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**RIINA ILORANTA**

**The Challenge of  
Luxury Experience**

Service Provider's Perspective



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Riina Iloranta

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## **ABSTRACT**

The concept of luxury has evolved robustly during the last decades. In addition to being affected by the changes in the consumer culture and experience economy, the concept itself has undergone a transformation due to the democratization of luxury, and new forms of luxury have emerged. The contemporary understanding of luxury is broader and multidimensional, so that now, parallel to the traditional perspectives of luxury there are new forms of luxury, such as unconventional luxury. The new forms of luxury are defined from the consumer’s perspective and can be embedded and experienced in addition to the luxurious contexts, in everyday mundane life. These changes have created opportunities for experiential luxuries which can be enjoyed in different contexts than those traditionally attached to luxury.

Consequently, previous luxury tourism studies have been examined the phenomenon mainly from the consumers’ perspective in a traditional context. Therefore, this study takes a novel approach as the dissertation examines luxury tourism experiences from the service provider’s perspective in an unconventional context, Finland. The theoretical basis of the current thesis lies in the literature on luxury and the domain of marketing, in which

luxury tourism is discussed from the perspective of brand marketing, service marketing, and tourism marketing.

The objective of the thesis is to increase understanding of how the luxury tourism experience is facilitated by the service provider's actions in the context of unconventional luxury. This thesis consists of three articles, which gradually and progressively approach the objective. The findings of the study show that luxury can be found at different levels, ultimate luxury and ordinary luxury; the main differentiator affecting the whole service structure being privacy. Furthermore, the service provider creates the prerequisites for a luxury experience, which are inconspicuous and intangible as they aim to add the customer's well-being into the hedonic or even eudaimonic experiences. If the customer desires, they can be more active in co-creating unconventional luxury experiences, which could possibly lead to different experiential value dimensions. In addition, as the context is a combination of non-commercial and commercial aspects, the luxury experience may contribute to a prudential value and meaningfulness. Through acquiring continuous customer insights, the service provider aims to understand what is meaningful for the consumer and what kind of luxury value the consumer is striving for.

The study contributes to the literature by highlighting the heterogeneity of the contemporary luxury consumer. Therefore, the study argues that the challenge of creating prerequisites for luxury experiences from a service provider's perspective in an unconventional context involves the continuous interpretation of the customer's luxury expectations and value formation through insights into what is meaningful for the customer. Meaning is a significant component of luxury in an unconventional context. Furthermore, it is essential to find the right personnel with the right attitudes, skills, and knowledge about the context to flexibly design the experience stemming from both the context as well the perspective of the attributes of experiential luxury: escapism, aesthetic, authenticity, and exclusivity.

**Keywords:** luxury tourism, luxury service, unconventional luxury, meaningful experience

# TIIVISTELMÄ

Luksuksen käsite on kehittynyt voimakkaasti viimeisten vuosikymmenten aikana. Kuluttajakulttuurin ja elämystalouden muutosten vaikutusten lisäksi käsite itsessään on muuttunut luksuksen demokratisoitumisen myötä ja uusia luksuksen muotoja on syntynyt. Nykyaikainen käsitys luksuksesta onkin aiempaa laajempi ja moniulotteisempi. Perinteisen luksusnäkökulman rinnalle ovat nousseet uudet luksuksen muodot, kuten epätavanomainen luksus, joka määrittyy kunkin kuluttajan omasta näkökulmasta käsin, ja joka voidaan kokea ylellisten kontekstien lisäksi jokapäiväisessä arkielämässä. Nämä muutokset ovat avanneet mahdollisuuksia erityisesti elämykselliselle luksukselle, joita voidaan nauttia täysin erilaisissa ympäristöissä kuin mihin luksus on perinteisesti liitetty.

Myös luksusmatkailun tutkimukset ovat aiemmin sijoittuneet perinteisiin luksuskonteksteihin ja luksuksen kokemista on tarkasteltu pääasiassa kuluttajien näkökulmasta ja suhteessa luksus brändeihin ja niiden kuluttamiseen. Tässä tutkimuksessa lähestymistapa on uusi, ja väitöskirjassa tarkastellaan luksusmatkailuelämyksen tuottamista palveluntuottajan näkökulmasta epätavallisessa luksuskontekstissa, eli Suomessa. Tämän väitöskirjan teoreettinen perusta on luksuskirjallisuudessa ja markkinoinnin alalla, jossa luksusmatkailusta keskustellaan brändimarkkinoinnin, palvelujen markkinoinnin ja matkailumarkkinointikirjallisuuden näkökulmista.

