduction chapter sets the scene for the entire research project by presenting an overarching view of the luxury industry before briefly outlining the opportunity to further explore luxury consumers in the context of the luxury travel industry. It will also highlight key literature and authors before the commencement of chapter two.

### **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The literature review will explore in great detail, the existing knowledge that exists around luxury consumption. As this project will be focussed on consumer behaviour, the literature review will detail two key consumer groups who fall under the umbrella of luxury consumers, i.e. traditional luxury consumers and aspirational luxury consumers. It will discuss their motivating self-concept and drivers in detail before exploring the realm of experiential marketing.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The methodology chapter will provide in detail an insight into the objectives of this study, the emerging research questions and it will discuss and explore the various research philosophies, before detailing the chosen route. The methodology will also provide details of the conducted in-depth interviews, sample selection and the method of data analysis.

### **Chapter Four: Findings**

Thematic analysis was used for analysing the findings of this research project and in the chapter four, these findings will be explored in great detail. Salient points in relevance to the outlined objectives in chapter three will be discussed in detail also.

### **Chapter Five: Discussion**

The discussion chapter will integrate the key findings with the secondary findings from the literature review. This chapter required the author to review all data collected with a critical eye in order to expose key points of interest which aid a clearer understanding of the phenomenon that is luxury travel consumers.

### **Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The final chapter of this research project will reflect on the entire process and the results which emerged in contrast to literature review and the outlined research objectives and questions in chapter three. Recommended areas for future and further research will also be noted in this chapter.

## **Chapter Two - Literature Review**

The literature review will cover the topics needed to gain a strong understanding of the luxury travel industry and its consumers. The chapter will begin with an overview of the industry before exploring the concept of luxury, luxury travel consumers and the importance of experiential marketing for this industry. The chapter will then conclude with the identification of research gaps, which will set the scene for developing interesting, thought provoking and relevant research questions.

### **2.1 Luxury Travel Industry**

The global luxury travel industry is currently worth US\$5200 million and it is set to reach US\$8460 million by 2024 (Reuters, 2019). When compared to regular tourists, luxury travel consumers represent 3% of all tourists around the world but, they spend eight times more per day than usual tourists and invest 25% more on their choice of travel services (Verissimo & Loureiro, 2012). This impressive market and its projected growth over the next five years has presented opportunity for exploration on the consumers who are choosing to embrace luxury travel experiences.

From an Irish perspective, the future looks promising for this industry. In the latest census, it was reported that the average household income has risen 7.1% since 2010 (CSO, 2016). This rise in household income is reflected in tourism figures as it was reported by the Central Statistics Office that since 2017, the number of Irish residents travelling overseas from Ireland grew from 553,000 to 1.7 million in 2019 (CSO, 2019). These consumers generated €6.4 billion in revenue in 2018 (WTTC, 2019), a figure which has gradually been rising year on year. Of these 1.7 million Irish travellers, it is not evident how many are luxury travel consumers, i.e. those who invest in first class/business class flights, luxury cruising and five-star hotel



accommodations when travelling. While it can be assumed that they are likely to be a small percent of total travellers from Ireland, the investment they make on travel experiences poses an opportunity for understanding of who they are and what motivates them to spend above average on their holidays.

## **2.2 What is Luxury?**

Traditionally, luxury was heavily related to just products and it was considered as ‘goods for which the mere use or display of a particular branded product brings prestige to the owner, rather than functional utility’ (Grossman & Shapiro, 1988). It is a concept that is often associated with prestige, status (Husic & Cicic, 2009) and a materialistic lifestyle (Hudders & Pandelaere, 2012), where consumers focus on investing in particular brands, in an attempt to showcase their belonging to a particular social group (Siu, et al., 2015). It is also evident that luxury varies from person to person (Verissimo & Loureiro, 2012) and as a result it is highly subjective and difficult to define. When we consider luxury from an overall perspective, one author defines it as ‘soft or extravagant living, (over)-indulgence and sumptuousness, luxuriousness and opulence’ (Tynan, et al., 2010). While this definition is detailed, it fails to identify the realm of which luxury lies. Luxury is about more than touch and feel, it is about meaning, history and culture (Wu & Yang, 2018). A definition that better describes luxury defines it as ‘generally non-essential, high quality, and associated with premium prices’ (Wu & Yang, 2018) Adding an additional layer to this definition, luxury brands are those who are associated with being unique, offer superior quality and who have an aesthetic design, which together signifies expensiveness and rarity (Hudders & Pandelaere, 2012).

When we consider what luxury is, we must do so in alignment with understanding the consumers who invest in luxury. It is evident from the literature, that consumers invest in luxury brands for many

different reasons. Husic and Cicic (2009), enforce that the true motivations of luxury consumers lie within the desire to conform to particular social groups, and they are therefore, motivated by status. But the author of this study, disagrees with this theory, as there are other factors such experiential and hedonic factors which have also been proven to come into the play with the consumption of luxury. Vigneron and Johnson (1999) support this theory and believe that consumers either externalise their luxury purchases in an attempt to signal their social status or wealth, or, they often internalise their luxury purchases because they are driven by a different set of values, of which are more intrinsic. Pricing also plays a key role in defining luxury for consumers. This belief dates back to one of the first studies on luxury, conducted by Veblen (1899), who found that consumers attach importance to price, as price indicates a level of prestige, which in turn, feeds a desire to impress others within a social group (Veblen, 1899). While a century ago, this may have been the true motivation behind luxury consumption, today it is about much more. Luxury consumption has moved away from just being about status, to being about experience and authenticity (Yeoman, 2011). Building on this theory, it is evident that luxury is comprised of a mix of various factors, of which some are tangible and intangible (Chen & Lamberti, 2015). These include the aforementioned points such as financial value, quality and uniqueness (Chen & Lamberti, 2015), but also in addition, marketers must understand the importance of self-indulgence (Wu & Yang, 2018), pleasure (Ki, et al., 2017) and experience (Choo, et al., 2012).

Luxury consumption was traditionally enjoyed by the upper classes exclusively, but nowadays, with increased affluence, luxury is no longer available to just the elite (Yeoman, 2011), but also to new audiences, of whom come from a variety of social classes, with varying incomes (Husic & Cicic, 2009). As discretionary income rises (Husic & Cicic, 2009), new consumers are now embracing luxury brands. While significant industry growth is positive, luxury brands

being more readily available to a larger market, can damage exclusivity (Chen & Lamberti, 2015). Not only that, luxury is now also an experience that is seen to be co-created through both the experience exchange, but also throughout the lifetime of the engagement between the brand and the customer (Choo, et al., 2012). Co-creation between brand and customer has never been more important, both from a value perspective and also an experiential perspective (Wu & Yang, 2018). The concept of value co-creation argues that consuming luxury is not just about the luxury product, or service offering, it is about the active participation of both brand and customer during the consumption experience (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Finding the balance within this construct can be difficult, especially from a service perspective, where luxury is highly subjective (Hennings, et al., 2015).

When we consider the existing studies on luxury consumption and luxury consumers, it is clear that not much research has been conducted around the luxury travel industry as a whole. Like any luxury product or service, luxury travel can be classed as inessential, but desirable (Stiehler, 2016). Some studies do review select areas of the industry, predominately luxury hospitality, but in its entirety, it is an area of the tourism industry that is yet to be thoroughly explored and understood. However, Reuters (2019) reveals that luxury tourism is booming, but what defines a luxury travel experience? Verissimo & Loureiro (2012) list the key characteristics of a luxury travel service as privacy, personalisation, simplicity, perfection, authenticity, comfort and safety (Verissimo & Loureiro, 2012) but what the author fails to do in this instance, is research how these characteristics are perceived by luxury consumers and also how important they rank each of the characteristics. When compared to other authors, it is evident that this model might be focussed on the intrinsic perspective held by consumers. Intrinsic values represent a consumer's desire to satisfy their internal personal needs and values (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999) and while this is important, the model fails to acknowledge that

some luxury travel consumers may be status driven. With the finding that highly materialistic consumers are more likely to consume luxury, it is likely that status and perceptions among peer groups are important to these consumers (Hudders & Pandelaere, 2012).

Verissimo & Loureiro (2012), also identified four factors which are important for creating a positive luxury hotel experience. These four factors are linked heavily to the experience customers will engage with and these are; connecting with the customer, differentiating the offering, offering a competitive advantage and creating value (Verissimo & Loureiro, 2012). While this study brings forward important points to consider, it fails to consider the role of the customer in the delivery of the service. Many consumers aspire to engage in luxury experiences because it is considered to be out of the ordinary (Yeoman, 2011), and building on this, luxury brands need to recognise that consumers are active players in the experience (Wu & Yang, 2018). Trust between both parties is important (Liu & Burns, 2013) to consumers nowadays, as is the emphasis on offering a pleasurable experience (Ki, et al., 2017). Pleasure is achieved when a consumer feels enjoyment and happiness from a desirable experience, that in turn allows them to feel delight and gratification (Ki, et al., 2017). When we consider Verissimo & Loureiro's (2012) four factor model, it feels almost robotic. It fails to understand that consumers are emotional and hedonic buyers (Chen & Lamberti, 2015). Considering this background on luxury consumption, it is important to understand luxury consumers in greater detail, in an attempt to underpin what their motivations are when they embrace luxury and luxury travel experiences.

### **2.3 Luxury Travel Consumers**

The majority of the research around luxury travel, has specifically been linked to the hospitality sector of the industry (Chen & Lamberti 2015, Siu, et al., 2015, Wu & Chen, 2015). Because of this, this

section will explore luxury consumers in general, with the intention of linking their characteristics and values to those who consume luxury travel experiences.

Traditionally, luxury consumption has been linked to wealth, social class and economic power (Soloman, et al., 2016). Husic and Cicic (2009) studied the various factors which encourage luxury consumption and while they argue that luxury consumers are predominately driven by their self-image and their place in society, they fail to recognise the importance of internalised motivations. Several existing studies suggest that luxury consumers are driven by their emotions and therefore are heavily influenced heavily by lifestyle, hedonism and other psychographic factors, which satisfy their personal, as well as their social needs (Fain, et al., 2015).

Vigneron & Johnson (2004), two key authors in the luxury field, believe that consumers invest in luxury brands in an attempt to satisfy both functional and psychological needs. These needs are sometimes driven by a desire to be unique, or to communicate one's identity (Hudders, 2012) or social status (Jain, et al., 2015). They are also known to be driven by the opportunity to experience sensory gratification and pleasure (Hudders, 2012), but also, they may serve a functional purpose to (Yang & Mattila, 2016). On review of the original studies on luxury consumers, it is evident that conspicuous consumption was a key driver in luxury consumption (Veblen, 1899). While Veblen's study on conspicuous consumption is still relevant today, it is not in isolation.

Luxury consumers are complex, they know what they want and are happy to pay for it (Husic & Cicic, 2009). But while this may be the case in general, Ki, et al., (2017) found that often, luxury consumers are likely to feel a sense of guilt if they are considering spending excessively, therefore consumption is not just about the monetary value attached to the luxury product/service (Siu, et al., 2015).

Finding the balance between the right and wrong price may be a challenge for luxury brands, as those typically associated with a higher price point, are expected to deliver across a multitude of value dimensions, which in turn gives the consumer the opportunity to weigh up their sense of pleasure or guilt (Ki, et al., 2017).

Vigneron & Johnson (2004) have heavily studied luxury consumers and they developed the Four Value Dimension of Luxury Framework, which identifies the perceived values of luxury consumers. They argue that consumers look for functional value, financial value, symbolic value and hedonic value when investing in luxury (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). With the creation of value linked to satisfaction and brand trust, understanding the value drivers for luxury travel consumption is crucial for success in this industry (Hennings, et al., 2015).

Functional values reflect what is expected from a luxury brand in terms of usability and quality, when compared to non-luxury alternatives (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Perceived physical benefits must also have a strong correlation to the price of the product/service (Fain, et al., 2015) as higher costs do play a key role in differentiating the quality and functionality of one product, over another (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). However, simply being functional is not enough. Luxury brands have to deliver every time in order to align with the financial commitment (Hennings, et al., 2015). While some research assumes that price is not a factor in a luxury context (Walley, et al., 2013), as previously discussed, price can often influence purchase intentions both positively and negatively (Yang & Mattila, 2016). Therefore, a balanced cost-benefit relationship is very important for luxury brands to consider as this has been found to be a key determinant when luxury consumers choose to invest in a particular luxury brand (Yang & Mattila, 2016).

It is also evident that outer directed values are important to luxury consumers as luxury brands often have symbolic meanings attached to them (Fain, et al., 2015). In fact, it is the symbolic power of brands which distinguishes them as luxury, as they evoke values of exclusivity, wealth, and often a position of power among society (Yang & Mattila, 2016). A combination of these values might be what drives luxury consumers to invest in luxury, but it is important not to ignore hedonic values, especially in a luxury travel context. Research has shown that luxury consumers not only expect status, quality and prestige from consumption, but that they also crave hedonistic benefits (Hudders, 2012). Hedonic value refers to emotional benefits such as indulgence and pleasure, that a luxury brand creates for consumers through consumption (Yang & Mattila, 2016). A series of studies on hedonic consumers have shown that many purchase luxury experiences because of the heightened emotional satisfaction that they can enjoy as a result of their consumption (Canziani, et al., 2016). This inward view of luxury consumption is interesting as it defies previous studies that showcase luxury consumers as predominately society climbers. Often, hedonic consumers aim to reward themselves and their own gratification, rather than seek acceptance from society (Liang, et al., 2017). While this appears to be conflicting, understanding the drivers of self-indulgence among those who invest in five-star travel experiences, will be key for brands operating within the industry.

Luxury brands have also become more accessible to the middle classes and as a result, many choose to invest in luxury brands in order to appear to belong to their desired class in society (Canziani, et al., 2016). This symbolic need for affiliation is often related to luxury products (Escalas, 2013), as consumers wish to wear particular brands in order to showcase an affluent lifestyle, and also to distinguish from non-affluent lifestyles (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). However, the question arises as to whether symbolic values drive luxury travel consumption. While minimal research exists around luxury travel

experiences, there has been some studies done on the hospitality side of the industry. Yang & Mattila (2016) found that symbolic value, in the instance of hospitality services, failed to influence consumers purchase intentions. Being intangible, luxury travel services have traditionally not given those who consume them the opportunity to showcase their wealth and status. However, with the rise of social media, and in particular Instagram, perhaps this loose connection of symbolic value and luxury travel experiences is changing.

The value dimensions of luxury (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004) are heavily studied and form the basis of many research papers. However, the mention of luxury services in context to the value dimensions remains unexplored. Delving deeper into the values of luxury consumers, and who they are, the literature revealed that there are two core consumer segments who are embracing luxury brands, traditional luxury consumers and aspirational luxury consumers.

### **2.3.1 Traditional Luxury Consumers**

Traditional luxury consumers are essentially the upper class. These consumers enjoy outer directed symbolic values such as social status, recognition among their consumer group and they choose brands which give them the opportunity of distinguishing themselves as wealthy and powerful among society (Fain, et al., 2015). From an experience perspective, this consumer group also expect superior quality (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999), superior performance (Yang & Mattila, 2016), and a correlation between the high price point paid, and the functionality and performance of the product or service (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). While they are depicted as extrinsically motivated consumers, (Ki, et al., 2017), it can be argued that they also enjoy the hedonistic, experiential factors associated with luxury consumption (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). The experiential process of luxury consumption is important to traditional luxury consumers as well (Ki, et al., 2017). This finding, linked with the understanding



that luxury consumers are also renowned for being decisive, they know what they want, and are willing to spend to get it (Husic & Cicic, 2009) showcases that they are not only thinker's, but also feelers (Ki, et al., 2017). They appear to be searching for the perfect balance between showcasing their status in society and their desires to achieve a sense of pleasure (Ki, et al., 2017). They showcase prestige brands throughout every aspect of their lives as luxury is simply common place for them (Husic & Cicic, 2009).

Luxury consumers traditionally had the consumption of luxury brands to themselves, but a shift in consumerism has seen this change. It has been found that traditional luxury consumers do not like the emergence of new to luxury consumers, as this new group brings with them a loss of prestige and exclusivity (Yang & Mattila, 2014). However, while this mentality from traditional luxury consumers is evident across the luxury goods industry, from a hospitality perspective, it has been found that they have been less likely to abandon a brand if the less affluent begin to enjoy the luxury service also (Yang & Mattila, 2014). Based on this, it can be assumed that they will continue to invest in luxury travel experiences, but their reasoning for doing so currently remains unclear. Firstly, it is important to further understand new luxury consumers.

### **2.3.2 Neo-Luxury / Aspirational Consumers**

A consumer group which have emerged through the literature in recent years are neo-luxury consumers, also known as aspirational consumers. A neo-luxury or aspirational consumer can be defined as a 'non-traditional luxury consumer who is requesting goods and services from luxury brands' (Canziani, et al., 2016). They are typically from the middle classes, but enjoy experiencing luxury brands (Chen & Lamberti, 2015). From a travel perspective, aspirational consumers are important as they like to invest in luxury travel services in an attempt to enjoy heightened emotional

satisfaction from five star experiences (Walley, et al., 2013). They are also consumers who are spending a large proportion of their income on luxury brands and experiences (Hudders, 2012), even if outside of their financial capabilities. But the question is why? It can be argued that they may be embracing luxury in an effort to satisfy the self (Escalas, 2013), or they may be attempting to showcase their belonging in higher social classes (Canziani, et al., 2016). Building on this, it is important to understand their motivations and values and to contrast them against those of traditional luxury consumers.

The literature reveals that luxury has two facets, the consumption of luxury for oneself, and the consumption of luxury for others (Kapferer, et al., 2014). But it is unclear as to what motivates aspirational luxury consumers. The idea of luxury is fascinating to the lower classes (Bizarrias, et al., 2017), as luxury was predominately consumed by the wealthiest in society (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015). Therefore, from a broad luxury perspective, the argument that aspirational luxury consumers invest in luxury, do so in an attempt to emulate the lifestyle of the rich (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015), while also expressing their place in society through symbolism (Miller & Mills, 2012). However, while this may be true for luxury products, a closer look at the literature reveals that the importance of status and symbolism may not be relevant to the travel industry, or more specifically hospitality industry (Wu & Yang, 2018). Hotel stays are more difficult to display than a luxury product, and therefore they are less attractive to these consumers, in terms of symbolic meaning (Wu & Yang, 2018). Reasonable prices (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015), combined with the opportunity to indulge in oneself might be true motivators for this segment. However, from an experiential perspective, luxury experiences and the consumer brand interaction has remained largely unexplored (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015).

The literature also reveals that another differential between traditional luxury consumers and aspirational luxury consumers is the level of digital savviness. Aspirational consumers have been identified in the literature as being heavy internet users (Liu & Burns, 2013), but traditional luxury consumers have not embraced digital channels as they believe that the accessibility of luxury online, results in a loss of luxury (Liu & Burns, 2013). This focus on traditional luxury consumers may be the reason why luxury brands have in turn, been slow to embrace online platforms (Liu & Burns, 2013).

In an attempt to appeal to their new audiences, they must consider digital. Liu and Burns (2013) found that the motivations to shop in store versus online for luxury varies per consumer group. However, while new luxury consumers may use the internet to find luxury at better value, Husic & Cicic (2009) believe that this is not the case for traditional luxury consumers because they have wealth at their disposal. The author disagrees with this belief however, as it is evident in the literature that while wealth may exist, financial considerations do still play a role in deciding to embrace luxury, even for the traditional luxury consumers (Hennings, et al., 2015). The high price point must align with a specific level of perceived quality (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999).