Väitöskirjatutkimuksen päätavoitteena on lisätä ymmärrystä siitä, miten palveluntuottajan toiminta luo edellytyksiä luksuselämyksen syntymiselle matkailussa epätavallisessa kontekstissa. Tämä väitöskirja koostuu kolmesta artikkelista, jotka lähestyvät päätavoitetta askel askeleelta. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että luksuspalveluissa luksusta tuotetaan eri tasoilla, aina ultimaattisesta luksuksesta tavalliseen luksukseen, jossa yksityisyys on tärkeimpänä erottavana tekijänä. Yksityisyyden vaatimus vaikuttaa myös yrityksen palvelurakenteeseen. Lisäksi palveluntarjoaja luo edellytyksiä luksuselämykselle, joka on huomaamatonta ja aineetonta, koska sen tavoitteena on lisätä kuluttajien hyvinvointia hedonisilla tai jopa eudaimonisilla kokemuksilla. Jos asiakas haluaa, on hänellä mahdollisuus osallistua aktiivisesti

luksuselämyksen syntyyn yhdessä palveluntuottajan kanssa, mikä voi johtaa kokemuksen erilaisiin luksuksen arvoulottuvuuksiin. Suomalainen luksusmatkailuelämys on usein yhdistelmä ei-kaupallista kontekstia eli luontoelämystä ja kaupallisia näkökohtia. Tämä yhdistelmä voi edistää merkityksellisyyden kokemusta ja sellaista arvoulottuvuutta luksuselämyksessä, jota ei perinteisessä luksuskontekstissa voida kokea. Palveluntuottaja pyrkii ymmärtämään, mikä on merkityksellistä juuri kyseiselle kuluttajalle ja millaista luksusarvoa tämä kuluttaja etsii. Se vaatii palveluntuottajalta laajaa ja yksityiskohtaista tietoa asiakkaasta.

Väitöskirjatutkimus edistää luksuskirjallisuutta korostamalla nykyaikaisen luksuskuluttajasegmentin heterogeenisyyden merkitystä. Siksi tutkimus väittää, että suomalaisessa epätavanomaisen luksuksen kontekstissa haasteet luoda edellytyksiä luksuselämyksen kokemiselle liittyvät asiakkaan luksukseen liittyvien odotusten jatkuvaan tulkintaan sekä arvonmuodostukseen: palveluntuottajan on ymmärrettävä, mikä on asiakkaalle merkityksellistä. Lisäksi palveluntuottajan haasteena on oikeanlaisen henkilöstön löytäminen. Henkilöstöltä vaaditaan oikeanlaista asennetta, taitoja sekä kontekstin tuntemusta, jotta he voivat suunnitella ja muotoilla joustavasti kontekstista nousevia luksuselämyksiä. Elämyksellisen luksuksen ominaisuuksia ovat eskapismi, esteettisyys, aitous ja yksityisyys, joiden kunnioittamista henkilöstöltä vaaditaan.

**Avainsanat:** luksusmatkailu, luksuspalvelu, epätavallinen luksus, ylellisyys, merkityksellinen kokemus, matkailu

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There is only one true luxury, that of human relationships.

**Antoine de Saint-Exupéry**

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Helsinki 22.9.2021

Riina Iloranta

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In the past 20 years, the consumer market has been affected by the shift from a product and service based to an experience-based economy (Atwal & Williams, 2009; Carù & Cova, 2007; 2003; Pine & Gilmore, 1999); meaning that rather than just buying products or services, consumers are searching for experiences to fulfill their needs and desires. The same phenomenon is visible in luxury consumption as the significant trend in the luxury market is the transition from product consumption towards experiential luxury consumption (Cristini, Kauppinen-Räsänen, Barthod-Prothade, & Woodside, 2017). Therefore, it has been argued that luxury has transformed itself into a consumer's search for meaningfulness "via shifting from having-to-being and from owning-to-experiencing" (Cristini et al., 2017, 101).

Luxury used to be something for the elite, it was distant and exclusive, and associated more with status and wealth (Llamas & Thomsen, 2016). This traditional understanding of luxury highlights the conspicuous consumption of luxury, which means that luxury is seen as elitist, exclusive, symbolic, prestigious, expensive, and attached strongly to the products and their attributes (Godey et al., 2013a). In the academic discussion, this form of luxury is based on branding literature, where luxury focuses on high-quality products sold at high prices, giving the owner a sense of prestige based on symbolism (Ko, Costello, & Taylor, 2019). However, in the contemporary world, luxury is not only gold, glitter, champagne, caviar, and sports cars. In addition to the traditional understanding, there is now "new luxury", which is an emotional and hedonistic perspective on luxury, where luxury is characterized by the subjectivity of the consumer's desires, emotions, feelings, and pleasure (Godey et al., 2013a). It is argued that modern luxury consumers are searching for value, such as balance and equilibrium, by consuming luxury to reduce stress and find a way to self-actualization (Danziger, 2005; Hemetsberger, von Wallpach, & Bauer, 2012). Therefore, in this perspective, luxury is increasingly

linked with immaterial things, experiences, services, tourism, and traveling (Danziger, 2005). The shift in luxury consumption toward experiences can be interpreted as an inconspicuous consumption (Eckhardt, Belk, & Wilson, 2015), which also implies that luxury nowadays serves self-interests more than status (Cristini et al., 2017; Hemetsberger et al., 2012; Silverstein & Fiske, 2008). With the rise of inconspicuous and private consumption of luxury, the most recent studies label the new form of luxury as an unconventional luxury that focuses on the consumers' private understanding of luxury and how luxury is experienced (Thomsen, Holmqvist, von Wallpach, Hemetsberger, & Belk, 2020). However, this new unconventional luxury requires further academic research (Thomsen et al., 2020).

The new form of luxury has also been linked to the "luxurification" (Berry, 1994; Twitchell, 2001) or "democratization" (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Silverstein & Fiske, 2008) of luxury, which has been argued to dilute the original luxury concept (Turunen, 2018). The democratization of luxury has become a societal trend, where luxury is partly available to the masses; the lower socioeconomic class wants to feel rich and enjoy luxury, thus, they buy cheaper versions of the luxury brand. The market has responded to these desires by producing new luxury goods but in lower price categories (Bakker, 2005; Wiedmann & Hennigs, 2013). This has also led to a concept of "masstige", which refers to prestige and mass marketing and results from a luxury brand reducing its price to become affordable to the masses without any pronounced compromise in the product's quality (Kumar, Paul, & Unnithan, 2020). With the development of masstige, what is considered a luxury has become more challenging to define. Furthermore, it dilutes the perception of luxury as non-luxury and luxury are seen as two extremes in a continuum, and where the ordinary ends and luxury starts is in the eyes of the beholder (Tynan, McKechnie, & Chhuon, 2010). Therefore, scholars agree that there is no longer only one kind of luxury (Koch, 2011).

The concept of luxury is multidimensional in the contemporary world (Cristini et al., 2017). With the rise of experiential consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Pine & Gilmore, 1998) and the democratization of luxury with masstige brands, consumers are increasingly turning to luxury experiences as they are unique. Luxury experiences are seen as superior to

luxury products as they are based on inner-directed motivations (Bauer et al., 2011; Kapferer & Laurent, 2016; Tynan et al., 2010). Furthermore, prior research suggests that a significant reason for the popularity of consuming luxury is that it has the ability to make consumers happy (Loureiro, Maximiano, & Panchapakesan, 2018). Studies have shown that people tend to be happier with experiences than material possessions (Carter & Gilovich, 2012; Rosenzweig & Gilovich, 2012; Van Boven, Campbell, & Gilovich, 2010). Compared to material possessions, experiences are likely to be more closely related to the self (Carter & Gilovich, 2012), and are less likely to create regret regarding how an individual has spent their money (Rosenzweig & Gilovich, 2012), because they attempt to create longer-lasting memories and hedonic values (Nicolao, Irwin, & Goodman, 2009). These shifts may also relate to the world's gradual transformation from a materialistic to a post-materialistic value system in many Western societies (Belk, 2020; Desmet & Pohlmeier, 2013; Inglehart, 2015).

The consumers' search for meaning and happiness through luxury consumption by doing and experiencing therefore creates opportunities, especially for the luxury services and the tourism sector. Leisure, hospitality services, and traveling are significant constituents of life experiences as they are seen as a valuable part of our quality-of-life and the well-being of our mental and physical health (Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2016). People construct an understanding of themselves in the world via consumption: managing a sense of place, social position, and identity (Belk, 1988) as people define themselves by the destinations and the way they travel (Sirgy & Su, 2000). According to Kapferer (2015a), people desire opportunities to indulge in unique, rare, emotional, and memorable experiences around the world. Therefore, the luxury market is vital for the tourism and travel industry (Park, Reisinger, & Noh, 2010), and experiences drive the contemporary luxury market's development (Thomsen et al., 2020).