Aspirational luxury consumers are younger than their traditional counterpart, and they are avid embracers of digital media (Yu, et al., 2017). Considering this, it is disappointing that luxury brands fail to recognise the power of digital marketing and ecommerce (Trocchia, et al., 2015). With disposable income rising and with the allure of luxury experiences teasing the middle classes, there is huge potential within the aspirational luxury consumer group (Walley, et al., 2013). The idea of accessible luxury has been embraced by some luxury product brands in an attempt to attract the masstige market, i.e. the emerging mass market who enjoy investing in premium products (Brun & Castelli, 2013). Considering this, it is crucial to note that

brands need to understand their target consumers consumption patterns, whether online or offline.

On review of the industry and its consumers, it is evident that it is not just be the upper class who are driving the luxury travel industry, but in fact the emergence of aspirational luxury consumers. This finding presents an obvious research gap in the literature that deserves to be explored. Are luxury travel consumers motivated by social status, functionality, hedonism or something entirely different. Such questions will help brand marketers who work within the luxury travel industry identify successful ways to build their experiences and their marketing campaigns around their customers and their lifestyles. Building on the importance of understanding luxury travel consumers and their motivations, a closer review of the literature surrounding the self-concept is required.

## **2.4 The Self-Concept**

The self-concept can be defined as the ‘cognitive and affective understanding of who and what we are and it can take two forms, the actual and the ideal self’ (Hudders, 2012). The actual self refers to who the person sees themselves currently, in their current life, versus the ideal self, which is shaped by the consumers own desires and goals (Hudders, 2012). The ideal self is a person’s idea of the very best version of themselves (Hudders, 2012).

The idea of the self-concept plays a really interesting role in the context of luxury. Considering the importance of status to luxury consumers (Husic & Cicic, 2009) understanding the role of an individual’s self is crucially important for brands when designing their brand message as consumers will respond to and invest in brands to align with their self-concept (Mathews, 2015). While Malar, et al. (2011) found that most consumers are motivated by their actual self, this may not be the case for the emerging aspirational luxury

consumers, who are striving to belong to higher social classes (Wu & Yang, 2018), or for those individuals who crave social recognition. With luxury consumers fulfilling their need for status recognition by showcasing a particularly favourable public image (Malar, et al., 2011), it is evident that at the core of such values and motivations is possibly the ideal self. Vigneron and Johnson (1999) explored varying dimensions of consumer behaviour which form among consumers as a result of the self-concept. Their Prestige Seeking Consumer Behaviour Model (1999), which is detailed below, breaks down a person's self-concept in the context of the level of private versus public self-consciousness and the importance of price and prestige in determining behaviour.

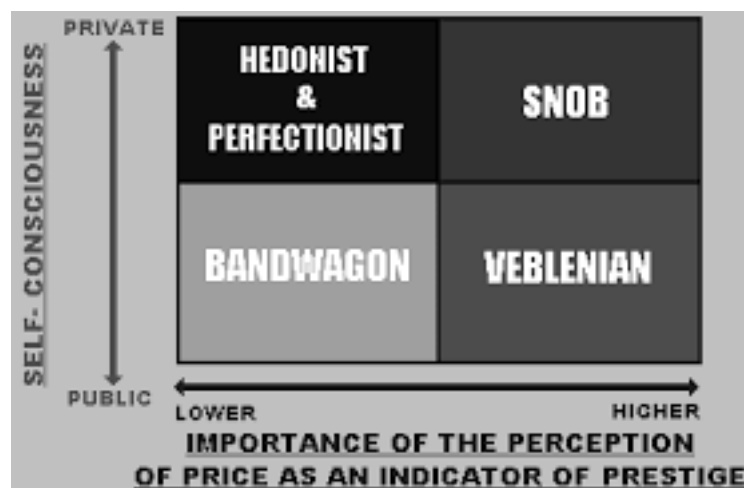


Figure 1: Prestige Seeking Consumer Behaviour Model

Source: (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999)

This model is an interesting one as it places consumers on an axis depending on their true motivating self-concept, i.e. the actual or ideal version of themselves. For the consumers who may be motivated by their actual self, they may be considered as hedonist consumers, who are driven by their own emotional desires (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999), while consumers who are driven by their ideal self can fall into any three of the other categories as they are known to crave status, recognition and acceptance by higher social classes (Husic & Cicic,

2009). The model is quite heavily focussed on the ideal self-paradigm, which poses the question of its relevance from a luxury service experience perspective whereby luxury consumers may be driven by their actual self, but still aspire to their ideal self, but for intrinsic reasons and not those of prestige among society, as outlined in the model.

An interesting study by Belk (1988) on the self highlights the importance that consumers place on their possessions. He believes that we are what we possess (Belk, 1988), and this simple belief is a powerful one as it is perhaps the most basic point to consider when studying consumer behaviour. Intangible attributes of luxury brands play a key role in defining the self-concept to society (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015). They portray wealth, vanity and also social status cues (Farrag, 2017), which align perfectly with Belk's theory. The challenge for brands, is recognising which form of the self to address through their brand messages and marketing (Sreejesh, et al., 2016). The type of luxury consumption that a consumer partakes in, is a reflection of what version of the self motivates them (Sreejesh, et al., 2016). When self-congruity arises, i.e., the alignment between the brand and the self, it has been found to influence consumption behaviours in a positive way (Roy & Rabbanee, 2015). Self-congruency is important because it plays a prominent role in influencing positive consumer behaviour towards a particular brand (Malar, et al., 2011). While on paper achieving self-congruency with your target consumer seems easy, it must feel authentic to the consumer in question or else it is wasted efforts on a brands behalf (Hung, 2014). Building on this, a potential issue that luxury brands may encounter if they choose to target both the traditional luxury consumers and aspirational luxury consumers, is the tone of delivery of message as the brand messaging for both of these groups may be different, depending on what version of the self motivates them. While research reveals that both are subject to influence by status and social classes, one group may be aiming to indulge in their actual self,

while the other their ideal self, of which different brand cues and messages may be needed. This merging of traditional wealth and 'new money' consumers can have negative impacts on the traditional luxury consumers as the less-wealthy in society begin to invade their elite space (Hudders & Pandelaere, 2012).

Status seeking is difficult to ignore in a luxury context as many consumers use luxury consumption to portray their social status, or desired social status (Wu & Yang, 2018). But what status means to both traditional luxury consumers and aspirational consumers may vary greatly if they are driven by different versions of the self. The bandwagon effect is heavily linked to the self-concept (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999) and probably more so for those consumers who are driven by their ideal self. Bandwagon consumers attach lower importance to the monetary value of luxury products, but instead choose to use luxury brands to distinguish themselves from others in society (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). They are motivated by the prestige of which luxury brands give them (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). From a luxury travel perspective, the bandwagon effect may be void as luxury services do not give individuals the ability to showcase wealth so easily.

Maintaining a level of self-distinctiveness (Tak & Pareek, 2016) is another status motivator, albeit more so for traditional luxury consumers. When we consider aspirational luxury consumers, they are found to have been motivated by new social positions (Bizarris, et al., 2017), which showcase that the ideal self may be their true motivator. The original godfathers of the self-concept, Belk (1988) and Veblen (1899) both analysed consumers and the importance of the self, from just a product perspective. Therefore, the author believes there are other factors missing when considering the role of the self from a service and/or travel perspective. Researchers have noted the importance of the experience (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015), as well as the importance of interactivity between brand and

consumer as drivers of luxury consumption (Miller & Mills, 2012), but both the original self-concept works do not consider this. Luxury is no longer just about outward directed goals, but inward directed rewards such as a sense of hedonism, creativity and fulfilment (Miller & Mills, 2012). While there are many studies on the self and its various connections, there is an opportunity to understand the self-concept from a luxury travel service perspective. It is also evident that it is incredibly important for brand managers operating within the luxury industry to understand the various versions of the self which impact consumer behaviour.

## **2.5 Luxury Brand Marketing**

The growth of the luxury industry, while positive, poses many difficult challenges for luxury brands as they must now aim to grow their business, while also maintaining an air of exclusivity among consumers (Wiedmann, et al., 2012). There are many factors which affect how consumers view brands such as awareness, perceived quality and brand personality (Wiedmann, et al., 2012). Brand personality has been identified in the literature as crucially important in the luxury context, because of its relationship with the self-concept (Aaker, 1997). However, aligning a luxury brands values and the meaning of such values with consumers may be more important because brand values allow consumers to construct their self-identity, through more than just a subjective personality (Wiedmann, et al., 2012). Bringing this topic back to the luxury travel industry, it is crucial for luxury travel brands to understand whether their consumers are motivated by their actual self, or their ideal self. Finding out which self-concept is at the root of their psychological processes will allow brands within the industry to design their service experience in alignment with consumer needs and values (Hudders & Pandelaere, 2012). As we build upon the previous topic and the emergence and integration of aspirational luxury consumers with



traditional luxury consumers, this role will become more difficult for brands.

Marketers must consider how they manage their brand, in an attempt to sway how consumers, perceive it. Keller (2009) developed a model which noted the characteristics of luxury brands. This list included maintaining a premium image, creating intangible brand associations, aligning with relevant celebrity personalities and creating a premium pricing strategy (Keller, 2009). While these factors are a strong guide for luxury brands, they are outward focussed and do not consider the consumer as a co-creator of the luxury experience and the owner of brand equity. Another challenge for brands when we consider their role in consumers lives, is whether their growth to new audiences will reduce the prestige of the brand in consumers eyes (Miller & Mills, 2012). A luxury brand's reputation can be eroded by the rise in aspirational luxury consumers if it is not correctly managed (Bekir, et al., 2013) and while they grow to new audiences, they will need to remain desirable to their traditional luxury consumers also (Roy & Rabbanee, 2015). This conundrum is further supported by Gradnot, et al., (2013), who believe that luxury is no longer attractive, or even at all exclusive (Gradnot, et al., 2013). The author disagrees with this theory however, as it is still evident throughout the existing literature that luxury is growing at a phenomenal rate, it is just the focus has moved from product consumption, to the experience (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015).

Exploring the change in luxury branding further, it is important to highlight that luxury is no longer just about its symbolic value, but it is also about the hedonic consumption attached to it and its connection with the self and personality (Atwal & Williams, 2009). If a luxury brand can offer their consumers an experience which promotes a sense of contentment, pleasure and happiness, they may win them over and gain a competitive advantage over others in their industry (Verissimo & Loureiro, 2012). Self-reward and gratification

now come hand in hand with symbolic luxury brand meanings and finding this balance may be a challenge for brands when choosing who and how to target their desired consumers (Miller & Mills, 2012). To attain self-congruency, luxury brands must recognise the balance between internal and external psychological needs when building their brand and marketing messages (Roy & Rabbanee, 2015). Doing so, will allow them to offer a complete luxury experience.

## **2.6 Experiential Marketing**

Often overlooked in the literature due to the connection between status and luxury is the importance of emotional desires as a driver of sensory gratification from luxury consumption (Wiedmann, et al., 2012). At the core of all luxury brands is experience, which is built upon an understanding that consumers are emotional buyers who seek meaningful relationships, through the experiences they co-create (Choo, et al., 2012). The concept of experiential marketing was first introduced by Pine and Gilmore (1999) and since its introduction in the late 1990s, it has played an important role across service industries (Schmitt, 1999). Experiential marketing has grown to become the cornerstone of many industries and it is crucially important to the tourism industry (Atwal & Williams, 2009), as it is a key objective for differentiating against competing services (Hwang & Seo, 2016).

Where traditional marketing focussed on features, benefits and offering a service, experiential marketing recognised that consumers are emotional beings who are driven by pleasurable experiences (Schmitt, 1999). However, the challenge today is that many businesses fail at recognising the distinction between offering a service and offering an experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). When a customer buys a service, they purchase a set of activities, but when they buy an experience, engagement and involvement is encouraged,

therefore the encounter becomes memorable (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Involvement can be defined as the ‘level of interactivity between the supplier and the customer’ (Atwal & Williams, 2009), and its focus is not on the service provider offering a service to the customer, but rather allowing the customer to co-create the service (Atwal & Williams, 2009). By involving consumers in a co-created experience, brands are essentially building a holistic experience which creates value for the customer (Atwal & Williams, 2009). While this may seem standard for service businesses, consistently delivering an excellent experience for consumers is key, especially in the luxury context (Wu & Yang, 2018).

Pine and Gilmore identified four realms of an experience and these are; entertainment, educational, escapist and esthetic (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

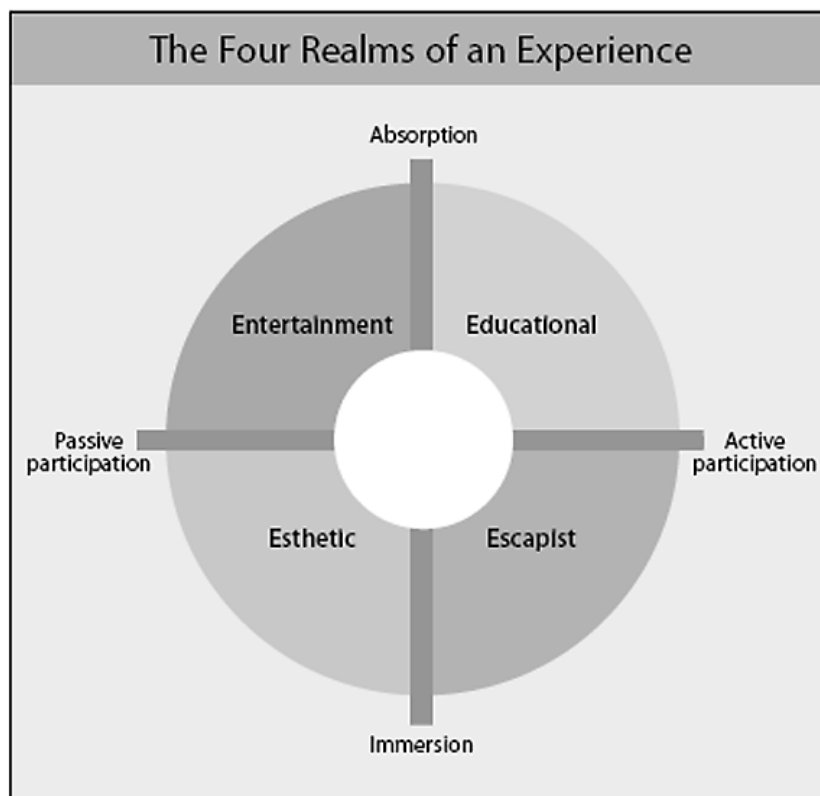


Figure 2: The Four Realms of an Experience

Source: (Pine & Gilmore, 1999)

They define entertainment experiences as experiences whereby a consumer watches entertainment, such as a concert (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Educational experiences involve active participation from both consumer as well as the service, such as completing a ski lesson while on holiday (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). They define escapist experiences as similar to educational, but they involve greater consumer immersion, such as descending into the Grand Canyon (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). And lastly, they define esthetic experiences as immersive experiences, where the consumer has no participation but is immersed, such as visiting an art gallery (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). They concur that the richest experiences, especially those in a tourism context, encompass all aspects of the four realms, to form what they refer to as a 'sweet spot' (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). However, when reviewing the realms, which sit upon an axis of level of absorption versus level of immersion and level of passive participation, versus the level of active participation, it can be argued that an integration of all may not be applicable in a luxury context. The model also fails to acknowledge luxury in the form of escapism and relaxation. Experiential marketing notes co-creation has a key aspect of the principle, yet the four realms model considers passive participation in its mix.

Schmitt (1999) notes that there are alternative ways to create the perfect experience. He believes there are five types of experiences or strategic experiential modules (SEMs), which are; sensory experiences, affective experiences, creative cognitive experiences, physical experiences, behaviours and lifestyles and social-identity experiences (Schmitt, 1999). These modules all relate to human senses and touch upon a consumer's ability to feel, think, act and relate. Schmitt's model also aligns with the literature discussed previously in this chapter, as it highlights the importance of social identities, and also of sensory experiences. Luxury experiences are predominately hedonic (Wu & Yang, 2018) and therefore the psychological processes that motivate consumers cannot be ignored.

When exploring Schmitt's work on experiential marketing in greater detail, it is evident that he considers many factors that Pine and Gilmore (1999) do not. His work notes the importance of the experience, and the link between consumption and creating the holistic experience. But, he also draws fact to the point that consumers are emotional as well as rational, and that there are other factors to consider in experiential encounters such as the influences and experiences that consumers bring to the experience as a result of their background, varying cultures and the reference groups of which they emerge from (Schmitt, 1999). A combination of these pre-existing factors all play an important role in how an experience is executed between brand and consumer and they cannot be ignored. These factors are what Schmitt considers to be the drivers of excellent experiential marketing.

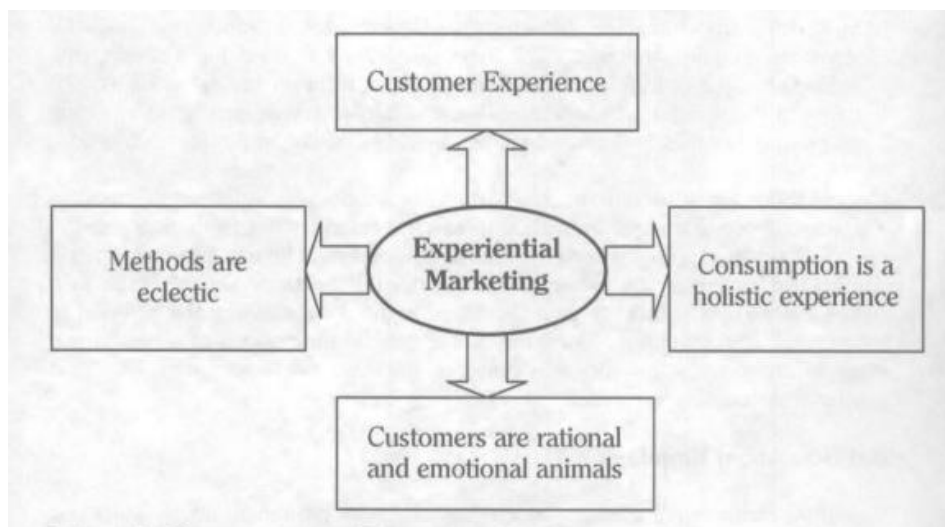


Figure 3: Characteristics of Experiential Marketing

Source: (Schmitt, 1999)

Reviewing both frameworks, it is evident that Pine and Gilmore analysed experiences in an engagement sense, however it can be argued that they are missing a consideration with their framework, and that is the importance of the consumer's self-concept in the entire process. Schmitt's model, while similar to Pine and Gilmore's takes the study of experiential marketing to a superior level by considering

the role of reference groups and cultures and their importance to consumers, as previously highlighted. This is an important point to note in the luxury travel industry as a core research question for this dissertation will revolve around the drivers of luxury travel consumption. While it is evident that experiential marketing will play a key role in the choice to embrace luxury travel experiences, it may not be the only driver, as the self-concept has been heavily researched and proven to be important to luxury consumers.