Experience factors play an essential role in determining companies' success (Gentile, Spiller, & Noci, 2007). However, in the discussions on luxury service and tourism, the focus has been on experiences from the brand and product perspective and has not thus far considered the new forms of luxury. Furthermore, the discussion is lacking the service providers' perspective.

This three-fold challenge in the discussion on contemporary luxury tourism presents a one-sided image of luxury tourism, and also leaves the tourist in a relatively passive role. However, the literature on contemporary service and tourism marketing acknowledges that service providers need to co-create unique and personally meaningful experiences together with their customers (LaSalle & Britton, 2003; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Another challenge is that difficulty with value formation in co-creation arises from the fact that with the democratization of luxury in the contemporary world luxury consumers are more heterogenic than previously assumed (Heyes & Aluri, 2018; Thomsen et al., 2020; Uriely, 2005). In the context of luxury tourism, the higher a person's status is, the less likely it is to impact on their holiday choices (Correia, Kozak, & Reis, 2014). The study of Correia et al. (2014) showed that celebrities perceived luxury tourism as being with their families in quiet, private resorts enhancing the hedonic values; for ordinary people, luxury tourism was described as an experience, which was different, exquisite, and thrilling. This creates a challenge when trying to balance between the different kinds of luxury and value expectations from the service provider's perspective; this aspect is the main topic of this study.

The theme of the current thesis originated in 2012 when I was writing my master's thesis on Finnish luxury as a concept and phenomenon. During that time, I worked in the tourism industry and traveled around the world to a range of locations from large cities to small villages, all offering tourism services. How luxury was present in Dubai or New York was visible; however, I did not see the same phenomenon in Finland. This led to an interest in understanding luxury as a broader phenomenon, focusing on the more inconspicuous and unconventional forms of luxury. During the research process, luxury tourism has gradually emerged in Finland, and it has also evolved into a more visible presence in academic discussions.

## **1.2 JUSTIFICATION AND PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY**

Even though luxury research is increasing in academia (Chandon, Laurent, & Valette-Florence, 2017; Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016), scholars have not

yet agreed on the definition of the concept. The complexity of the luxury concept lies in its multidimensionality, which makes the concept imprecise and therefore requires further integrative understanding (Kapferer, 2012; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Thomsen et al., 2020; Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2009). Although there are some definitions of the concept, there is no agreement among scholars, and the current understanding remains indistinct (Kapferer, 1998; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006). The concept is fuzzy as luxury depends on its context (Kemp, 1998), and it is also a relative term, meaning it may refer to almost anything depending on the individual being asked (Heine, 2012). Hence, this study aims to contribute to the conceptual discussion on luxury by increasing understanding of the concept in the luxury tourism context.

This study also responds to the call for studies on luxury services which are still quite rare (Wirtz, Holmqvist, & Fritze, 2020), even though pure luxury services are a rapidly growing sector (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012), and luxury spending in the service industry has boomed (Chang, Ko, & Leite, 2016). Moreover, the luxury discussion has been argued to be based on branding literature (Bauer et al., 2011), referring to luxury service only as a complement to the luxury product (Turunen, 2018). The branding literature acknowledges that understanding the luxury service industry from a brand management perspective is too limited (Park & Ahn, 2021). Thus, in the luxury literature, luxury services research has been argued to be minimal or conducted from the product perspective; despite this large body of literature acknowledging the differences between services and goods (Wirtz et al., 2020) as the service marketing literature argues that goods marketing logic is only partly applicable to services (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011). According to Wirtz et al. (2020), research on luxury services from the product-based literature does not support the nature and characteristics of services and therefore, the research has been criticized as mainly disregarding the differences between immaterial luxury services and luxury goods (Yang & Mattila, 2014, 2016). Furthermore, the latest studies applying luxury product-based research to the context of luxury service research indicate that using a product-based view on luxury may be unstable, and inadequate for services research (Conejo, Cunningham, & Young, 2020).