With consumers being emotional buyers, as well as rational buyers, luxury travel brands need to offer a heightened sensory service experience in order to attract these consumers to their brand, over another (Schmitt, 1999). While this will complicate the marketing mix for luxury tourism brands, executing experiential marketing is critically important to consumers as it gives brands the chance to portray an image of quality, authenticity and performance (Atwal & Williams, 2009), which are all important factors for consumers determining the strength of a brand's equity (Siu, et al., 2015). The shift in business mind-set from transactional service offerings, to holistic experiences is crucial (Atwal & Williams, 2009) because consumers expect more than just a standard service experience, they expect extraordinary experiences (Yeoman, 2011). Therefore, luxury travel businesses must focus on a seamless total experience for their consumers (Atwal & Williams, 2009). This again links back to Pine and Gilmore's belief that a consumer never expects just a service, they expect to experience a series of memorable events that they can engage with in a personal way (Atwal & Williams, 2009). These small, engaging service encounters can amplify consumer co-creation and encourage a sense of brand attachment and self-fulfilment.

Building on existing literature, two layers of experiential marketing not discussed in either of the two key experience marketing frameworks is the importance of vividness and also the role of digital customer experiences. Vividness is crucially important from a luxury

tourism perspective as the creation of vivid memories and experiences are usually stored long-term in customers memory (Manthiou, et al., 2012). The more vivid a luxury travel experience is, the more likely the luxury consumer can recall and relive the experience (Manthiou, et al., 2012). These well-constructed memories, if positive, form the basis for future decisions to be made by the consumers in question (Manthiou, et al., 2012). Due to their age, the frameworks also fail to cover the importance of digital customer experiences. Ecommerce is an unstoppable trend (Yu, et al., 2017), and luxury brands operating today need to understand the importance of not only offering an engaging experience during the service encounter, but also online, so as to help consumers who are doing research on luxury holidays. A 7 C's model for creating a highly impactful digital customer experience was outlined by Atwal & Williams (2009), which serves as a means for brands to adapt their luxury service experience online and it covers, content, customisation, customer care, communication, community, connectivity and convenience (Atwal & Williams, 2009). With aspirational luxury consumers being the fastest growing segment for the luxury market (Chen & Lamberti, 2015), the internet can no longer be ignored by frameworks as it has been found that these consumers are digitally savvy in their luxury consumption (Liu & Burns, 2013).

While some research, such as that of Liu & Burns (2013) has been conducted, revised frameworks are required which consider this important path to purchase for consumers. Aspirational luxury consumers have begun to consume luxury travel experiences and therefore, it may be considered crucial that luxury travel brands consider digital platforms and the importance of them at the research stage in relevance to experiential marketing.

If we consider experiential marketing in the luxury tourism context, it is evident it has always played a role, but is it purely just the experience that drives luxury travel consumers to invest in luxury

travel, or are there larger self-fulfilment goals also playing a role. Many researchers have found that providing satisfactory experiences is key for long term success (Manthiou, et al., 2012), but is this simply enough? On review of luxury consumers and the importance of the self-concept from a brand and luxury context, many questions arise around consumer's true motivations. If the ultimate goal of experiential marketing is to create a holistic experience that encourages co-creation from the customer, marketers must understand how to tap into all of the consumers senses through the experience they provide.

## **2.7 Chapter Conclusion**

The literature review highlighted the significance of the luxury travel industry and it brought to light its incredible growth in recent years. However, it also revealed the existing lack of understanding around luxury travel consumers and the values that are important to them. In an attempt to underpin this consumer group, the author studied luxury consumers in a broader sense. From this, the literature revealed there are two key consumer groups which need to be explored from a luxury travel perspective; traditional luxury consumers and aspirational luxury consumers. These consumers have been found to have many similarities in their values such as a need for status, hedonism and a requirement for quality, but from a travel perspective, it remains unclear what they value most from luxury travel experiences. The self-concept was found to be crucially important to luxury consumers and identifying whether luxury travel brands should focus on the actual or ideal self will allow them to create more tailored marketing messages.

From a co-creation perspective, the concept of experiential marketing appears as an obvious route to achieving the attention of luxury travel consumers, but little research, to the authors knowledge has been conducted on its importance to luxury travel brands. With hedonism,



pleasure and self-gratification all emerging as key drivers for luxury consumption, experiential marketing in a luxury travel context has huge potential to create memorable holidays for luxury consumers. Therefore, understanding how to deliver the best experience, in alignment with luxury travel consumers' needs and values is critically important.

While connections can be made between traditional luxury consumers and the context of the luxury travel industry, there is a gap around truly understanding luxury travel consumers and the drivers that motivate them to invest in luxury travel. Exploring these consumers will involve recognition to their sub groups and whether their drivers and values are aligned. With the luxury travel industry showing substantial growth to date, and with its projected growth, there is a need to understand luxury travel consumers in specific, greater detail.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will discuss in detail, the research objectives and supporting research questions that have arisen from the literature in chapter two. It will also discuss existing research philosophies before identifying and discussing the most suitable research route to explore and provide answers to the research questions. Additional to the theoretical understanding of research and the various methodological considerations, the chapter will also detail the research sample, limitations of the study, ethical considerations and the method of data analysis.

### **3.2 Research Objectives and Questions**

From reviewing the extensive literature on luxury consumers, it is evident that little research exists specifically around luxury travel consumers and their values and motivations. Existing studies do review elements of travel and tourism, such as hospitality services, but an overarching understanding of these consumers is lacking and, understanding the needs of these consumers is crucial for those operating within the industry. Therefore, this consumer behaviour research dissertation aimed to answer the following questions, in an attempt to fill the identified research gap.

#### **3.2.1 Research Objective and Question One**

The core research objective for this study, was to gain an understanding of Irish luxury travel consumers and the drivers and values that motivate them to invest in luxury travel experiences. Building on this, it will be important to identify whether their motivations come from a place of self-fulfilment or status seeking, i.e. are they motivated by intrinsic or extrinsic factors. Detailed studies by Vigneron and Johnson (1999) highlight that luxury consumers are driven by four value dimensions of which frame their consumption of

luxury. Functional value, financial value, symbolic value and hedonic value (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999) are studied in detail from a luxury product perspective, but from a service perspective have not been explored. Due to their consistent presence across the literature however, they are important to study from a luxury travel perspective. Building on this, the integration of the self-concept plays a role in motivating luxury consumers (Hudders, 2012), but it remains unclear to date, whether luxury travel consumers are motivated by the actual or the ideal self. In an attempt to underpin this research gap, the first objective of this study poses the first research question.

RQ1: What are the drivers that motivate traditional luxury travel consumers and aspirational luxury travel consumers to invest in luxury travel experiences?

A) What values are important to these consumers in the context of luxury travel?

1) How important is the role of hedonism?

2) What, if any functional values are expected from luxury travel experiences?

B) Does social status play a role in motivating this consumer group?

C) Which version of the self motivates luxury travel consumers and are they driven by intrinsic or extrinsic desires?

D) Are existing drivers the same for both traditional luxury travel consumers and aspirational luxury travel consumers?

### **3.2.2 Research Objective and Question Two**

The second research objective of this study aimed to examine the importance of the experience, in a luxury travel context. The literature revealed that experiential marketing is crucial to the tourism industry (Atwal & Williams, 2009) and a gap to explore this more specifically around luxury travel emerged. From understanding experiential marketing from a consumer perspective, companies operating in this

industry will be able to design service experiences to align with expectations.

RQ2: How important is the role of experiential marketing in a luxury travel context and what factors of the experience are most important?

A) What if any, negative service cues should be avoided in the experience delivery?

### **3.3 Research Onion**

In order to identify the most suitable research method for this study, the researcher referred to the Research Onion (Saunders, et al., 2016). The research onion presents an overview of the entire research journey from philosophies to data collection and analysis. It provides a step by step guide to choosing the correct research method, to suit a research question or hypothesis (Saunders, et al., 2016). The challenge for researchers however, is determining which route to pursue in order to develop the best research design for their topic (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Terminology and research steps from the research onion, will be discussed throughout this chapter.

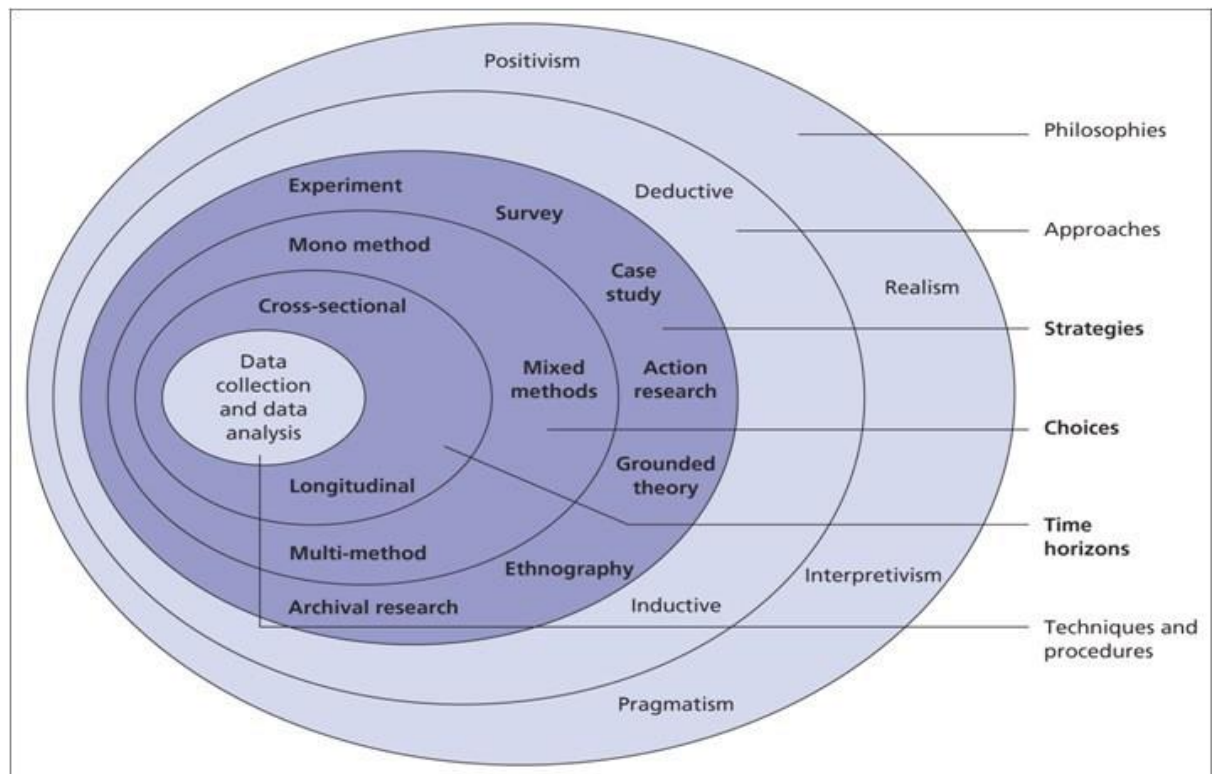


Figure 4: Research Onion.

Source: (Saunders, et al., 2016)

### 3.4 Research Philosophy

Before conducting a research project, it is important to understand what research philosophy is. Research philosophy can be defined as a ‘system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge’ (Saunders, et al., 2016). There are many research philosophies and it is important to note the differences between them (Saunders, et al., 2016). Assumptions are the key differentiator of research philosophies and these are based on a researcher’s beliefs, values and understandings (Saunders, et al., 2016). They are highly subjective but are present in all research processes (Hair, et al., 2008).

Ontology and epistemology are two key research philosophies (Saunders, et al., 2016). Ontology suits many studies, due to its assumptions about the nature of reality (Saunders, et al., 2016). Its approach raises questions about the way in which the world operates (Saunders, et al., 2012). Ontology believes that social reality is indeed

objective and external to the researcher in question (Collis & Hussey, 2009). However, when we consider the findings evident in the literature review, it is clear that luxury is highly subjective, and therefore an ontology approach to research does not suit in this instance. Exploring the various approaches in greater detail, comparisons between objectivism with subjectivism must also be made. Objectivism represents the position that external to social actors, social entities exist (Saunders, et al., 2012). While, subjectivism asserts that social phenomena are created from the perceptions and actions of social actors (Saunders, et al., 2012). Epistemology accepts assumptions about knowledge (Saunders, et al., 2016) and it is only concerned with what we accept as valid knowledge (Collis & Hussey, 2009). It focuses on how we communicate said knowledge to others, and it reviews what is considered acceptable, valid and legitimate knowledge (Saunders, et al., 2016). Positivism and interpretivism are two key epistemology research frameworks, which present quantitative and qualitative avenues. While positivism focusses on quantitative methods and data (Saunders, et al., 2016) interpretivism focusses on qualitative methods, which aim to understand the meanings behind human behaviors (Neuman, 2000).

### **3.4.1 Positivism vs Interpretivism**

Positivism is the traditional route to understanding a phenomenon and it has been widely used to study the sciences (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Positivism focuses on justifying knowledge without the influence of subjectivity (Bryman & Bell, 2003) and its methods include questionnaires and empirical experiments, both of which result in numerical data findings. Due to its numerical nature, it must be noted that positivist research approaches fail to acknowledge the underpinning of human motives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The belief that one objective truth exists (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), while possibly true in some cases, cannot be applied to all studies, as there

is no one objective reality or truth that exists around a phenomenon (Bryman & Bell, 2011). All realities are constructed through the social actors involved and are influenced by their interpretations of said realities.

Counteracting positivism is interpretivism, a research philosophy that is more understanding of the world we live in, as it allows for the understanding that research can be influenced by our social world (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Interpretivism challenges the beliefs of positivism and highlights the need for understanding humans and human behavior (Saunders, et al., 2012). The meaning of things is all relative (Brand, 2009) and interpretivism allows for an individual's personal experience to play a role in determining their actions (Saunders, et al., 2009). Linking this with the literature review, we can see that interpretivism is important in order to underpin the values which motivate luxury travel consumers. Luxury experiences and perceptions of luxury are difficult to underpin in numerical terms because luxury is highly subjective (Hennings, et al., 2015) and therefore understanding true meanings goes beyond positivist approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

### **3.4.2 Grounded Theory**

Working through the research onion, the methodological approach best suited to this interpretivist study is grounded theory. Grounded theory is used to develop inductive theories around a phenomenon (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Saunders et. Al (2012) refer to grounded theory as a method of inquiry. Developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory challenges extreme positivism as it was created to consider the social sciences and reality as something that is constructed through the actors in question and their experience (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). To critique this research method, Glaser & Strauss (1967) note that the emerging data should be free from subjectivity on behalf of the researcher, but like in all cases of

research, all data is subjective and this must be considered in this research project also. By commencing such an approach with a clear research purpose, the role of bias is reduced, allowing for best practises to occur (Saunders, et al., 2012).

In the context of an inductive, or qualitative study, research is less structured (Bryman & Bell, 2011) and may take the form of in-depth interviews, focus groups or participant observation. The challenge with interpretivist studies however, is to remain open minded to the data that presents itself (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Grounded theory, as an inductive research approach also allows you to continuously conduct qualitative research until you achieve theoretical saturation (Saunders, et al., 2012). Therefore, the following research design justification has been identified.

### **3.5 Research Design and Justification**

Considering these philosophies, it is evident that the route most suited to this study is the interpretivism route. When we consider the world in black and white, i.e. through the belief that all is rational, we fail to truly understand human behaviours as the complexity of such behaviours (Saunders, et al., 2012). An interpretivist research route, allows the researcher to enter the world of their subjects in an attempt to gain better understanding of who they are and what they are about (Saunders, et al., 2012). Everyone's world is unique and therefore needs to be understood in-depth and subjectively (Saunders, et al., 2009). The literature revealed that luxury consumers are emotional buyers (Verissimo & Loureiro, 2012), therefore it is important to understand their internal motivations to invest in luxury travel experiences. Quantitative research methods do not provide the opportunity to understand human subjective nature, as quantitative studies attempt to measure data precisely through numerical means (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). In contrast, qualitative research is defined as 'a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather



than quantification in the collection and analysis of data' (Bryman, 2008). With quantitative research focussing on a deductive approach that uses data to test theory (Saunders, et al., 2012), the human emotion and values may get lost in translation if used as the method for this research project. Therefore, qualitative research will allow the researcher to understand consumer perceptions and also the meanings behind them.

### **3.5.1 In-Depth Interviews**

On review of the various forms of qualitative research, semi-structured, or in-depth interviews were identified as being the logical route to meet the research objectives. Interviews can be defined as a 'method of data collection in which one person asks questions of another person, either face to face, or by telephone' (Polit & Beck, 2005). An important consideration for in-depth semi-structured interviews is that their more natural conversation approach may require a change in consistency of questions per each interview (Saunders, et al., 2012). Therefore, staying on topic throughout the entire research process is a key objective when pursuing this route.

The natural progression of in-depth interviews is a form of exploratory research, which allow for the generation of insights around a topic, or problem, with the aim of creating a solution (Hair, et al., 2010). Semi-structured interviews are designed to answer outlined research questions, but give the researcher the opportunity to pose open ended questions to the participants in an attempt to expose their true motivations and values (Bryman & Bell, 2011). While interviews are an excellent means of gathering in-depth data, a disadvantage of conducting this type of research is the amount of time that they take to conduct, capture and assess data (Bryman & Bell, 2007). However, while focus groups for example may take up less time, in-depth interviews suit this study due to the topic of research being sensitive from a financial status point of view. The intimacy of

one to one interviews does however, allow for a rapport and sense of trust to develop between the interviewer and interviewee (Saunders, et al., 2012), which will no doubt benefit the study.

While other forms of research such as questionnaires and focus groups are heavily used in similar studies, these routes of data collection were not considered appropriate due to the nature of this study as consumer's emotions around luxury are quite complex (Chen & Lamberti, 2015). Questionnaires will not allow the researcher to truly understand the underlying motives and desires of luxury travel consumers, while focus groups require participants to share information within a group, which may not be suitable when discussing high value purchases such as luxury holidays.

The decision to choose semi-structured in-depth interviews for this research project also considered the following key reasoning's:

- 1) As luxury holidays are a high value purchase, consumers may be more willing to share personal information on a one to one basis.
- 2) Due to the nature of consumers generally associated with luxury travel, participants may have very busy schedules and it may prove difficult to hold focus groups or other forms of observational research. One to one interviews therefore allow the researcher to meet with each interviewee, at a time and location that is convenient for them.

This interpretivist research approach will allow for rapport to develop between the researcher and interviewee, which may encourage a connection of trust and the sharing of more in-depth information (Saunders, et al., 2016).

### **3.6 Sample**

Choosing an appropriate sample for a study is an important task and there are two key sample selection routes that researchers can choose to pursue. Probability sampling, also referred to as representative sampling is often associated with quantitative surveys (Saunders, et al., 2016). The sample selected through this approach is used to represent a target population (Saunders, et al., 2016) where data is generally collected through the use of surveys and questionnaires, before being presented for analysis in a numerical form. In contrast, non-probability sampling, also known as non-random sampling, allows you to be more specific when selecting your sample (Saunders, et al., 2016). While this sample selection often suits qualitative studies, it is important to note that it is considered highly subjective in nature, which may impact results, a challenge researchers face.

Due to the nature of this research project, despite its criticisms, the researcher chose the sample for this project through the approach of non-probability sampling, of which three types exist. A purposive sample is a sample where the researcher simply chooses participants that will best help achieve the research objectives (Saunders, et al., 2012). A snowball sample results after the initial sample selection brings forward additional contacts with other similar members to the original sample (Bryman & Bell, 2007). While a quota sample is used to reflect a population in terms of gender, age etc. (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Choosing the correct form of sampling is important because it provides a valid alternative to a general census of information (Saunders, et al., 2012). However, creating a sample for a study can be quite expensive (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

In this instance, the researcher pursued a purposive sample route. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to choose cases which best enabled them to answer the research questions and to meet objectives (Saunders, et al., 2012). While relevant to this study, purposive sampling cannot be statistically representative of a total population

(Saunders, et al., 2012). This research project included five in-depth interviews, of which three took place with traditional luxury travel consumers and two with aspirational luxury travel consumers. Below is a detailed overview of this sample.

### 3.6.1 Consumer Participants

The sample selection chosen for this research project was based on a combination of traditional luxury travel consumers and also aspiration luxury travel consumers. The research aims to attempt to provide a robust understanding of luxury consumers, in the context of luxury travel experiences, through the approach of a small, detailed sample size. The below chart showcases the profiles of these consumers.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Consumer Type</b>
Participant 1	Female	52	Psychotherapist	Traditional Luxury Travel Consumer
Participant 2	Male	48	Managing Director	Traditional Luxury Travel Consumer
Participant 3	Female	39	Marketing Manager	Traditional Luxury Travel Consumer
Participant 4	Male	34	Ecommerce Manager	Aspirational Luxury Travel Consumer
Participant 5	Female	47	Travel Writer	Aspirational Luxury Travel Consumer

Five participants as outlined above, took part in in-depth interviews between the dates of 24<sup>th</sup> July 2019 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 2019. These interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes per interview. Each participant was advised that they would be anonymous in the project and they each confirmed their involvement in the study, by signing a waiver before the commencement of the interview.

### **3.7 Protocol for Data Collection**

Data collection is a key aspect of any research project (Bryman & Bell, 2011). There are many moments during an in-depth interview where collecting data will be advantageous to the final findings and conclusions (Saunders, et al., 2016). A key success factor considered by the researcher was the importance of question design. Surveys and structured interviews use specific questions (Saunders, et al., 2016), which do not suit this type of research project. Therefore, probing questions were used to explore in-depth responses in a way that specific, closed questions do not allow (Bryman & Bell, 2011). These open format questions allowed participants to define and describe their experiences or feelings around an event (Saunders, et al., 2016). Each of the interviews were recorded on an audio device and the researcher also took extensive notes on body language, mood and other social queues that were observed during the research process. Self-memos were also important to the researcher, as they allowed occurring thoughts during the interview process to be noted for use in the final findings (Saunders, et al., 2016).

During the research process, the author followed best practises by encouraging each participant to tell his or her story in their own words through the use of open-ended questions, while also keeping them on topic (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Building on this, the author was aware of the intensive nature of collecting data via a grounded theory route (Collis & Hussey, 2009), so therefore ensured that adequate time was given to conduct the interviews, make notes and

transcribe the interviews in an attempt to ensure all data was noted accordingly for analysis.

### **3.8 Method of Data Analysis**

Qualitative studies generate a considerable amount of data (Collis & Hussey, 2009) and therefore choosing the correct data analysis approach is extremely important in order to extract findings. Considering the chosen interpretivist research approach of in-depth interviews, the analysis method best suited to review the collected data is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis requires a researcher to search through their collected data in an attempt to identify themes and patterns, which can then be coded for interpretation (Saunders, et al., 2016). While thematic analysis is a popular data analysis approach, it is criticised for its subjectivity and the possibility that the context of a quotation may be lost, or misinterpreted (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Some forms of thematic analysis can convert qualitative data into quantifiable data but in this instance, the researcher chose not to pursue this route because at the core of this research study is essentially understanding an element of human behaviour and therefore a model and approach leaning towards social sciences is more suitable (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Due to the decision to use open, probing questions, the researcher was able to extract a large volume of data from each of the interviews. Each of the interviews, during the data analysis process were transcribed into a Word document for theming. The recordings were listened to numerous times, to ensure no key points of interest were missed. The transcriptions were then aligned with the additional memos and notes taken by the researcher during the interviews. While quantitative research methods provide for a larger scale study, the small number in this qualitative instance, allowed the researcher to truly analyse all information in fine detail, which provides for great insight and knowledge (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Quantitative

research would not have considered unspoken social cues in this approach and therefore, it would have removed the emotional human layer of the findings. Content analysis is widely used by those who conduct qualitative research and therefore it is a strong route to analysis (Collis & Hussey, 2009). The process involves the researcher identifying common words or phrases throughout the data collected which are then used to determine common themes or topics (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Frequency of occurrence and other factors can also be adopted but in the instance of this topic of research, identifying the true values and drivers which motivate luxury travel consumers was more important. These themes coincide with the research objectives and questions outlined in this chapter, and therefore also feature sub-themes in places.

Once the interview transcripts were created, the process of theming commenced. The patterns which emerged from the data were reviewed in regard to the existing literature and they form the basis of the next chapters of this report. To summarize, the thematic coding which took place allowed the researcher to spot important and repetitive comments which were grouped together in an attempt to identify recurring and important themes. The data did reveal some major reoccurring themes while also bringing light to sub-themes. These were grouped in accordance and alignment with the initial research objectives and are highlighted below, before their discussion in chapter four.

### 3.8.1 Research Objectives and Emerging Themes

Emerging themes and their associated colours used during analysis:

- Drivers/Values (pink)
- Hedonism (orange)
- Status (blue)
- Functional (dark green)
- Financial (red)
- Brand (bright green)
- Experiential (yellow)
- Negative Experiences (brown)

<b>Research Objective One:</b> <b>Understand the drivers that motivate traditional luxury travel consumers and aspirational luxury travel consumers to invest in luxury travel experiences.</b>
<b>Emerging Themes:</b>
<b>Hedonism / Relaxation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Luxury travel consumers are hedonistic and crave relaxation.</li></ul>
<b>Quality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Luxury travel consumers expect high quality and functionality in return for high a high investment made.</li></ul>
<b>Value Driven</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Luxury travel consumers are value and price driven.</li></ul>
<b>Non-Status Seeking Consumers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Luxury travel consumers are not driven by status.</li></ul>
<b>Intrinsic Motivations / Actual Self</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Luxury travel consumers are intrinsically motivated, i.e. driven by their actual self.</li></ul>
<b>Motivating drivers are aligned for both consumer groups.</b>



<b>Research Objective Two:</b>
<b>Understand the importance of experiential marketing in a luxury travel context and understand what is expected from such a service.</b>
<b>Emerging Themes:</b>
<b>VIP Treatment</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exceptional VIP service and feeling special is expected.</li> </ul>
<b>Efficiency</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficient handling of issues is expected.</li> </ul>
<b>Ease of service is crucial.</b>
<b>Escapism and relaxation are key elements of luxury travel</b>
<b>Emotive experiences count.</b>

### 3.9 Research Limitations

A key limitation for this study, while it provided an opportunity, was the limited amount of research on the luxury travel industry and its consumers as a whole. This research gap, did require the author to link various concepts to each other in an attempt to paint a picture at the literature review stage. While this created a gap in the research for this project, it did create a need for the author to have to study other industries and dedicate additional time to existing research in an attempt to cross-reference findings.

Another limitation which affected the study was the existing luxury consumer frameworks. While still relevant in many ways, the existing luxury consumer frameworks are also somewhat outdated due to the lack of mention or consideration of the digital era we live in and its impact on consumer behaviour. An opportunity exists for academic researchers to review existing models and to update them to align with today's modern world. The current models, while discussed are not considerate of today's consumer age.

From a data collection perspective, the researcher was unable to consider a large selection of interviews as part of the research process, due to time constraints. Therefore, it must be noted that the findings of this study only reflect a small sample of the Irish luxury travel market, but they provide the foundations for further exploration.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

The author has followed all ethical guidelines in accordance with the National College of Ireland and offered her promise of complete confidentiality of identity to the consumer participants. Participants were advised that the study was taking place as part of a MSC in Marketing course and that, if they so wish, they can receive copies of their transcripts, recordings and notes. Participants also signed a waiver to confirm that their quotes and input can be used in the study, on a confidential basis.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

This chapter will outline the findings from the five in-depth interviews which were conducted between July 24<sup>th</sup> and August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2019. The findings will highlight the perceptions of both traditional luxury consumers and aspirational luxury consumers to showcase whether an alignment in consumption is evident or not. The chapter will follow the guidance of the previously discussed research objectives and present the findings relevant to each of the research questions.

### **4.1 Research Objective One and Findings**

The core research objective for this study was to identify the drivers that motivate Irish consumers to invest in luxury travel experiences, while also determining whether these values are intrinsic or extrinsic in nature. The literature revealed that many factors such as hedonism, social status and functional values are often influencers of general luxury consumption, therefore the aim of this research project was to explore drivers in a luxury travel perspective. On review of the data collected, the emerging themes around drivers, values and the self-concept were as follows:

<b>Emerging Themes:</b>
<b>Hedonism / Relaxation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luxury travel consumers are hedonistic and crave relaxation.</li> </ul>
<b>Quality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luxury travel consumers expect high quality and functionality in return for high a high investment made.</li> </ul>
<b>Value Driven</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luxury travel consumers are value and price driven.</li> </ul>
<b>Non-Status Seeking Consumers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luxury travel consumers are not driven by status.</li> </ul>
<b>Intrinsic Motivations / Actual Self</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luxury travel consumers are intrinsically motivated, i.e. driven by their actual self.</li> </ul>
<b>Motivating drivers are aligned for both consumer groups.</b>

What is interesting about these emerging themes is that they were evident across all interviews for both traditional luxury travel consumers and aspirational luxury travel consumers. While one group may have access to a greater level of luxury experiences, the same motivators existed for both. The following sections will discuss each theme and finding in detail.

#### **4.1.1 Luxury Travel Consumers are Hedonistic and Crave Relaxation**

A major theme emerging from the research was around the need for feeling indulged by oneself, especially in return for working hard. The emerging data showcased that hedonism is the main driver for luxury travel consumption, because it gives these consumers the opportunities to unwind and relax in a luxury environment.

One participant notes luxury as:

*'Luxury is stress free, it is a break. You know, I work hard enough, my husband works hard enough, we don't need to have to work trying to go on holidays.'*

*(Participant 3, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

Another participant notes how luxury holidays make them feel:

*'Relaxed. Secure. Worry-free. Special. Happy. You feel different, you feel like you're on a proper holiday. You're not rushed around. The environment you're in is usually always very chill and it is so nice to feel that every hour of the day. I love when the atmosphere is always relaxed, I feel I get more from my holiday.'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

Taking care of oneself while travelling was also another motivator within the area of hedonism, with one participant noting:

*'I'm too old for sitting down the back (on an aircraft) and luckily, I can afford business class.'*

*(Participant 2, male, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

The literature noted that hedonic consumers often aim to reward themselves and their own gratification and from the data, this looks to be true in the context of luxury travel. The alignment of the findings with the literature will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

#### **4.1.2 Luxury Travel Consumers expect High Quality and Functionality in return for a High Investment Made**

Existing literature revealed that luxury consumers expect superior quality from luxury products, in return for a high investment made. And, from the collected data, it is evident that superior quality is also important in the context of luxury travel. Findings highlight that quality is expected alongside of extra touches to enhance the luxury travel experience. The following quotes highlight what luxury travel consumers consider to be key from a quality perspective.

*‘Quality of the room, how comfortable the bed is, the kind of sheets and pillows. The products in the bathroom, the availability of water in the room. I don’t believe you should have to go out of your way to get fresh drinking water in your room, or be charged for it.’*

*(Participant 1, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

*‘Within the room, whether in a hotel or on a cruise, I would expect the quality of the bed and pillows so important because I expect excellent sleep quality. High quality towels and robes are also essential, as are good luxury branded products in the shower. Cleanliness of course is key.’*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

*'Good beds, decent sized bathrooms with separate bath and shower and the rooms must have good storage. I also hate shower curtains. Proper air-conditioning systems are also so important.'*

*(Participant 2, male, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

*'I enjoy having a very comfy seat when flying long distances that means you arrive at your destination rested.'*

*(Participant 1, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

The participants on a resort level also touched upon the importance of amenities with dining being a recurring necessity.

*'Dining options, fitness centre, an on-site spa are all important factors which influence my choice'*

*(Participant 2, male, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

When discussing the Sibeut brand, participant one spoke about food as being one of the key reasons they choose to stay loyal to this luxury hotel brand:

*'Much of the food is local and in some of their properties, they produce their own wine.'*

*(Participant 1, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

The role of quality is interesting in the context of luxury travel as it overlaps greatly with the literature on experiential marketing. Quality, while noted in the previous quotes predominately focusses on the hardware of a luxury service, the lack thereof such quality surroundings, would impact the experience for the customer, therefore highlighting their interdependency.

#### **4.1.3 Luxury Travel Consumers are Value and Price Driven**

The literature highlighted that aspirational luxury travel consumers are price driven as they aim to invest a large proportion of their income on luxury consumption, even if outside of their financial capabilities. However, while the data found this to be true, what is also interesting is that traditional luxury travel consumers, while wealthier, still consider the cost of their getaways and often refer to online websites such as booking.com in an attempt to get better value for money. This finding showcases another alignment among the two consumer groups as their path to purchase habits are the same.

*'We look for deals and value when it comes to luxury. We judge the right price based on what's included in the holiday and the standard of experience we will get for our money. We would have a cut-off point then and just say no, if we feel we're going to high. We also consider the amount of spending money we would need on top of the holiday.'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*



*‘Price and value for money is so important. We don’t want to be ripped off. We set ourselves a budget and then we determine what we can get for that budget. If we wanted to upgrade our room, we always review the difference and sometimes it is worth going above budget to get a better experience or room.’*

*(Participant 3, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

*‘Yes 100%, especially when I am booking business class flights.’*

*(Participant 2, male, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

Under the price and value umbrella, it was also evident that both luxury travel consumer audiences are heavy internet users and do review various websites and brands in an attempt to source the best value for their money.

*‘We do some research online and find accommodation options. Once we decide we want to make a booking, we sometimes go directly to the hotel, other times we use something like booking.com.’*

*(Participant 1, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

*'We prefer to use a travel agent because of the bonding and protection of our money, especially because we tend to travel to the USA, Caribbean and Mexico a lot. But we do book online as well for European breaks and we always look for the best possible price'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

*'For the likes of London, we do book our 5-star hotels through booking.com all the time ad we find it great. They always have amazing specials on luxury hotels, so we always keep an eye out on there.'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

Interestingly enough, considering the price driven nature of luxury travel consumers, hotel deal websites such as [groupon.com](http://groupon.com) and [livingsocial.com](http://livingsocial.com) are not widely used by this audience. One participant noted that they actively use these sites:

*'Yes, but only for accommodation. I have booked many luxury Irish hotels on Groupon and Living Social.'*

*(Participant 5, female, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

However, participant 5 seems to be in the minority, with other interviewees showing a lack of interest in this form of booking, even though they consider themselves to be heavily influenced by price.

*‘No not really as I travel at certain times, so I wouldn’t have the flexibility that is required with these’.*

*(Participant 2, male, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

*‘We would review them and do research from them, but again, we tend to book through an agent or online.’*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

The importance of price and the considerable use of the internet as a planning tool among these consumers highlights a need for a modernised model of luxury consumer behaviour, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

#### **4.1.4 Luxury Travel Consumers are not Driven by Status**

The literature revealed that status and symbolism are rooted in luxury consumption but little research was done around luxury travel as a motivator for status driven needs. From conducting in-depth interviews, it is evident that the need for status does not exist among luxury travel consumers in this instance. Unlike a designer bag or watch, it is difficult to showcase a luxury travel experience, unless doing so via social media. However, even though an opportunity exists through this platform to highlight the investment made by these consumers, they do not embrace social media for such activities.

*'I very rarely share anything online to be honest'  
and 'I don't like to be perceived as a show off'.*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel  
consumer)*

*'I'm very wary of showing the luxury side of my  
holidays. I think people are very judgemental on the  
internet and I would never put up posts about flying  
business class. I've flown it so many times and I  
would never put a picture on my Instagram of me  
flying business class. I feel like people will judge  
me.'*

*(Participant 3, female, traditional luxury travel  
consumer)*

Participant 1, simply replied 'none' when asked about which social media they use to showcase their luxury holidays. On the other end of the spectrum, two of the interviewees did mention sharing content online but more so for informative purposes:

*'Yes, I do (share), a lot of people want to see the  
luxury side of travel.'*

*(Participant 2, male, traditional luxury travel  
consumer)*

*'I love providing information on where we are. I am  
travel writer; therefore, I share all sides of my  
experiences (including luxury).'*

*(Participant 5, female, aspirational luxury travel  
consumer)*

These responses are all quite similar as they bring light to the fact that luxury travel consumers are different from regular luxury consumers, in that status is not important to them.

#### **4.1.5 Luxury Travel Consumers are Intrinsically Motivated, i.e. Driven by their Actual Self**

The participants have shown collectively that they are driven by intrinsic motivations and their actual present self. When reviewing the data from both consumer groups point of view, an alignment in the motivating self-concept is evident. Traditional luxury travel consumers feel that luxury is very much in existence throughout their everyday life and they choose to invest in luxury travel to reward their present self.

*'It is a part of my life, but it is not taken for granted. I have worked to reach my goals and I intend to enjoy my life. Luxury helps me to do that.'*

*(Participant 2, male, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

*'I think luxury is a part of everyday life.'*

*(Participant 1, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

*'I am driven more by my actual present self. The feeling I get when I'm very happy in a venue i.e. a hotel is a feeling I enjoy because I feel very present and alive.'*

*(Participant 1, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

From an aspirational luxury travel consumer perspective, the emerging theme was more difficult to define as the responses were somewhat varied. However, in the end, it was evident that intrinsic motivations were the key driver.

Participant 5 does not consider luxury to be important to them, but they embrace luxury travel for the experience and to satisfy their actual self:

*'It is all about my actual, present self. I love spoiling myself and my family with luxury getaways. Sometimes they are booked last minute. As I said already, I am impulsive! They are a treat for us and the kids love it. It's what it is all about'*

*(Participant 5, female, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

While, participant 4 is very much aware of their actual present self and taking care of said self, the opportunity to invest in greater levels of luxury as he progresses through life was noted, i.e. he aspires to his ideal self. The literature noted in detail that generally consumers are more driven by one or the other, but this does not appear to be the case in the instance of luxury travel consumers. Building on this, the existing literature also notes those consumers who are motivated by their ideal self, crave status, recognition and acceptance by higher social status, these factors do not appear to be personality traits of these consumers. Interview extracts below from participant 4 highlight how both actual and ideal self can both align, but both be driven from intrinsic desires.

*'It is definitely something I aspire to. I still consider myself working class, but where we have that room to spend on a nice luxury holiday we do.'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

Participant 4 also made reference to aspiring to flying business class as he becomes more successful in life, directly the interviewer to revisit him with the survey in ten years.