The third research gap to which this study aims to contribute relates to luxury tourism and experiences. It has been acknowledged that tourism and hospitality research lacks experiential luxury studies, and the topic has called for further research (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016; Park & Reisinger, 2009; Swarbrooke, 2018). Luxury tourism studies have been requested to acquire more understanding from different cultural contexts (Correia, Kozak, & Del Chiappa, 2020). Previous studies with luxury tourism have been conducted in traditional luxury contexts, such as 5- star accommodation with high-quality material features (e.g., Ariffin, Maghzi, Soon, & Alam, 2018; Chen, Peng, & Hung, 2015; Peng & Chen, 2019). However, as luxury is a subjective perception (Tynan et al., 2010) and the concept of luxury has evolved, and as the consumption of luxury has gained more inconspicuous forms (Eckhardt et al., 2015), the luxury tourism experience may be considered a form of tailor-made services, responding to consumers' individual needs (Kiessling, Balekjian, & Oehmichen, 2009). Therefore, there have also been calls for research into the agentic nature of unconventional luxury, of how different agencies with spatial, emotional and physical intensity are enrooted in and activated by different contexts (Thomsen et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Ritchie, Tung, and Ritchie (2011) argue that experience-related research remains underrepresented in tourism literature, therefore research should especially focus on a more comprehensive understanding of the different types of tourism experiences and the criteria for how different types of experiences are differentiated. The challenge with research on luxury experiences is that luxury experience can emerge from owning luxury products, occur through experiencing luxurious services, or it can be experience derived from a luxurious setting (Kauppinen-Räsänen, Gummerus, von Koskull, & Cristini, 2019). Research on luxury experiences have requested and called for more studies, especially from the perspective of studying the servicescapes of luxury firms, that pay particular attention to the attributes of moments of luxury; as this may help in the future conceptualize of how hedonic and extraordinary moments become luxury experiences and to what extent this escapism applies in other luxury settings (Holmqvist, Diaz Ruiz, & Peñaloza, 2020).



This study also responds to the lack of the service provider's perspective in tourism research, also noted by Jensen and Prebensen (2015). In the luxury tourism context, research has been conducted mainly from the customer's perspective. Some of the studies (e.g., Cetin & Walls, 2016; Harkison, 2016, 2018; Harkison, Hemmington, & Hyde, 2019, 2018a, 2018b; Lu, Berchoux, Marek, & Chen, 2015) combine the service provider's perspective with the guests and employees' perspective, leaving the service provider's perspective to a minimal (e.g., Buckley & Mossaz, 2016; Presbury, Fitzgerald, & Chapman, 2005). However, the service provider's perspective can also be seen as valuable from the luxury service perspective as a driver of value creation (Holmqvist, Visconti, Grönroos, Guais, & Kessous, 2020) and a means by which the provision of luxury service value is formed (Conejo et al., 2020). The previous studies (e.g., Thomsen et al., 2020) on unconventional luxury have raised the question of how can services, servicescapes, and products be designed to enhance consumers experiences of ephemeral moments of luxury as meaningful? In addition, how can these moments confer temporary transformations that may even deliver lasting value to our lives?

Additionally, this study represents a rare example of a qualitative approach in luxury research, where the quantitative methods dominate the research (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016). The quantitative perspective on the contemporary luxury discussion has challenges; for example, it has been argued that understanding customers' perceived value of luxury does not provide a complete picture of the experienced value of luxury as the research has been conducted mainly with quantitative methods (Turunen, 2018). Therefore, according to Thomsen et al. (2020), in the field of luxury, qualitative research, with in-depth studies on small samples should be more prevalent.

The study conducted in this thesis represents a novel approach to luxury tourism research by researching luxury from a service provider's perspective in an inconspicuous and unconventional luxury context. The purpose of the thesis is to increase understanding of how the luxury tourism experience is facilitated by the service provider's actions in the context of unconventional luxury. Thus, the study contributes to tourism marketing research. In addition, this study contributes to the luxury discussion and luxury service research by

exploring experiential luxury services (e.g., Wirtz et al., 2020) in the context of unconventional luxury (e.g., Thomsen et al., 2020). The thesis consists of three articles, each leading step by step purpose of the study. The objectives of the articles are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Objectives of the research papers