*'I would if I could (fly business class). It's something we have started to look at but we're not quite ready to commit to the cost yet. Down the line it will be something I know we will sway towards. Ask me this again in ten years!'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

*'It is about me in the here and now. It is not a perception thing for me and I usually switch off my social media when I am away. It (luxury) is about switching off for me and relaxing in a stress-free environment. It is about that time for my wife and I to relax and enjoy the present moment.'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

The above quotations from participant 4, while they mention future self, i.e. the ideal self, they still clearly still stem from intrinsic desires to reward oneself. To conclude on the motivating self, it is evident from the data that both groups of luxury travel consumers, area are intrinsically motivated, even if reaching for more through their progression of life.

#### **4.1.6 Motivating Drivers are Aligned for both Consumer Groups**

It is evident from the findings that both consumer groups, i.e. traditional luxury travel consumers and aspirational luxury travel consumers are in the context of luxury travel experiences, both driven by the same values and version of the self.

*‘I like being spoilt when I am on holidays, so luxury helps with that.’*

*(Participant 5, female, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

‘Luxury means being well looked after without feeling smothered.’

*(Participant 1, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

*‘I love when I feel like I have earned this. I have worked for this, so yes definitely satisfaction. I find it very hard to unwind and it takes me a while to get into that zone so it is great when I do.’*

*(Participant 3, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*



*'It is about me in the here and now. We need to relax as people. We can't always be working. We need to be able to switch off and just let the mind go and that's where my choice of luxury travel helps. It is not a perception thing for me.'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

As evident in the previous quotes, both groups of luxury travel consumers are evidently aligned in terms of why they embrace such holidays. This finding is interesting as it somewhat contradicts what the literature has said to date about these consumer groups having different motivators. This will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

## **4.2 Research Objective Two and Findings**

The second research objective was to understand and explore the importance of the experiential marketing, in a luxury travel context in an attempt to determine what is expected from a luxury brand operating in this industry.

From the data, it is evident that the experience that luxury travel offers is at the core of why both traditional luxury travel consumers and aspiration luxury travel consumers invest so heavily in luxury holidays. The importance of experiential marketing is so critically important for luxury travel consumers that as a theme in itself, it was a reoccurring topic throughout all interviews conducted. It emerged as an interdependent factor, in alignment with hedonism and showcased itself as the core reason for investing in luxury travel. The themes surrounding the experiential side of luxury travel which emerged through the findings were as follows:

<b>Emerging Themes:</b>
<b>VIP Treatment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exceptional VIP service and feeling special is expected.</li> </ul>
<b>Efficiency</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficient handling of issues is expected.</li> </ul>
<b>Ease of service is crucial.</b>
<b>Escapism and relaxation are key elements of luxury travel.</b>
<b>Emotive experiences count.</b>

#### 4.2.1 Exceptional VIP Service and Feeling Special is Expected

Exceptional VIP service and feeling special emerged as the theme in the context of experiential marketing. With both groups of luxury travel consumers being driven by intrinsic needs, this comes as no surprise. These hedonist consumers have collectively highlighted that they expect to feel special from the moment their journey begins.

*‘I like the Beacon Hotel in New York as the General Manager Tom Travers is always very accommodating to me.’*

*(Participant 2, male, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

*‘Yeah I think greeting someone by name is so nice. It shows you know the guest. On cruises, you sit at a specific table for dinner and they always remember your drink order and they do have it ready for you which I think is an excellent level of service.’*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

*'I have noticed a massive difference between four and five-star airlines. I loved Qatar Airways. Their dining on demand experience is just incredible and the flight attendants knew my name when I boarded which is such a brilliant touch.'*

*(Participant 5, female, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

#### **4.2.2 Efficient Handling of Issues is Expected**

Another important theme which emerged from the data was how efficiently handled issues can make or break an experience with a luxury travel brand. While experiential marketing is often discussed in the literature in terms of the best practises to create an excellent experience, it must be noted that handling bad experiences is also part of the process from the point of view of the consumer.

*'In November, we went to Mexico and we stayed in a Secrets Resort Hotel and we had an issue with our room being cleaned that was ongoing. We mentioned it at reception and the gentleman profusely apologized and gave us free spa passes with complimentary massages to make up for the mix up. He solved the problem as well and our happiness on the holiday was his first priority. That is what you call an exceptional luxury experience. I'd stay in the resort again because of that, even though we had an issue.'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

This mirrors similar feedback from other participants around handling issues during a luxury holiday:

*'I do expect any issues are sorted straight away.'*

*(Participant 3, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

*'Staff should be trained to say "I don't know I will find out for you", rather than bluffing. Its ok not to know.'*

*(Participant 1, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

The previous quotes showcase how luxury travel consumers are understanding of services not being carried out as planned, but they do expect such issues to be handled in an efficient manner. This of course can be linked back to these consumers expecting to feel like a VIP on their luxury travel holidays.

#### **4.2.3 Ease of Service is Crucial**

Ease of service also emerged as a key theme around experiential marketing. Due to busy lifestyles, luxury travel consumers want to encounter minimal stress while on their holidays. They appreciate private check-in areas, no queuing at airports and additional service providers such as butlers, to help them on their holidays.

*'I enjoy ease of check-in.'*

*(Participant 1, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

*'Luxury to me means hassle free.'*

*(Participant 2, male, traditional luxury travel  
consumer)*

*'My wife and I only get away for one nice luxury  
break a year, so when I go away, I want to  
everything to be stress free because we work hard  
enough.'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel  
consumer)*

*'I despise queuing in general so for me, luxury  
travel is about avoiding queues and busy areas in  
airports. Luxury travel means you don't have to do  
the hard bits. Its stress free, it is a break.'*

*(Participant 3, female, traditional luxury travel  
consumer)*

*'(Our butler) brought us to our own private check  
in area beside our suite.'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel  
consumer)*

When designing a luxury service experience, brands must consider how to make the entire experience as easy and stress free as possible in order to attract luxury travel consumers.

#### **4.2.4 Escapism and Relaxation are Key Elements of Luxury Travel**

It is evident from the data that achieving escapism in a relaxed, peaceful environment is key for luxury travel consumers. The below quotations from the data highlight the importance of relaxation and escapism on holidays. They showcase the need for peace and tranquillity on a luxury holiday.

*'I don't like noisy pool games or entertainment so I tend to avoid those sorts of getaways.'*

*(Participant 5, female, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

*'I like my holiday to feel slow. I don't enjoy feeling rushed or being busy on my holidays. I like to relax and read and I want somewhere that gives me the space to do this.'*

*(Participant 1, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

Building on this, it was also evident that the environment of the luxury service, for example the hotel setting is incredibly important to these consumers and while 'contemporary' aesthetics are important, it was noted that 'bling' and a 'party scene' would be unacceptable from a luxury brand.

*'I also love contemporary modern decor and luxury hotels usually have this.'*

*(Participant 2, male, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

*'Any sense of bling would turn me off. I like something that is low key.'*

*(Participant 1, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

*'If you pay your money, you don't want to be going away to an area or resort that's packed with party goers or spring breakers. It is my worst nightmare.'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

One final example of what luxury induced escapism looks like is from participant 4, who discussed why he chooses to pay more for a cabin with a private balcony on a luxury cruise.

*'Having a balcony cabin means you have your own personal outdoor space which is so important to relax. Its lovely. A cruise isn't something you do every year so it's worth the extra few pounds to have the best cabin you can, where you can relax and just be.'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

This quotation again shows the need for relaxing in a quiet ambience away from noise or distraction. A common theme across the findings, of which will be discussed and contrasted with existing models on experiential marketing in the next chapter.

#### 4.2.5 Emotive Experiences Count

Schmitt (1999) noted the importance of emotions in experiential marketing. He believed that experiences are subjective and all relate to human senses as they touch upon a person's ability to feel, think and relate. It was evident in the data that the extraordinary experiences enjoyed by participants left an impression because the luxury brand in question, went above and beyond to appeal to their emotions.

*'We arrived back to our accommodation to find a hot bath running with rose petals and a glass of champagne waiting.'*

*(Participant 5, female, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

*'We got champagne and strawberries in our suite, with a congratulations card. They even had a happy honeymoon sash across our door for our arrival with balloons. We felt very special and like our business was appreciated.'*

*(Participant 4, Male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

These experiences are the foundations for a truly memorable holiday and it is evident that the aim for luxury travel consumers, both groups is to be well looked after. This is evident because when asked about emotions they feel during a luxury holiday, they quoted:

*'I would say happiness, privileged, joy, contentment.'*

*(Participant 5, female, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*



*‘Satisfaction. I love when I feel like I have earned this. I have worked for this.’*

*(Participant 3, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

*‘Relaxed. Secure. Worry-free. Special. Happy.’*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

*‘When it is right, I feel extremely relaxed.’*

*(Participant 1, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

*‘Relaxed and happy.’*

*(Participant 2, Male, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

### 4.3 Summary of Key Findings

It is evident from the research that luxury travel consumers do not align with traditional luxury consumers who are heavy investors of luxury products. Their drivers and values, while somewhat aligned, fail to correspond in terms of the need for status and social acceptance. Luxury travel consumers appear to be entirely intrinsically motivated. They are emotional, hedonistic consumers who crave an escape from hectic everyday life. This study, which focussed on two variances of luxury travel consumers, those being traditional luxury travel consumers and aspirational luxury travel consumers showcased that an alignment between both groups exists in terms of their drivers and values, with no differences evident.

They place a lot of emphasis on the experience they receive from luxury travel brands and consider noisy, flash experiences or marketing to be a turn off. In fact, it is evident that low-key luxury where they can unwind and be present is what they expect from such holidays. This coupled with VIP treatment, excellent service from employees and the acknowledgement and quick action on any issues that may arise are all considered to be key from an experimental perspective. Functionality and quality is also crucially important to luxury travel consumers, both in a hard ware sense and also in terms of extra touches, such as complimentary bottled water. Both groups are considerate of financial commitment and actively seek value when booking their luxury getaways. The internet in this sense plays a crucially important role for these consumers.

To conclude on the key findings, it is also important to further highlight the lack of status driven needs among the group. Minimal social media presence was noted and some participants even felt under scrutiny of being considered '*show offs*' within their social circles. Another fact which highlights their investment in such experiences is purely for their own pleasure and enjoyment.

The data and themes which emerged from the research resulted in some excellent considerations for brands operating in this industry. These will be discussed in alignment with existing literature in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

This chapter aims to align the key findings from chapter four with the literature in an attempt to draw conclusions on similarities, differences and any new considerations which are important in this context. The discussion will be follow the guidance of the original research objectives.

The overall objective of this research project was to identify the drivers which motivate Irish consumers to invest in luxury travel experiences, while also determining whether these values are intrinsic or extrinsic in nature. The findings revealed that Irish luxury travel consumers are indeed intrinsically motivated and are driven by hedonism, relaxation and achieving escapism. In confliction with existing literature, the findings also show that luxury travel consumers are not motivated by status or position among society, they are emotional beings who seek to reward themselves with such experiences.

The second objective was to understand and explore the importance of experiential marketing in the context of luxury travel, as such a practise is highlighted in the literature as being crucial to the travel industry. In alignment with the literature, the findings confirmed that its presence is indeed crucial in the context of luxury. The engagement with experiential marketing was evident throughout the entire interview process with all participants alluding to the fact that the experience is what encourages them to book such high-cost holidays. Excellent experiential marketing in a luxury context gives these consumers the opportunity to reward themselves and achieve the escapism and relaxation they so desire.

These emerging themes from the findings chapter will guide the following discussion.

### **5.1 Luxury Travel Consumer's Drivers and Values**

Vigneron & Johnson (1999) identified functional value, financial value, symbolic value and hedonic value as four key value dimensions which are equally important to luxury consumers. While their studies were in-depth and provided excellent building blocks for understanding luxury consumers, they focussed their studies on analysing these values from a luxury product perspective. This approach presented the author with the opportunity to understand their importance of each of these values to luxury travel consumers, while also considering additional drivers.

While traditionally luxury consumers were considered to be motivated by predominately status and position in society (Canziani, et al., 2016), from the findings it is evident that luxury travel consumers seem to be the exception to the belief that status is the key motivator for investing in luxury consumption. Luxury travel consumers are predominately driven to invest in such experiences because they are motivated by their own intrinsic, hedonic values. The data revealed that these consumers crave an escape from their busy lives and find that luxury travel allows them to achieve this escape.

*'Luxury travel is stress free, it is a break.'*

*(Participant 3, female, traditional luxury travel  
consumer)*

*'It is about switching off for me and relaxing in a  
stress-free environment.'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel  
consumer)*

Building upon the importance of hedonism, the literature highlighted that luxury travel consumers are motivated by indulgence and pleasure (Yang & Mattila, 2016) and by solely rewarding themselves and their own gratification (Liang, et. Al., 2017). This was shown to be true in the findings.

*'I really enjoy the extras that flying business comes with. Like lounge access, comfortable seats and then I enjoy staying in a nice hotel.'*

*(Participant 2, male, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

Fain. Et Al. (2015), identified luxury consumers as being emotional beings who are heavily influenced by their emotions and lifestyle and the research findings confirmed this also. Alongside of hedonism, functionality in a quality perspective was also considered very important by participants with all five confirming that they expect *'comfortable beds'*, *'great food'*, and *'modern bathrooms'* as standard. Having *'complimentary water'* in rooms and also *'minimal noise'* in rooms were also noted as key quality aspects. While these findings may seem obvious, lack thereof from luxury brands in the past encouraged these elements to be highlighted by participants. The need for excellent functionality and high quality physical evidence is key in order to justify the high investment made (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

Building on this point, it was interesting to find that the traditional luxury travel consumers were just as price conscious when planning their luxury holidays, as the aspirational luxury travel consumers. Walley, et al. (2013) noted that price was not a factor in the context of luxury as luxury consumers have at their disposal, great wealth. However, it is evident that price is indeed important to luxury travel

consumers with traditional luxury travel consumers noting that; *'Even though I can afford to fly business class, I will still always look for deals'* (participant 2, male, traditional luxury travel consumer), *'I'm savvy, I do my research'* (participant 3, female, traditional luxury travel consumer) and *'Yes price is a consideration'* (participant 1, female, traditional luxury travel consumer). This feedback from traditional luxury travel consumers is mirrored by the emerging aspirational luxury travel consumers who noted the following in relation to the importance of price, *'Price will always play a big part, we want somewhere nice. There has to be value for money'* (participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer) and *'If I get a good deal on flights, then I will look up accommodation options'* (participant 5, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer). From these extracts, it is evident that financial values are incredibly important. The findings chapter also highlighted that in order to achieve the best value, luxury travel consumers do review all booking options including booking online and through a travel agent, in order to secure the best financial value.

In an interesting twist on the drivers of luxury travel consumption, the data revealed that luxury consumers are not motivated by status, or society. Symbolic power of luxury brands helps consumers to portray exclusivity, wealth and a high position in society (Yang & Mattila, 2016) but the data revealed that these factors do not motivate these consumers. Luxury travel consumers do not like to be perceived as *'show offs'*, or *'judged'*. They simply embrace luxury travel for their own happiness and do not want to give society the opportunity to *'judge'* them. This intrinsic focus challenges all existing studies on luxury consumers as it showcases that there are some, who invest in luxury for pure self-gratification.

## 5.2 The Self Concept

With regards to the self-concept, the literature revealed that all humans are driven either by their actual self, or their ideal self (Hudders, 2012). It suggests that if brands understand what version of the self a consumer identifies with, they can successfully create a brand personality and values to align with that version of the self. In the context of luxury consumers, it had been noted in the literature that traditional luxury consumers were indeed driven by their actual self (Malar, et al., 2011), while aspirational luxury consumers were known to be driven by their ideal self, as they aim to belong to a higher social class (Wu & Yang, 2018). While this may be true in the context of luxury products such as fashion accessories, the data from this study revealed that both consumer groups, in the context of luxury travel are motivated by their actual self. Self-distinctiveness which was noted in the literature as an important component of the self-concept looks to be void in this particular area of the luxury realm. While luxury travel consumers are motivated to invest a high proportion of their income on luxury travel experiences, it is not to signal wealth and/or social power to others (Veblen, 1899).

Instead, the findings reveal that luxury travel consumers care about pleasing only their current, actual self, which aligns with Miller & Mills (2012) study that notes that luxury is no longer about outward directed goals, but inward directed rewards, such as a sense of hedonism and fulfilment. This consideration also aligns with the desire for self-gratification through hedonic experiences which was noted at the beginning of this chapter. In the context of aspirational luxury travel consumers having intrinsic drivers at their root of their personalities also brings light to the fact that Vigneron & Johnson's Prestige Seeking Consumer Behaviour Model (1999) is not satisfactory in the context of luxury travel. Aspirational luxury travel consumers showcased an element of being motivated by their ideal self, however it was for intrinsic reasons and not to be perceived among society as a bandwagon consumer or '*snob*', of which the



model would see them. Considering this finding, the author believes that it may be possible to have both self-concepts present, if both are stemming from the same internal desires, whether they come from a place of self-gratification or self-distinctiveness.

The following excerpts from participant four are an example of both the actual and ideal self playing an interconnected self-gratification role for an aspirational luxury consumer:

*'It is definitely something I aspire to. I still consider myself working class, but where we have the room to spend on a luxury holiday we do.'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

*'It is about me in the here and now... It is not a perception thing for me and I usually switch off my social media when I am away. It is all about relaxing in a stress-free environment. It is about that time for my wife and I to relax and enjoy the present moment.'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

Understanding the position of luxury travel consumers in respect of their motivating self is important for brands who must tailor messages to suit these consumers. Alongside of this, luxury brands operating in the luxury travel industry must also consider the importance of the experience and its importance in the context of the self-concept.

### 5.3 The Experience is Everything

At the core of all luxury brands is experience (Choo, et al., 2012) and from conducting in-depth qualitative research, this has been confirmed to be true in the context of the luxury travel industry.

While Pine & Gilmore (1999) allude that the perfect experience must feature a combination of entertainment, education, esthetics and escapism, this does not mirror what is expected from a luxury travel experience. The data revealed that one of these realms was important, with the others appearing non-existent in this context. The importance of escapism was one of the key themes which emerged through the data, with all participants noting that they invest in luxury holidays in an attempt to *'relax'* and *'unwind'* in a *'hassle-free'* environment. The findings also showcased that alongside of such escapism, the setting must be of a particular style and standard in order for the experience to achieve and be, what they need it to be. They expect a particular level of quality and appreciate when aesthetics are *'modern'*, *'contemporary'*, *'boutique style'* and *'quiet'*. It appears that while Pine & Gilmore (1999) consider the sweet spot to be a combination of their four identified realms, in the context of luxury travel, the sweet spot does not consist of this mix, with luxury travel consumers being more responsive to feeling like a *'VIP'*, while enjoying an *'easy, stress free experience'* of which all *'issues and encounters are handled quickly and efficiently'*.

The author noted in the literature review chapter that Schmitt (1999) approached experiential marketing from a better perspective. He acknowledged that consumers are emotional beings who enjoy heightened sensory experiences (Schmitt, 1999) and the data confirmed this to be true by revealing that luxury experiences are important to luxury travel consumers because of the hedonic factors they offer. Therefore, the author believes Schmitt's (1999) approach to experiential marketing is best aligned with luxury travel experiences. He recognises that every consumer brings their own experiences and culture to a service encounter and considers the

exchange between the consumer and the luxury brand as a holistic exchange. He noted how important psychological processes are (Schmitt, 1999) and when we align this with the findings, it is evident that they play a role because luxury travel consumers are motivated to return to or be loyal to a luxury travel brand, based on their past experiences with said brand.

*'My favourite Irish luxury travel brand is Ballyfin which is a very special place. Again, there is great attention to detail and once you sieve through the gates of the estate it is very easy to feel extremely relaxed. Staff are very friendly.'*

*(Participant 1, female, traditional luxury travel consumer)*

*'He solved the problem as well and our happiness was his first priority. That is what you call and exceptional luxury experience. I'd stay in the resort again because of that, even though we had an issue.'*

*(Participant 4, male, aspirational luxury travel consumer)*

Building on this, the importance of truly emotive experiences must be noted, as during the interviews, it was evident how much joy luxury travel consumers feel when they retell the stories of their best luxury experiences. Words like 'happiness', 'joy', 'contentment', 'relaxed', 'worry-free', 'secure', 'special' and 'valued' all arose throughout the findings, highlighting the happiness and contentment that excellent experiential marketing can achieve.

Another finding worth discussing is the finding that luxury travel consumers do embrace digital platforms in an attempt to plan their getaways and find the best value. Therefore, first impressions and first experiences with a brand may begin with the use of a brand's website. Neither of the existing models on experiential marketing consider the web as part of an experience and with the data showing that luxury travel consumers expect '*strong use of imagery and video*', '*a lot of detail*', and '*state of the art design*', the existing models need to be updated to consider this. To the best of the authors' knowledge, these models are still key models used by researchers today, therefore eluding to the fact that newer versions have not yet been explored or researched. The findings have showcased that luxury travel brands and academics must acknowledge that experiential marketing now begins online.

To summarise the discussion on experiential marketing, it must be highlighted that when a service experience is truly exceptional, it becomes memorable and vivid in consumer memories, therefore pleasing a consumer's actual present self and their internal hedonic needs. It is the hook which encourages luxury travel consumers to invest in such high-end holiday experiences and the brands which attract these consumers and offer them a VIP experience even when something goes wrong, will be most successful in this industry.

#### **5.4 Discussion Summary**

To conclude on the discussions chapter, it is evident that luxury travel consumers are quite different to regular luxury consumers. They are entirely driven by their intrinsic desires and choose to invest high proportions of their income on luxury travel holidays, as such holidays give them the opportunity to destress, relax and enjoy downtime. What is also interesting about luxury travel consumers, is that both sub-consumer groups are completely aligned in their drivers and version of the self, with both groups seeking to please their actual self in return for working hard. This finding will be important to luxury brands operating in the industry as it will help them to create the right marketing and brand messages to appeal to luxury travel consumers collectively, and as one.

Because of their self-gratifying motivations, they defy the belief that luxury consumers are extrinsically motivated and crave elitism and social recognition among the higher classes of society. Symbolism and flashy marketing from brands are not entertained by luxury travel consumers. Instead, they enjoy low-key luxury experiences which offer a quiet, relaxed ambience, where they can switch off and be present. Experiential marketing plays a huge role in such experiences and the luxury travel brands who get it right are favoured among consumers.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **6.1 Conclusion**

The overall aim of this research dissertation was to investigate and understand Irish luxury travel consumers, in an attempt to discover the drivers that influence them to invest in luxury travel holidays. The literature review highlighted an opportunity for the researcher to conduct this project as to date, little research had been done on this exclusive consumer group and their consumption patterns, in relation to luxury travel experiences. What was interesting however, was the emergence of two luxury consumer groups which proved relevant to this study and influenced the approach to research. Traditional luxury consumers and aspirational luxury consumers emerged through the literature as being relevant to luxury consumption and from a travel perspective, this is interesting as luxury travel is often seen as a stepping stone into the world of luxury. This finding from the literature influenced the sample which were chosen to be a part of the study. Understanding each consumer group, their differences and alignments became a core focus.

The conducted in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to understand both groups of luxury travel consumers and the results were surprising. The literature highlighted these consumer groups as having very different drivers and needs, with one group i.e. traditional luxury consumers found to be motivated by their existing place in society, while the aspirational luxury consumers were traditionally found to be motivated by aiming to belong to the higher classes of society. In reference to the self-concept, the literature noted in alignment with this point that the traditional luxury consumers were motivated by their actual self, while the aspirational luxury consumers were motivated by their ideal self. Existing studies on luxury consumers and luxury consumption had also noted that often, status and symbolism was the root cause of why luxury consumers

spent more on such products. However, the findings revealed this was not the case in the context of luxury travel consumers.

From conducting in-depth interviews, it was evident that traditional luxury travel consumers and aspirational luxury travel consumers are aligned in their drivers to consume luxury travel experiences. They both crave escapism, relaxation and a feeling of self-reward through luxury experiences. They both presented themselves as emotional, hedonic beings who crave pleasurable experiences while on holiday and it is this, that drives them to invest higher levels of their income on luxury travel. Unsurprisingly, as per the literature, quality is also of the utmost importance to such consumers in return for the high investment made. They interestingly don't expect everything to run smoothly during an experience and appreciate that issues may arise, but the way in which these are handled by a luxury travel brand can encourage or discourage these consumers from said brand.

Experiential marketing was noted in the literature to be crucial for the tourism industry and from the findings, it is evident that this is true for the luxury travel sector. Throughout the entirety of the interviews conducted, the participants continuously linked their love of luxury travel with the experience they enjoy by investing in such holidays. Without the added extras, the special touches and the VIP experience, it can be said that luxury travel would not feel luxurious at all. The experience is what makes a great product, such as a luxury hotel great.

Based on the occupations of those interviewed, it is evident that they each have high responsibility careers and they invest in luxury holidays because they see them as an opportunity to escape every day stresses. It is all about relaxation. The findings also show that luxury travel consumers do not like loud resorts, or fussy environments. Luxury to them in terms of travel, is low key, relaxing and easy. Despite what existing literature says about the variances among these

two consumer groups and the version of the self which motivates them, the synchronicity of this finding showcases that both luxury travel consumer groups are indeed motivated by their actual self. They crave luxury experiences in an attempt to reward themselves through self-gratification. Status seeking or the need to showcase wealth through the use of symbolism, is not a driver in the instance of these consumers. They do not seek self-distinctiveness, therefore, highlighting them as a hybrid group as such, of luxury consumers.

The researcher feels that this study does advance existing theory on the luxury travel industry and its respective consumers, as it achieved the goal of understanding their internal drivers, values and version of the self-concept, of which they are motivated by. It also brought to light the importance of the experience which creates the escapism that these consumers desire. However, while this research project achieved its desired objectives, it did present some key areas for future research.

## **6.2 Recommendations for Future Research**

While the current study did answer some initial key questions around the luxury travel industry and its consumers, it also revealed some areas for further attention and research. Firstly, it showcased how different luxury travel consumers are from regular luxury consumers and presents a need for existing luxury consumer behaviour models to be revisited, to account for luxury services as well as products. Furthermore, this study highlighted the need for existing experiential marketing models, to include digital technologies. The importance of the digital experience was apparent in the context of luxury holiday planning, with all participants of this study showcasing the high standard they expect from luxury travel brands on their websites.

With this in mind, while this study was more so focussed on luxury travel consumers and their internal drivers and motivators, a follow



on, in-depth study on their digital habits and their path to purchase routines would be an interesting research opportunity which could be pinnacle for luxury services operating in this industry. Luxury travel consumers, even the wealthier traditional luxury travel consumers are extremely savvy and do seek out opportunities to achieve better value for their money when investing in such holidays. Therefore, their first port of call, as evident in the data is online. The path to purchase, while not a focal point of this research project, did seem to vary across the group with some booking online and some through an agent. This presents an opportunity to investigate such purchase patterns in an attempt to underpin how these consumers invest in luxury travel.

This study also focussed primarily on Irish luxury travel consumers and therefore an opportunity exists to research consumers from various cultures and backgrounds, in an attempt to compare the differences or similarities among them. With the literature highlighting the psychological backgrounds that every consumer brings to the experiences they encounter, understanding different cultures may help luxury brands to create the ultimate luxury experience that appeals to select and/or all cultures and consumers. It would also assist brands and marketers with designing appropriate marketing campaigns and messages that appeal to more than one culture.

Finally, loyalty to particular luxury travel brands was evident in the data and such loyalty was brought on by ease of service, efficient handling of issues and feeling special during a luxury experience. Considering this, an opportunity exists to understand brand loyalty in the luxury travel industry on a more in-depth level. With brand values highlighting why a service is luxury, getting the mix of messaging right is critically important.

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## **Appendix**

### **Appendix One: Interview Template / Guide Questions**

#### **Luxury Consumer Interview Questions**

**Age:**

**Occupation:**

#### **Introduction Questions**

- Tell me about the type of holidays you enjoy?
- Why do you prefer all-inclusive holidays?
- How often do you go on luxury holidays each year?

#### **The Meaning of Luxury Questions**

- What does luxury travel mean to you?
- Do you have a favourite luxury travel brand? If yes, tell me about them?
- Which luxury brands operating in the luxury industry would you see as the most exclusive?
- Are there any factors which would turn you off using a luxury travel brand? If yes, what are the factors?

#### **Planning Luxury Holidays**

- What factors influence you to invest in a luxury holiday, over a 'normal' holiday?
- What if any, influences sway your choice to book one luxury travel brand over another?
- What do you see as value?
- Do you read reviews on the internet about luxury travel brands before booking?
- What would you expect from a luxury travel company's website?

- Do you ever choose to enjoy standard products/services on your holidays, or is it always luxury hotels etc.? Can you discuss your answer in more detail?
- How do you plan your luxury travel holidays?
- Tell me more about your holiday planning routine? How long does it take / do you consider feedback from friends / online etc.
- Do you book online or through a travel agent? Can you tell me more about why you book your luxury holidays in this way?
- Do you use bargain / offer websites to find luxury travel deals?
- Does price come into play for you when planning your luxury holiday? If yes, can you discuss what constitutes the 'right price' for you?
- What if any, social influences sway your choice to book one luxury travel brand over another?

### **Holiday Update Questions**

- What if any, social network sites do you share updates from your holidays on?
- What kind of updates do you share?
- Do your updates showcase the luxury side of your holiday? If so, how?

### **Luxury Travel Experiences**

- In your opinion, what differentiates a luxury travel service, from a standard service?
- What are the basics you would expect from a luxury travel service?
- What differentiates an ok luxury experience, from an exceptional luxury experience?
- In your opinion, what negative cues should be avoided by luxury travel services?

- Have you ever flown business or first class on your holidays?  
What did you enjoy / perhaps not enjoy about this experience?
- What factors convinced you to choose one airline over the other?
- What type of accommodations do you enjoy staying in on your holidays? What do you enjoy / perhaps not enjoy about them?
- Have you ever been on a cruise holiday? If yes, what type of stateroom did you book and why?
- Can you tell me about your cruise holiday experience? What factors did you enjoy, what would you improve on?
- Is personalised service important to you? What if any, are the factors you would expect from a personalised experience?
- Tell me about the best experience you have ever had from a luxury travel company, what made it so memorable for you?
- What emotions do you feel when you travel or enjoy a luxury getaway?
- What if any, are the factors you consider important from a quality perspective?
- Being that luxury is now accessible to a larger mass market, does this influence your preference of which luxury travel brands you choose to consume?
- Do you invest in other types of luxury products/services – i.e. cars, handbags etc.? If yes, tell me about these?
- Do you feel you are loyal to any particular luxury travel brands? If yes, can you tell me what factors influenced your loyalty?

### **Self-Concept**

- Is luxury something you aspire to and/or dream about or do you feel it is a part of everyday life? If yes, how.
- Does luxury travel help you please your actual, present self or your ideal, future best self?

## **Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**

### **Interview One:**

**Age: 52**

**Occupation: Psychotherapist**

#### **Tell me about the type of holidays you enjoy?**

I enjoy holidays that allow me to enjoy experiences in different cultures. Food is important on holidays and I love eating the food of the country I'm visiting as well as drinking local wine. I love nature and being able to enjoy nature on my holidays. This might be swimming in the sea or walking in woods or on walking trails.

#### **How often do you go on luxury holidays each year?**

We go on holidays at least twice a year.

#### **What does luxury travel mean to you?**

Luxury means feeling well looked after without feeling smothered. I like to sleep in a comfortable bed with good sheets and pillows. I also love to eat locally produced food that is in season. I like my holiday to feel slow, I don't enjoy feeling rushed or being busy on my holidays. I like to relax and read and want somewhere that gives me the space to do this.

#### **Do you have a favourite luxury travel brand? If yes, tell me about them?**

We have two really. My wife and I came across the Sibuet brand about seven years ago and have stayed in five or six of their properties in France. We have had summer holidays in southern France and have also spent skiing holidays with them. The hotels are very luxurious but low key and there is a high staff to guest ratio. Much of the food is local and in some of their properties they produce

their own wine. Staff are friendly and attentive but not fussy so it is very easy to relax and to feel relaxed. My favourite Irish luxury travel brand is Ballyfin which is a very special place. Again, there is great attention to detail and once you drive through the gates of the estate it is very easy to feel extremely relaxed. Staff are very friendly and attentive and the quality of the food and the service is exceptional.

**Which luxury brands operating in the luxury industry would you see as the most exclusive?**

I don't have an opinion on this and don't have an awareness of what might be considered exclusive.

**Are there any factors which would turn you off using a luxury travel brand? If yes, what are the factors?**

Any sense of "bling" would turn me off. I like something that is low key so am not attracted to hype or excessive advertising.

**What factors influence you to invest in a luxury holiday, over a 'normal' holiday?**

Because of my wife's work we are "time poor" in terms of holidays so when we do get to plan a holiday, we want to know that what we choose is going to deliver the essential ingredients we are looking for. Things like levels of comfort, access to amenities, quality and variety of eating experiences are all important elements for us.

**What if any, influences sway your choice to book one luxury travel brand over another?**

We would be influenced by our own experiences and by recommendations from friends. We are happy to try something, but once we find something we like we are happy to stay with a brand. An example for us would be returning a number of times to various Sibuet properties.



**Do you read reviews on the internet about luxury travel brands before booking?**

Yes, if I wanted to learn about a particular brand and if I was thinking about using the brand.

**What would you expect from a luxury travel company's website?**

I would expect a lot of detail.

**Do you ever choose to enjoy standard products/services on your holidays, or is it always luxury hotels etc.? Can you discuss your answer in more detail?**

The combination of simplicity and luxury is what is important. I would choose a simpler option like an Agriturismo in Italy for example, rather than pick an overly fussy luxury hotel. If we are staying one night near an airport for example, we are unlikely to choose a luxury hotel. It's important to have the time to enjoy a luxury hotel and to make the most of it.

**How do you plan your luxury travel holidays?**

We do some research online and find accommodation options. Decide what we want... for example there are times we've chosen an apartment in a city, for example Rome, if what we want is to be in the middle of the city and that means we are then not restricted to having breakfast in the hotel. Once we decide what we want we make a booking. Sometimes this is directly with the hotel, other times we use something like booking.com.

**Tell me more about your holiday planning routine? How long does it take / do you consider feedback from friends / online etc.**

The time it takes to plan and book depends on whether we know where we want to go or not. We often do know though, and often our holiday time is limited and we can't do all that we want so we need to be selective. We do consider feedback and would never book

something new without knowing exactly where it is in terms of access to what we want.

**Do you book online or through a travel agent? Can you tell me more about why you book your luxury holidays in this way?**

For travel within Europe we would book ourselves. We make our own travel arrangements generally using Aer Lingus and often we book hotels online using booking.com. We use this for the possibility it offers to cancel without penalty as we have in the past had to cancel trips for a variety of reasons.

When travelling outside of Europe we would use companies like Tour America for travel to the US or Trailfinders for travel to Asia and Australia. Generally, this is for flights only as we often travel with a group of friends and rent private accommodation which would be sourced by one of the party.

**Do you use bargain / offer websites to find luxury travel deals?**

Not usually but sometimes.

**Does price come into play for you when planning your luxury holiday? If yes, can you discuss what constitutes the ‘right price’ for you?**

Yes, price is a consideration. We have many excellent experiences to compare prices to and would usually take our experiences into consideration in deciding if something “is worth it”.

**What if any, social influences sway your choice to book one luxury travel brand over another?**

Probably word of mouth such as talking with friends.

**Do you read reviews on the internet about luxury travel brands before booking?**

Yes, I'd read travel pieces in the Irish Times and the Guardian and also if I came across them online. I like Cara magazine for this too when travelling with Aer Lingus.

**What does value mean to you in a luxury travel context?**

Value means getting looked after well, particularly in terms of the staff interaction with guests.

**What if any, social network sites do you share updates from your holidays on?**

None

**In your opinion, what differentiates a luxury travel service, from a standard service?**

There is more attention to detail. There are more options around transport for example. The quality of room furnishings, bed linen, dining etc. are of a very high standard. There is more staff.

**What are the basics you would expect from a luxury travel service?**

Promptness of response, attention to detail, listening to what it is you want, a degree of flexibility.

**What differentiates an ok luxury experience, from an exceptional luxury experience?**

Attention to detail, the quality of the room, the quality of the staff who should be confident and chatty and have a capacity to think on their feet.

**In your opinion, what negative cues should be avoided by luxury travel services?**

Staff should be trained to say “I don’t know but will find out for you” rather than bluffing. It’s ok not to know.

**Have you ever flown business or first class on your holidays?**

**What did you enjoy / perhaps not enjoy about this experience?**

Yes. I enjoy the ease of check in, the use of a lounge particularly when there is a long waiting time. I enjoy having a very comfortable seat when flying long distances that means you arrive at your destination rested.

**What factors convinced you to choose one airline over the other?**

I like to minimise stop overs and also like to avoid going through Heathrow when travelling further afield. We will choose an airline such as Emirates or Etihad going to Australia for example. Another factor is a having a flat bed.

**What type of accommodations do you enjoy staying in on your holidays? What do you enjoy / perhaps not enjoy about them?**

We would be fans of smaller “boutique type” hotels rather than very large chains. We like a bit of quirkiness and character. We often travel with a group of friends and stay in high end self -catering. When we do this, we are looking for very high-quality accommodation, good eating out options or on site cheffing options, someone on hand who can guide us etc.

**Have you ever been on a cruise holiday? If yes, what type of stateroom did you book and why?**

Yes, we have cruised, just three times. We have always booked a state room with veranda. I don’t know exactly what type of stateroom they were. We had butler service which was useful in terms of restaurant reservations and the size of the cabin was generous and had excellent finishing touches.

**Can you tell me about your cruise holiday experience? What factors did you enjoy, what would you improve on?**

I liked the novelty of being on a ship and the lack of hassle in visiting different places. It is very easy. This is perhaps also the bit that annoys me. Once you choose your destination there can be no changes so no autonomy. All of our cruise experiences have been in the Caribbean and it is not a destination I would say I especially like. I dislike the lack of infrastructure and because of this the cruise ports tend to be overly commercial.

**How did you choose your room type / stateroom type? What factors swayed your decision in the end?**

We travelled with friends who had a lot more cruise experience than us and listened to their advice.