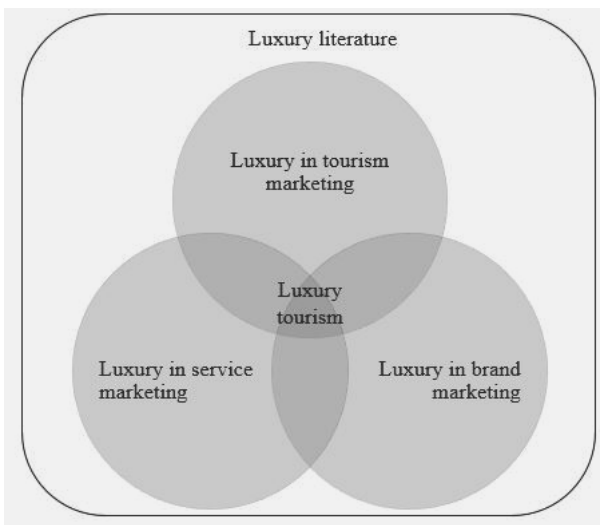
<b>Article</b>	<b>Research objectives</b>	<b>Sub-questions examined in the articles</b>	<b>Research themes</b>
Article I	Examines the luxury tourism concept with an analytical approach that combines a systematic literature review, content analysis, and a synthesis approach to the different theoretical perspectives of luxury tourism research.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is the state of the luxury tourism research?</li> <li>2. How is luxury tourism described and contextualized in research</li> <li>3. Which theoretical approaches are leading the research into current luxury tourism?</li> </ol>	The description and contextualization of luxury tourism in academic discussions. Luxury tourism as a concept.

<p>Article II</p>	<p>Examines the Finnish luxury tourism concept and luxury tourism service provisions. The study explores luxury as there is no consensus about the topic and it is context-specific. The first objective of this study is to investigate how service providers understand and define the concept of Finnish luxury. The second objective is to determine the prerequisites for providing a Finnish luxury tourism experience.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How is Finnish luxury tourism understood?</li> <li>2. What are the prerequisites for the provision of luxury services?</li> </ol>	<p>A description of the Finnish luxury tourism experience and the elements of their service provisions.</p>
<p>Article III</p>	<p>Examines the luxury tourist experience product and the challenges Finnish service providers face in developing their products.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What comprises a product in the Finnish luxury tourist experience?</li> <li>2. What is the value aimed for with the products in the luxury tourist experience?</li> <li>3. What are the challenges with a luxury experience in the Finnish context?</li> </ol>	<p>A description of the product elements in the luxury tourist experience and the challenges that need to be overcome by the service provider.</p>

### 1.3 POSITIONING OF THE STUDY

This study positions itself in the luxury literature discussion. Luxury is a phenomenon that can be approached from the perspective of various disciplines, which all have their own understanding of the concept and research traditions (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016; Heine, 2012). Luxury literature has contributed to the theoretical and empirical understanding of luxury from the perspective of both the consumer and the industry. In this thesis, the discussions conducted in various disciplines are reflected in the understanding of the concept and its development.

The current thesis belongs to the domain of marketing. As the thesis approaches luxury tourism from the service provider's perspective, the thesis positions itself in the intersection between brand marketing literature, service marketing literature, and tourism marketing literature. Luxury tourism is investigated through these different theoretical standpoints as it is not at the center of any of these discussions but rather belongs to all of them on some level. The positioning of the thesis is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Positioning of the study

Since the 1980s, luxury literature has adopted marketing as the main discussion domain as the luxury concept has been strongly linked to products and brands. Therefore, it has been argued that luxury literature lies in branding literature (Bauer et al., 2011), and branding has been suggested as being the commonly used base for luxury conceptualizations (Fionda & Moore, 2009). Even though the contemporary marketing theory regards the customer as being at the center of marketing and that companies are only able to make value propositions (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), the luxury literature on branding uses a goods centered dominant logic, where the customer is seen as an operand resource, and marketers then manage luxury brands by segmenting customers. Consequently, in the branding literature, the product and brand management perspective in the luxury discussion is strong, and therefore, it appears throughout the whole theoretical viewpoint of the thesis. The product and brand management perspective of luxury provides some guidelines of what can be considered as a luxury in order to categorize and characterize general views, and represent the business, managerial, and industry perspective; however, it is only one approach (Turunen, 2018). The branding perspective contributes to luxury literature with the objectification of luxury; nevertheless, luxury literature is criticized for being heavily goods-centric (Cristini et al., 2017) and seeing luxury through objective determinants and luxury features attached to tangibles, the objectification of luxury is argued to be relatively easy (Wirtz et al., 2020). However, with luxury services, a subjectification of luxury is also needed (Wirtz et al., 2020).