**What do you look for in a five-star hotel?**

Location, reputation, word of mouth experiences, a feeling of being somewhere special

**Is personalised service important to you? What if any, are the factors you would expect from a personalised experience?**

Perhaps a bit but it's not a priority

**Tell me about the best experience you have ever had from a luxury travel company, what made it so memorable for you?**

My best experiences have probably been in Ballyfin, Co Laois. It is very beautiful and when you drive through the gate it feels like you've arrived in a very special place. Many of the staff are local and have a connection with the development of the place or a few attended school there. The grounds are magnificent and there are a number of low- key activities on site such as taking a couple of bicycles, taking a row boat out on the lake or walking around the 600

acres and visiting the walled gardens. The rooms are all beautifully furnished as is the whole house and the quality of dining is excellent.

**What emotions do you feel when you travel or enjoy a luxury getaway?**

When it is right I feel extremely relaxed.

**What if any, are the factors you consider important from a quality perspective?**

Quality of the room, how comfortable the bed is, the kind of sheets and pillows. The products in the bathroom, the availability of water in the room. I don't believe you should have to go out of your way to get fresh drinking water in your room, or be charged for it.

**Being that luxury is now accessible to a larger mass market, does this influence your preference of which luxury travel brands you choose to consume?**

No, we have our own personal favourites.

**Do you invest in other types of luxury products/services – i.e. cars, handbags etc.? If yes, tell me about these?**

I don't.

**Have you ever had a bad experience with a luxury travel brand? If yes, can you tell me what happened?**

I don't recall any bad experiences.

**Do you feel you are loyal to any particular luxury travel brands? If yes, can you tell me what factors influenced your loyalty?**

I feel loyal to Ballyfin and to the Sibuet Brand. Usually having had excellent experiences.

**Is luxury something you aspire to and/or dream about or do you feel it is a part of everyday life? If yes, how.**

I neither aspire to it nor dream of it. I think of luxury as part of everyday life, for example in ways such as having good quality bed linen, eating good quality food and drinking good wine.

**Does luxury travel help you please your actual, present self or your ideal, future best self?**

I am driven more by my actual present self. The feeling I get when I'm very happy in a venue, i.e. a hotel is a feeling I enjoy because I feel very present and alive.

**Interview Two:**

**Age: 46**

**Occupation: Managing Director**

**Tell me about the type of holidays you enjoy?**

I enjoy a mix of holiday types. I love long haul travel as well as the week-long trips to Europe. My year of travel normally starts with a week-long break to Gran Canaria in February for some winter sun. Last year I stayed in Seven hotel in Masplaomas which targets the gay market and it is also kids free. Most St Patricks weekend I going skiing to Les Deux Alpes in France for approximately four days and I stay in a friend's apartment while there. All European travel is with Aer Lingus and I normally have the emergency seats. I always avoid Ryanair like the plague unless another airline doesn't travel to the destination required.

Then for Easter and around May bank holiday, I normally travel to the states probably, New York. I always travel business class to the states. I'm too old for sitting down the back and luckily, I can afford business class. However, even though I can afford to fly business class, I will still always look for deals on business. In June, I normally head to Sitges near Barcelona and in August I normally go to Biarritz to stay in a friend's house. We also go to Lake Como with other pals who have a place there.

Then from September to November, I usually go on a long-haul holiday for 10 -14days. I like to go either West Coast USA flying business class or to Asia to visit Thailand/Vietnam etc. Then for Christmas, I always fly out of Ireland on St. Stephen's Day to get away for 5-6 nights. The last few years I have flown to Miami. I will be doing the same this year and I normally fly home on New Year's Eve.



**How often do you go on luxury holidays each year?**

I travel on average around six to seven times a year.

**What does luxury travel mean to you?**

Luxury to me means hassle free. I love to fly business to relax on the way out and home and I really enjoy the extras that flying business comes with. Like lounge access, comfortable seats and then I enjoy staying in a nice hotel. Minimum four stars.

**Do you have a favourite luxury travel brand? If yes, tell me about them?**

I fly business class with Aer Lingus, United Airlines, Etihad, Turkish Airways and British Airways a lot. I choose these airlines mainly because they have direct flight routes in most circumstances. In terms of hotels, I love the 1 Hotel in Miami, I think it's absolutely fabulous. I like the Beacon Hotel in New York as the General Manager Tom Travers is always very accommodating to me. I also love to stay in the Shangri-La hotels in China.

**Which luxury brands operating in the luxury industry would you see as the most exclusive?**

I would say Celebrity Cruises, Silver Seas, Uniworld, Etihad Airways, Emirates, Four Seasons Hotels, Mandarin Hotels, Shangri-La Hotels, the 1 hotel in Miami and the Viceroy L'Emritage.

**Are there any factors which would turn you off using a luxury travel brand? If yes, what are the factors?**

It would have to reading poor reviews on customer service and food. They're too important to get wrong.

**What factors influence you to invest in a luxury holiday, over a 'normal' holiday?**

Customer Service is a key influencer for me. I also love contemporary modern décor and luxury hotels usually have this. Good amenities are

also important. Dining options, fitness centre, an on-site spa etc. are all important factors which influence my choice.

**What if any, influences sway your choice to book one luxury travel brand over another?**

It would have to be price.

**Do you read reviews on the internet about luxury travel brands before booking?**

Yes, I do, but generally speaking, I have stayed in most luxury brand properties.

**What would you expect from a luxury travel company's website?**

It would have to be state of the art design, an easy to use/book experience and the offering of useful, relevant information to help me make an informed decision.

**Do you ever choose to enjoy standard products/services on your holidays, or is it always luxury hotels etc.? Can you discuss your answer in more detail?**

It can be a mix depending on destination and the type of holiday. While I enjoy luxury, I am very down to earth.

**How do you plan your luxury travel holidays?**

I normally plan and book about 3-6 months away from the date of departure to ensure I get the best deals.

**Tell me more about your holiday planning routine? How long does it take / do you consider feedback from friends / online etc.**

I begin with the destination, then I check the prices with the airlines and hotels etc. I always try to find the best deal for the best luxury accommodation.

**Do you book online or through a travel agent? Can you tell me more about why you book your luxury holidays in this way?**

I do both. I normally book my hotels myself unless a better deal is available with a Travel Agent.

**Do you use bargain / offer websites to find luxury travel deals?**

No not really as I travel at certain times, so I wouldn't have the flexibility that is required with these.

**Does price come into play for you when planning your luxury holiday?**

Yes 100%, especially when I'm booking business class flights.

**What if any, social influences sway your choice to book one luxury travel brand over another?**

Social influencers might influence me to look at other options, but I still decide on my own. I'd also consider feedback from friends who enjoy similar holidays to me.

**Do you read reviews on the internet about luxury travel brands before booking?**

Yes, I do. I'd read Trip Advisor reviews and also travel articles.

**Do you ever choose to enjoy standard products/services on your holidays, or is it always luxury hotels etc.? Can you discuss your answer in more detail?**

I do both depending on the price and the time of the year. Luckily after selling my business I can still afford luxury travel at peak times of the year.

**What does value mean to you in a luxury travel context?**

Good price for a good service. Most airlines have a similar business class offering so price would be an important factor and in respect of

similar prices for airlines I would select the most modern aircraft next.

**What if any, social network sites do you share updates from your holidays on?**

I share posts on Facebook and Instagram.

**What kind of updates do you share?**

I always share posts from before I travel, like in the airport and lounge. I also share posts from my business class seat and then I'll share holiday snaps every now and again.

**Do your updates showcase the luxury side of your holiday? If so, how?**

Yes, I do, a lot of people want to see the luxury side of travel. For example, enjoying champagne in business class, tours of a hotel suite, or the cruise ship you are sailing on. I like to be one of the first on new cruise ship launches as well so sharing posts from these is important too.

**In your opinion, what differentiates a luxury travel service, from a standard service?**

It depends on the product, but I like to be made feel special and have priority services during the experience like priority check-in etc.

**What are the basics you would expect from a luxury travel service?**

I'd always expect VIP treatment. Great service, perhaps champagne on arrival, a great room for example and no queuing etc.

**What differentiates an ok luxury experience, from an exceptional luxury experience?**

It would have to be VIP service. It's always nice to be made feel very special from the moment you arrive, until you depart. It's what it's all about.

**What factors convinced you to choose one airline over the other?**

It would have to be price and also the service offering.

**Have you ever been on a cruise holiday? If yes, what type of stateroom did you book and why?**

I sure have. I sailed recently on Celebrity Edge in their Suite Class.

**Can you tell me about your cruise holiday experience? What factors did you enjoy, what would you improve on?**

I really enjoyed the food and dining. I also loved the personal butler service and we had access to the VIP Retreat Area which is reserved for suite class guests. I loved it. The gym is great as well. In terms of dislikes, I didn't enjoy the check-in service or the slow baggage delivery to my room. I also found the restaurant booking service slow and wasn't keen on the on-board activities or entertainment.

**How did you choose your room type / stateroom type? What factors swayed your decision in the end?**

A friend of mine had done the cruise before and suggested the suite class experience to me.

**What do you look for in a five-star hotel?**

I would look for contemporary luxury, excellent service, comfortable beds, modern décor, and VIP treatment.

**Is personalised service important to you? What if any, are the factors you would expect from a personalised experience?**

It definitely is. I would look for a personal welcome, a complimentary drink on arrival and I love a speedy check-in experience, at my room preferably, rather than at the main reception desk.

**Tell me about the best experience you have ever had from a luxury travel company, what made it so memorable for you?**

I adore the 1 HOTEL in Miami. It's got such cool décor, the rooms are large, the service experience is so personalised and nothing is ever a problem.

**What emotions do you feel when you travel or enjoy a luxury getaway?**

Relaxed and Happy.

**Being that luxury is now accessible to a larger mass market, does this influence your preference of which luxury travel brands you choose to consume?**

No not at all.

**Do you invest in other types of luxury products/services – i.e. cars, handbags etc.? If yes, tell me about these?**

Yes, I do. I drive a Range Rover car, and I invest in good clothes and watches as well.

**Is luxury something you aspire to and/or dream about or do you feel it is a part of everyday life? If yes, how.**

It is a part of my life, but it is not taken for granted. I have worked hard to reach my goals and I intend to enjoy my life. Luxury helps me to do that.

**Does luxury travel help you please your actual, present self or your ideal, future best self? It makes me more relaxed!**

### **Interview Three:**

**Age: 39**

**Occupation: Marketing Manager**

#### **Tell me about the type of holidays you enjoy?**

I like staying in nice places. I like nice hotels. I'm not into the cultural thing, nor do I like the outdoors. I like city and beach, like LA. I like things to do and I enjoy good food. You know, I like to go for dinner. Nice hotels, I love having my own balcony and outside space in my hotel rooms and I like good food, cities and beach.

#### **How often do you go on luxury holidays each year?**

So, it varies. We do a couple of trips a year, but then other years it can be more. We like to take advantage of work trips and add on a few days if one of us is away with work. We're not big planners, so we don't plan months ahead.

#### **What does luxury travel mean to you?**

Comfort. Easy. I despise queuing in general so for me, luxury travel for me is about avoiding queues and busy areas in airports etc. Luxury travel means you don't do the hard bits. You're on the plane first. Luxury travel is stress free, it is a break. You know, I work hard enough, my husband works hard enough, we don't need to have work trying to go on holidays. In a hotel sense, you want a luxury feeling hotel. A good bed, nice room, good furnishings, great service. I will only stay in a full-service hotel, I don't do Air Bibbs. I like checking in, I like people, if I need towels or help.

#### **Do you have a favourite luxury travel brand? If yes, tell me about them?**

We tend to use the Hilton brand. We have a loyalty account with them and would have some points but that doesn't always dictate where we stay. Em, but we do like the luxury Hilton brands such as the Conrad and the Waldorf.

**Which luxury brands operating in the luxury industry would you see as the most exclusive?**

I would think the Conrad Hotels and the Walfdorf Astoria is amazing as well. Then there are local luxury hotels such as the Shelbourne in this city. The W is a cool luxury hotel.

**Are there any factors which would turn you off using a luxury travel brand? If yes, what are the factors?**

Silly TV ads! No, I mean there is nothing really.

**What factors influence you to invest in a luxury holiday, over a 'normal' holiday?**

So, because I think it is a break from real life. For me, I'd rather go on less holidays but enjoy luxury holidays than go on more holidays and stay in 3\* hotels. I just feel like, I'd rather stay at home. So, if I am going for luxury, I want to feel that my holiday is something special. And of course, I want value.

**What do you see as value?**

So definitely the service, and the people and how they interact with you. I also think the overall ambiance of the hotel is so important. Some hotels just have a weird feeling where some have a lovely welcoming feeling where you just know you're in a luxury place. American hotels are amazing at creating the welcoming ambiance. Asia are great at creating the ambiance as well. The Peninsula hotels in Asia are the ultimate luxury brand.

**What if any, influences sway your choice to book one luxury travel brand over another?**

So, probably I would choose a Hilton Hotel because of my points. But location is so important. I would look at where hotels are, are they near the restaurants etc. Does one hotel have a better package than



another, e.g. stay three nights pay for two, that would sway me. I'm savvy, I do my research.

**Do you read reviews on the internet about luxury travel brands before booking?**

Oh yeah! I go to trip advisor, but not to read the reviews, but to look at the travel photos so that I can see the difference between the management photos and the travel photos. I also read blogs, telegraph reviews etc.

**What would you expect from a luxury travel company's website?**

No pop ups! Ease of use is important as is availability. I don't want to have to spend time looking for availability. It should be easy to pop dates into the calendar and get a price.

**Do you ever choose to enjoy standard products/services on your holidays, or is it always luxury hotels etc.? Can you discuss your answer in more detail?**

Depending on what we're doing, we might stay in a 3\* hotel if it's a night on the way to somewhere else. Or we might splash out for a really high-end hotel with a stay in an average hotel. In saying that, we still research heavily to ensure the hotel is ok.

**What if any, social network sites do you share updates from your holidays on?**

Instagram! Also, Twitter.

**What kind of updates do you share?**

My husband is very anti-social media so he doesn't appear on social media so that limits what I can put up from my holidays. But also, I just want to enjoy my holidays and I think people who do live stories from holidays is great and all. But it's not for me. More often than not, I'll share a few pictures, or maybe a video in a twitter.

**Do your updates showcase the luxury side of your holiday? If so, how?**

I'm very wary of showing the luxury side to my holidays. I think people are very judgemental on the internet and I would never put up posts about flying business class. I've flown it so many times and I would never put a picture on my Instagram of me flying business class. I feel like people will judge me.

**In your opinion, what differentiates a luxury travel service, from a standard service?**

Ease of experience mainly and maybe that it feels like a treat. Luxury should feel like a reward, like an escape from ordinary life.

**What are the basics you would expect from a luxury travel service?**

I suppose, from hotels I do expect any issues are sorted straight away. Things should be, as they should be. From a flights perspective, it would be lack of queuing and a drink on boarding is always a nice touch. Turning left is delightful!

**What differentiates an ok luxury experience, from an exceptional luxury experience?**

I think the Peninsula hotel brand do this best. I mean they are wow. The hotel is marble and beautiful. They're not huge hotels but they're just beautiful. Everything is perfect, the staff ratio is high. It's exactly how you would imagine a luxury hotel to be. You even have someone to press the button in your lift. It feels luxury.

**In your opinion, what negative cues should be avoided by luxury travel services?**

I think the comfortable bed thing is a must. If you pay for luxury, you should get a high-quality bed. Also, unnecessary noises in the room. Let's talk about this! Loud fridges or fans are a no no for me.

**Have you ever flown business or first class on your holidays?**

**What did you enjoy / perhaps not enjoy about this experience?**

I have and I think you feel like you are truly on holidays even before you get to the airport when you fly business class. I've flown business class with Emirates and Etihad and I love that they have a chauffeur who picks you up from your home and takes you to the airport. It's just special and such a nice way to start a holiday. I love the airport and business class makes it such a smooth experience and you can use the lounge. Then from a flight perspective, especially travelling to and from the USA, it's the ability to be able to sleep. The food is also great, I like that its served restaurant style in courses and it is also nice to have nice alcohol choices like various wines and cocktails.

**What factors convinced you to choose one airline over the other?**

Well again loyalty schemes in the past would have swayed me but nothing really at the moment. I'm not mad on Aer Lingus for example but I fly with them because they are convenient, especially for direct flights to the West Coast.

**Have you ever been on a cruise holiday? If yes, what type of stateroom did you book and why?**

No. They're not really for me. I would consider an Alaskan cruise or maybe a river cruise but I'm not great on water and I'm not sure about them.

**Is personalised service important to you? What if any, are the factors you would expect from a personalised experience?**

Yes, it would be. It's nice when you're returning to somewhere, its lovely to be acknowledged on your return.

**What emotions do you feel when you travel or enjoy a luxury getaway?**

It's kind of like satisfaction. I love when I feel like I have earned this, I have worked for this, so yes definitely satisfaction. I find it very

hard to unwind and it takes me a while to get into that zone so it's great when I do.

**What if any, are the factors you consider important from a quality perspective?**

Good beds, decent sized bathrooms with separate bath and showers and bathrooms must have good storage. I also hate shower curtains. Proper air-con systems are also so important.

**Being that luxury is now accessible to a larger mass market, does this influence your preference of which luxury travel brands you choose to consume?**

No not really.

**Do you invest in other types of luxury products/services – i.e. cars, handbags etc.? If yes, tell me about these?**

Yes! I do love my handbags, I love Prada, YSL and Gucci bags. I also love shoes.

**Is luxury apart of your everyday life?**

It is sometimes. We've stepped back a little as my husband has just changed jobs, but we're working to get back on our luxury track.

**How do you plan your holidays?**

We don't use travel agents, we do it all ourselves. We love Google Maps for planning logistics and understanding where things are. We use hotels.com to check availability and choices but we rarely book through here. We often revert to a Hilton brand because I have Hilton points. I'll look at packages and offers and what's available but we usually book directly with the airline and hotel. We shop around and are flexible to get a better deal, even if it means moving dates or having a stopover.

**How long does your planning process take?**

We usually plan about 2-3 months out. We're not really forward planners.

**How important is price?**

Price and value for money is so important, we don't want to be ripped off. We set ourselves a budget and then we determine what we can get for that budget. If we wanted to upgrade our room, we always review the difference and sometimes it's worth going above budget a little to get a better experience or room. It depends what I am getting for the extra.

**Interview Four:****Age: 34****Occupation: Ecommerce Manager****Tell me about the type of holidays you enjoy?**

I like all-inclusive holidays with a good 4-5\* hotel. I like high end hotels. When we go away, I don't want to have to worry about the standard of where we are staying or the service we are getting. I get limited time off so when I go away, I want to ensure that nothing goes

**Why do you prefer all-inclusive holidays?**

I like all-inclusive because in the long term all-inclusive holidays work out as very good value for money. Everything is in the resort, there is little expenditure on external costs like food or taxis. You know that everything can be resolved if there is an issue. The hotels are always high standard hotels with good amenities.

**How often do you go on luxury holidays each year?**

We go away once a year internationally, like on a big holiday and we go away for weekends, both in Ireland or somewhere nearby, like London.

**What does luxury travel mean to you?**

Luxury to me is a five-star hotel or resort that offers a personalised service where requests are handled efficiently as well.

**Do you have a favourite luxury travel brand? If yes, tell me about them?**

I love the Secrets Resorts in Mexico. They offer you champagne on arrival, take your luggage to your suite, they greet you as you enter which is nice. The service is just fantastic. Their hotels are also really contemporary so you know you're getting a great suite with a complimentary mini bar and complimentary room service as well.

**Which luxury brands operating in the luxury industry would you see as the most exclusive?**

I really loved the Aria Hotel in Las Vegas, I felt it was a level above most hotels. It was a brilliant five star, very contemporary and the rooms were so technologically advanced and could be adjusted by an in-room iPad that controlled your air condition, TV, curtains etc. It was unreal. I also would consider the Shang Ri la hotels to be some of the most high-end luxury hotels. Staying somewhere like this, is the goal, it's just the top tier of luxury I think, because it is not your everyday hotel.

**Are there any factors which would turn you off using a luxury travel brand? If yes, what are the factors?**

If I was spending the money on a luxury trip, then I went on said trip and an issue I had was not handled correctly and just dismissed, I would have an issue and would not return to that hotel. You need to take care of your customer, especially when they are spending good money to stay with you.

**What factors influence you to invest in a luxury holiday, over a 'normal' holiday?**

My wife and I only get away for one nice luxury break a year, so when I go away, I want everything to be stress free because we work hard enough. So that is why we are happy to spend a little more to stay in good, luxury hotels or go on really nice cruises. We don't want hassle and we don't want problems, so we pay more for our holidays for more peace of mind. Peace and quiet is also important to me.

**What if any, influences sway your choice to book one luxury travel brand over another?**

Price will always play a big part, we want somewhere nice and with a good room or suite, or we want the extras like good beds, modern bathrooms, bathrobes etc. in the room. There has to be value for money.

**What do you see as value?**

I enjoy luxury all-inclusive where possible so I'd expect the food that's included to be of an excellent standard and to have a variety of choice. I would also consider the condition of the rooms, the cleanliness of the hotel and the level of customer service as value indicators. All of these things create an easier holiday and removes stress so they're essential.

**Do you read reviews on the internet about luxury travel brands before booking?**

Yes, I would read reviews on Trip Advisor and Trust Pilot. I tend to also look at other people's photos to see what places really look like.

**What would you expect from a luxury travel company's website?**

Ease of use, a fast load time and a good mobile user experience. Then I would expect strong use of imagery that covers all facilities. I think videos are important as well because they help you get a sense of product. I also like to see reviews and Trust Pilot on site.

**Do you ever choose to enjoy standard products/services on your holidays, or is it always luxury hotels etc.? Can you discuss your answer in more detail?**

We go standard as well sometimes. Like if we were going on a low budget trip, we would choose a lower standard hotel or sometimes we have no choice in order to get a hotel in a great location. If I know what I am getting I am cool with a 3\* hotel, but it would have to be a good 3\* and we would do a lot of research beforehand to ensure its ok for us. For me, the TV has to be up to date in the room. For my wife, there has to be no shower curtains and the hotel must be clean.

**How do you plan your luxury travel holidays?**

My wife does the majority of the planning. She does the research. She shows me the options and then we make a decision from there. We



choose where to go and what to do based on price, value for money and the best standard we can get for our price. We are quite savvy.

**Tell me more about your holiday planning routine? How long does it take / do you consider feedback from friends / online etc.**

We are planners for sure. We vary rarely book something last minute and we usually need time to pay it off because our holidays tend to be big investments. So, we book well in advance I'd say 8-9 months before we go.

**Do you book online or through a travel agent? Can you tell me more about why you book your luxury holidays in this way?**

We prefer to use a travel agent because of the bonding and protection of our money, especially because we tend to travel to the USA, Caribbean and Mexico a lot. But we do book online as well for European breaks and we always look for the best possible price. But yeah, when we book a luxury holiday, we always go to a travel agent purely because of the security when a holiday is over say €1300 each.

**Do you use bargain / offer websites to find luxury travel deals?**

We would review them and do research from them, but again we tend to book through an agent. In saying that, for the likes of London, we do book our 5\* hotels through booking.com all the time and we find it great. They always have amazing specials on luxury hotels, so we always keep an eye out on there.

**Does price come into play for you when planning your luxury holiday? If yes, can you discuss what constitutes the 'right price' for you?**

Yes, it does. We look for deals and value when it comes to luxury. We judge the right price based on what's included in the holiday and the standard of experience we will get for our money. We would have a cut-off point then and just say no, if we feel we're going to high.

We also consider the amount of spending money we would need on top of the holiday.

**What if any, social influences sway your choice to book one luxury travel brand over another?**

None really, we mostly go with what we find ourselves.

**What if any, social network sites do you share updates from your holidays on?**

I very rarely share anything online to be honest, the only one I'd put the odd thing on would be Instagram but its minimal.

**What kind of updates do you share?**

Photos of the destination I am in and sightseeing photos.

**Do your updates showcase the luxury side of your holiday? If so, how?**

No. I don't like to be perceived as a show off.

**In your opinion, what differentiates a luxury travel service, from a standard service?**

Personalisation and the extra touches. I also think turndown services are lovely. If a birthday or special occasion is recognised by a hotel or cruise line that is always lovely as well. It's also the ability to manage an issue that sets a luxury service apart from the rest. When they don't make you feel like a bad guy for reporting an issue, its brilliant. Handling anything that pops up in a professional manner is so important.

**What are the basics you would expect from a luxury travel service?**

I would say safety in the resort or on the ship, excellent service, a nice high-quality shower, preferably a waterfall shower, flat screen TV, a

complimentary mini bar, turndown service, bathrobes and slippers and of course, comfortable bedding! I have a bad back.

**What differentiates an ok luxury experience, from an exceptional luxury experience?**

In November, we went to Mexico and we stayed in a Secrets Resort Hotel and we had an issue with our room being cleaned that was ongoing. We mentioned it at reception and the gentleman profusely apologized and gave us free spa passes with complimentary massages to make up for the mix up. He solved the problem as well and our happiness on the holiday was his first priority. That is what you call an exceptional luxury experience. I'd stay in the resort again because of that, even though we had an issue. For our honeymoon, we also had a personal butler in another Secrets Resort and that was an entirely new level of luxury. We got champagne on arrival, checked in at a private check-in desk beside our suite and we got champagne and strawberries in our suite, with a congratulations card. They even had a happy honeymoon sash across our door for our arrival with balloons. We felt very special and like our business was appreciated.

**In your opinion, what negative cues should be avoided by luxury travel services?**

Handling an issue badly. Bad attitudes from employees is a serious issue for me. We were treated awfully at the reception desk in a luxury Irish hotel recently by two different employees and as a result, we will never stay there again.

**Have you ever flown business or first class on your holidays?**

**What did you enjoy / perhaps not enjoy about this experience?**

No not yet, but I would if I could! It's something we have started to look at but we're not quite ready to commit to the cost yet. Down the line it will be something I know we will sway towards. Ask me this again in ten years!

**What factors convinced you to choose one airline over the other?**

The service. I really like Virgin Atlantic. They're so friendly on board and I love the mood lighting on their aircraft. They are also excellent value and do offer you free drinks for your flight. The food is always a high standard and you get an excellent selection of movies. Aer Lingus would be my second choice because of the opportunity they offer to fly direct to many places.

**What type of accommodations do you enjoy staying in on your holidays? What do you enjoy / perhaps not enjoy about them?**

We like to choose a suite where we can. But standard rooms are ok too, it is more about the hotel and the length of the stay and the price. The purpose of the trip is very important as well. We always reward ourselves of anniversaries, birthdays etc.

**Have you ever been on a cruise holiday? If yes, what type of stateroom did you book and why?**

I have indeed! We sail in balcony cabins only and we chose balcony cabins because we don't want to feel claustrophobic. I also have asthma so I like fresh air. But also, having a balcony cabin means you have your own personal outdoor space which is so important to relax. Its lovely. A cruise isn't something you do every year so it's worth the extra few pounds to have the best cabin you can, where you can relax and just be.

**Can you tell me about your cruise holiday experience? What factors did you enjoy, what would you improve on?**

I like doing cruises because you get to see places that you may never see otherwise. There is also a level of security which I like, for example when you to various ports of call, like Caribbean islands and you book excursions with the cruise line, you know you're going to be safe and that you will have the best experience in each destination. I definitely liked the luxury of MSC Cruises Ship Seaside, it was very luxurious for the price we paid. I loved the speciality dining on board

and we were happy to pay extra for it because it enhanced our cruise experience and it great quality and very low key and intimate. I love the ability to enjoy different types of food and the standard you get for the money that you pay is phenomenal. The steakhouse was a real treat and so reasonable. Our balcony cabin was also gorgeous. Very modern, and contemporary, excellent bedding and it was cleaned a few times a day which I was really impressed by.

**Is personalised service important to you? What if any, are the factors you would expect from a personalised experience?**

Yeah, I think greeting someone by the name is so nice. It shows you know the guest. On cruises, you sit at a specific table for dinner and they always remember your drink order and they do have it ready for you which I think is an excellent level of service.

**Tell me about the best experience you have ever had from a luxury travel company, what made it so memorable for you?**

I would have to say it was on our honeymoon when we arrived at the Secrets the Vine hotel. They greeted us on arrival by saying welcome home and they offered us a hot towel to refresh which was so thought-out after a transatlantic flight. Our butler then greeted us with champagne, took our bags and brought us to our own private check in area beside our suite. Inside then, the hotel had arranged more champagne, strawberries and chocolate, and our butler even offered to unpack our suitcases, although we did decline ha-ha. We also got featured on the daily guest news and planner, congratulating us on getting married which we were delighted it. The staff were so good at that hotel as well.

**What emotions do you feel when you travel or enjoy a luxury getaway?**

Relaxed. Secure. Worry free. Special. Happy. You feel different, you feel like you're on a proper holiday. You're not rushed around. The environment you're in is usually always very chill and it is so nice to

feel that every hour of the day. I love when the atmosphere is always relaxed, I feel I get more from my holiday.

**What if any, are the factors you consider important from a quality perspective?**

Within the room, whether in a hotel or on a cruise I would consider the quality of the bed and pillows so important because I expect good sleep quality. High quality towels and robes are also essential as are good luxury branded products in the shower. Cleanliness of course is key.

**Being that luxury is now accessible to a larger mass market, does this influence your preference of which luxury travel brands you choose to consume?**

I think it would because if you pay your money, you don't want to be going away to an area or resort that's packed with party goers or spring breakers. It is my worst nightmare. I'd avoid those sorts of places. Price usually is the reason some hotels or cruise ships are like this so I'll pay more to stay somewhere more exclusive.

**Do you invest in other types of luxury products/services – i.e. cars, handbags etc.? If yes, tell me about these?**

My main luxury investment outside of travelling would always be my car. I drive an Audi A6 S Line. It's a pure luxury car that offers excellent reliability and for me, getting this car for myself is also a sign of doing well. I work very hard and I work very long hours so it is nice for me to get into my car and feel relaxed. It's a big motivator for me to keep working hard to be able to afford a car like that.

**Do you feel you are loyal to any particular luxury travel brands? If yes, can you tell me what factors influenced your loyalty?**

I would be loyal to the Secrets Resorts in Mexico because I know what I am getting there and I love it. I haven't had a negative experience, or at least one that wasn't rectified in a professional and

efficient manner. They are a very high standard hotel group and they cost a good bit more to stay here, but I have a strong sense of the value I am getting for that money and that is reassuring.

**Is luxury something you aspire to and/or dream about or do you feel it is a part of everyday life? If yes, how.**

Oh no, it is definitely something I aspire to. I still consider myself working class, but where we have that room to spend on a nice luxury holiday we do.

**Does luxury travel help you please your actual, present self or your ideal, future best self?**

It is about me in the here and now. We need to relax as people. We can't always be working. City breaks are great but they are busy. We need to be able to switch off and just let the mind go and that's where my choice of luxury travel helps. It is not a perception thing for me and I usually switch off my social media when I am away. It is all about switching off for me and relaxing in a stress-free environment. It is about that time for my wife and I to relax and enjoy the present moment.

**Interview Five:**

**Age: 47**

**Occupation: Travel Writer**

**Tell me about the type of holidays you enjoy?**

I love family holidays, city breaks, beach holidays, long-haul travel, cruises... pretty much all types of travel!

**How often do you go on luxury holidays each year?**

We usually try to book one long haul family holiday every Easter and then a sun holiday in July or August. I also go on separate trips for work.

**What does luxury travel mean to you?**

It would be 5-star accommodation.

**Do you have a favourite luxury travel brand? If yes, tell me about them?**

No, I don't have one I can think of.

**Which luxury brands operating in the luxury industry would you see as the most exclusive?**

I would say, Adams & Butler, Hayes & Jarvis, Ikos, Sani, Martinhal, Orient Express, Red Carnation Hotels, Leading Hotels of the World, Belmond Hotels, Anantara, Centara, Ritz Carlton, and the Intercontinental Hotels.

**Are there any factors which would turn you off using a luxury travel brand? If yes, what are the factors?**

No, they're aren't really.



**What factors influence you to invest in a luxury holiday, over a ‘normal’ holiday?**

I like being spoilt when I am on holidays, so luxury helps with that. I like nice accommodation, great food etc. and I also don’t like places with noisy pool games or entertainment, so I tend to avoid those sorts of getaways.

**What does value mean to you? What does it include from a luxury travel perspective?**

Because I work in travel I am very fortunate that I get discounted rates, so I rarely pay the full market price. Value to me can mean a good choice of restaurants if on a half board or all-inclusive arrangement, free airport transfers, complimentary water / coffee in the room each day and of course it is always nice to get a good breakfast included in the cost of the holiday.

**What if any, influences sway your choice to book one luxury travel brand over another?**

I don’t tend to stick to one particular brand. I go with word of mouth, recommendations from other travellers, from reading blogs etc.

**Do you read reviews on the internet about luxury travel brands before booking?**

Yes, always. I read reviews online and then also blogs.

**What would you expect from a luxury travel company’s website?**

I would expect it to look inviting with good images and with an easy to find contact us or help page.

**Do you ever choose to enjoy standard products/services on your holidays, or is it always luxury hotels etc.? Can you discuss your answer in more detail?**

Yes, all the time. I prefer luxury accommodation, but I like to eat in local restaurants, go on public transport etc. so sometime we need to

choose alternatives to be in the heart of the action. I also like to stay good quality Airbnb's like apartments and houses as well.

**How do you plan your luxury travel holidays?**

I usually look up airfares first as I am tied to school holidays. If I get a good deal on flights, then I will look up accommodation options.

**Tell me more about your holiday planning routine? How long does it take?**

Not long, I am quite impulsive.

**Do you book online or through a travel agent? Can you tell me more about why you book your luxury holidays in this way?**

I usually book direct with the airlines, hotels etc., but that is because of the business I am in. I did get a safari specialist to book our family trip to South Africa though.

**Do you use bargain / offer websites to find luxury travel deals?**

Yes, but only for accommodation. I have booked many luxury Irish hotels on Groupon and Living Social.

**Does price come into play for you when planning your luxury holiday? If yes, can you discuss what constitutes the 'right price' for you?**

Yes, but it really depends on the trip. There is a limit to what I would spend on a sun holiday in Greece / Spain, but if it is a trip of a lifetime, like one we done this year to the Maldives, I want to make sure I get it right so I would book the best possible luxury option and beg / borrow or steal to get it paid off!

**What if any, social influences sway your choice to book one luxury travel brand over another?**

I don't really choose brands per se, some brands are better on Africa, others Europe etc. I base my decision on the individual destination / hotel etc. I do my research.

**What if any, social network sites do you share updates from your holidays on?**

I share updates on my Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

**What kind of updates do you share?**

I tend to share Images of the destination, resorts etc. and I love providing information on where we are.

**Do your updates showcase the luxury side of your holiday? If so, how?**

Yes, I do because I am a Travel Writer, therefore I share all sides of my experiences.

**In your opinion, what differentiates a luxury travel service, from a standard service?**

There is a massive difference between 4 and 5 star in my opinion. From the service you experience, from the staff, to getting a welcome drink on arrival, having a meet and greet service and being shown to your room, to turn down service and the cleanliness of a resort. There are also usually less rules and restrictions on where to eat and it's great when drinks are included. It is all the little things.

**What differentiates an ok luxury experience, from an exceptional luxury experience?**

It would have to be the service and experience you receive.

**In your opinion, what negative cues should be avoided by luxury travel services?**

It would have to be having rules and restrictions or having to use vouchers for pool towels. I also don't like when there are supplements for certain dishes / drinks, within reason of course, like for champagne or lobster, a supplement is ok. I also don't like when employees are trying to sell you upgrades / activities etc.

**Have you ever flown business or first class on your holidays?**

**What did you enjoy / perhaps not enjoy about this experience?**

Yes, I have and from my experience I have noticed a massive difference between 4 and 5 star airlines. I loved Qatar Airways. Their dining on demand experience is just incredible and the flight attendants knew my name when I boarded, which was such a brilliant touch.

**What factors convinced you to choose one airline over the other?**

It would usually be route, so I like direct flights or short layovers. If money wasn't an object I would fly with 5 star airlines only but I would prefer to spend money on luxury accommodation rather than the flight.

**What type of accommodations do you enjoy staying in on your holidays? What do you enjoy / perhaps not enjoy about them?**

I like good hotels or sometimes we are happy to stay in apartments that might be on the grounds of a good hotel.

**Have you ever been on a cruise holiday? If yes, what type of stateroom did you book and why?**

Yes, we have and we usually pay more and go for 2 balcony cabins, because my husband is a loud snorer!

**Can you tell me about your cruise holiday experience? What factors did you enjoy, what would you improve on?**

Cruises are great for children so that is why we love them but I haven't cruised as a couple so from that perspective, it is difficult to say.

**What do you look for in a five-star hotel?**

I would expect a room with a separate bedroom and an indoor pool if we're staying in a city or if we are travelling during winter. A nice breakfast and preferably a late breakfast is always a plus as well.

**Is personalised service important to you? What if any, are the factors you would expect from a personalised experience?**

No, it's not really important to me to be honest.

**Tell me about the best experience you have ever had from a luxury travel company, what made it so memorable for you?**

It would have to be the Cheli & Peacock Tanzania Safari experience we done in South Africa. Firstly, we were awoken with a hot breakfast in our luxury tented camp overlooking Kilimanjaro and on another occasion during the trip, we arrived back to our accommodation to find a hot bath running with rose petals and a glass of champagne waiting. I mean wow.

**What emotions do you feel when you travel or enjoy a luxury getaway?**

I would say happiness, privileged, joy, contentment.

**Being that luxury is now accessible to a larger mass market, does this influence your preference of which luxury travel brands you choose to consume?**

No, not at all.

**Do you invest in other types of luxury products/services – i.e. cars, handbags etc.? If yes, tell me about these?**

I buy one good luxury handbag every few years and I used to buy luxury cars before I had kids!

**Have you ever had a bad experience with a luxury travel brand? If yes, can you tell me what happened?**

Nothing springs to mind.

**Do you feel you are loyal to any particular luxury travel brands?**

No, I'm not particularly loyal to any at all.

**Is luxury something you aspire to and/or dream about or do you feel it is a part of everyday life? If yes, how.**

Luxury and money is not that important to me, I just like nice experiences. I have stayed in 4-star accommodation on holidays and then checked into a great 5-star hotel for our last few nights on a few occasions, just for the experience.

**Does luxury travel help you please your actual, present self or your ideal, future best self?**

It is all about my actual, present self. I love spoiling myself and my family with luxury getaways. Sometimes they are booked last minute. As I said already, I am impulsive! They are a treat for us and the kids love it. It's what it is all about.