This thesis also positions itself as regards the service marketing literature from the service provider's perspective. When investigating luxury service research, the perspective of the individual sphere and the subjectification of luxury is evident (Wirtz et al., 2020). In the service literature, understanding customer value is the basis, and it focuses on how customers perceive value (Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2008), which differ from the nature of value creation and co-creation. However, in service-centered dominant logic, the customer is seen as more active, and marketing is seen as a process of doing things in interaction with the customer, where the service encounter is a value exchange process, and both service provider and customer are resources (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

For instance, in service marketing literature, Sandström et al. (2008) note that the service encounter is critical to customers experiencing the service offering, and the service personnel are, therefore, the key actors who have the possibility to adapt interactively to customers' reactions and responses by maximizing the value proposition (Sandström et al., 2008). The customer should receive an experience, and service providers should offer experiential consumption (Carter & Gilovich, 2012), which the customers encounter and live through in activities (Howell, Pchelin, & Iyer, 2012). The definitions of consumer experience or customer experience are often seen as the outcome of a service encounter (Knutson & Beck, 2004; Walls, Okumus, Wang, & Kwun, 2011). Therefore, building customer experiences in a luxury service context requires understanding the value dimensions of luxury in experience (Batat, 2019). Customer experience studies have emphasized the importance of consumers' perceived value in their consumption experiences (Batat, 2019); this is because the perception of the value of the luxury is essential to the consumer's enjoyment and satisfaction and, consequently, to the service provider. As the research in this thesis is from the service provider's perspective, the theoretical discussion relies very much on perceived luxury value. Furthermore, luxury service providers and luxury services in the current academic luxury literature are also raised for discussion, as they are still heavily related to luxury service as a complement to products and brands (e.g., Atwal & Williams, 2009). This has been succinctly expressed by Wirtz et al. (2020, p. 665) "services are largely missing from the luxury literature, just as the field of luxury is mostly missing from the service literature."

Research into service marketing in relation to service encounters and customer experiences has traditionally seen the service encounter as a brief moment (Bitner, 1990). However, within the tourism marketing discussion, the service encounter may be temporally extended (Arnould & Price, 1993), and therefore experiential models concentrating on brief moments may not be applicable to the discussion on tourism, and more research is needed (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007; Volo, 2009). In the tourism literature, experiential tourism products are linked to Pine and Gilmore's notion of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Furthermore, tourism literature emphasizes quality tourism experiences and considers the experience as the quintessence

of tourism (Tussyadiah, 2014) and the primary resource of tourism (Ritchie, Tung, & Ritchie, 2011). With extraordinary experiences, Arnould and Price (1993) have argued that service providers are able to organize engaging, narrative, and ritual content through the skills, commitment, emotion, and dramatic sense of their guides, whose aim is to give their customers something they are not even aware they could ask for. Several researchers have acknowledged that experiences entail sensorial, cognitive, affective, behavioral, and interpersonal components (e.g., Bergs, Mitas, Smit, & Nawijn, 2020; Pullman & Gross, 2004; Schmitt, 1999). The tourist's presence is vital for their experiences, as a service provider can only create prerequisites for experiences (Komppula, 2006), and experiences are subjectively determined by the tourist (Björk & Sfantla, 2009; Mossberg, 2007). The delivery of memorability in tourism experiences is vital for the business (Campos, Mendes, do Valle, & Scott, 2016; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012), as is the understanding of motivations and how and at what level the consumer wants to participate in the co-creation of the experiences (Björk, 2014; Campos et al., 2016; Hansen & Mossberg, 2013; Prebensen & Foss, 2011). Therefore, at the essence of their products and services, service providers should place unique experiences that lead to memorable experiences and add value to the consumer (Tussyadiah, 2014). Service providers should deliver meaning and value in consumer experiences and create a deeper emotional attachment, which leads to satisfaction and loyalty (Tussyadiah, 2014). Consequently, Coelho et al. (2018) suggest that the tourism industry has shifted from physical elements to the enhancement of subjective perceptions and the emotional involvement of an individual traveler.

Due to the multidisciplinary nature of luxury research, the thesis also leans heavily in the discussion on luxury towards experiential marketing and consumer behavior. Approaching luxury from the consumer's perspective requires delving into consumption research on luxury as a luxury is not inherent in products or characteristics, but rather in the meanings and perceived luxury value, where subjective and collective value dimensions also need to be recognized (Berthon, Pitt, Parent, & Berthon, 2009). That is, as Berthon et al. (2009) express, a person may look at a brand-manufactured diamond bracelet as long as they want; however, it is impossible to

distinguish it as a luxury as the diamond bracelet itself depicts only the objective (material) dimension. To be perceived as containing luxury, it is also necessary to consider individual and social spheres (Berthon et al. 2009). Therefore, the theoretical part of the thesis also examines luxury from the perspective of the consumers' meaning-making as regards luxury and the driving forces behind the luxury consumption of individuals. Having a perception of both how consumers experience products and brands and how a service provider can deliver the prerequisites for engaging experiences for customers is imperative for positioning and differentiating offerings in the contemporary competitive business environment. Even though it has been acknowledged that the discussion by Solomon and Corbit (1974) on the affective dynamics of consumption was the first mentioning of experiential aspects of consumption, the scholars Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) truly brought the experiential aspects of consumption into the discussion on marketing and consumer behavior. These experiential aspects relate to the hedonic form of consumption, where consumers seek pleasure and enjoyment via consumption (Alba & Williams, 2013; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Therefore, in experiential marketing, the value is not only the product or service and its functional and utilitarian benefit, but also the value found in the hedonic and experiential elements surrounding the product and service and in the experience of consumption itself (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013). In other words, consumers are not only consuming by buying commodities; instead, their consumption habits also express who they are as individuals. However, it should be noted that the literature on consumer behavior and experiential marketing are not the focus of this study, but rather regarded only as a framework in luxury literature expressing the required understanding of a service provider.



## 1.4 KEY CONCEPTS

The key concepts applied in the thesis are briefly defined in Table 2. As each of these concepts may be approached from several angles, a more detailed discussion of the main issues and concepts is presented in Chapter 2.

**Table 2.** Key concepts of the thesis

Luxury	In this study, luxury is seen as a subjectively defined concept, referring to “anything that is desirable and more than necessary and ordinary” (Heine, 2012, p.42). It is associated with extraordinariness in a person’s everyday life (Iloranta & Komppula, 2021) and a sense of specialness (Iloranta, 2019).
Luxury service	“Extraordinary hedonic experiences that are exclusive. Exclusivity can be monetary, social, and hedonic in nature. Luxuriousness is jointly determined by objective service features and subjective customer perceptions. Together, these characteristics place a service on a continuum, starting from everyday luxury (i.e., with low levels of exclusivity and extraordinariness) to luxury, to elite luxury (i.e. with high levels of exclusivity and extraordinariness).” (Wirtz et al., 2020, p. 668)

Luxury tourism	A tourism type, in which the experience products are designed as “Extraordinary hedonic experiences that are exclusive. Exclusivity can be monetary, social, and hedonic in nature. Luxuriousness is jointly determined by objective service features and subjective customer perceptions” (Wirtz et al., 2020, p.668), placing a service on a continuum varying from ordinary luxury to ultimate luxury (Iloranta, 2019). Besides exclusivity, they offer authenticity, aesthetics, and hedonic escapism (Holmqvist, Diaz Ruiz, & Peñaloza, 2020).
New luxury	Luxury is conceptualized through hedonistic terms, self-referring luxury as desire, dream, emotional, and it is characterized by pleasure and emotion and feelings (Godey et al., 2013a). Products and services that “evoke and engage consumers’ emotions while feeding their aspirations for a better life” (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003, p. 48).
Traditional luxury	Luxury is conceptualized through objectification as expensive, exclusive, where the core is price, quality, and extravagance (Godey et al., 2013a). In addition, it has a strong public dimension, that is, luxury is used as a means of social classification, demonstrating status and conspicuousness (Bauer et al., 2011; Godey et al., 2013a; Ko et al., 2019), highlighting the shared public meanings linked to a conspicuously consumed product or brand (Thomsen et al., 2020).
Unconventional luxury	“Unconventional luxury focuses more on luxury in terms of being epistemologically scarce, experiential and agentic” (Thomsen et al., 2020, p.442).

## 1.5 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

This doctoral thesis is an article-based dissertation comprising a theory section and three research articles. After the introductory chapter, the thesis is divided into four sections. The second chapter focuses on the theoretical background of the thesis and is divided into three subchapters that review

the approaches to the phenomenon. The first subchapter introduces the evolution of luxury and how it is understood in the contemporary world. Following the overview of the history of luxury, the main academic approaches within luxury research and contributions to the luxury concept are discussed. Luxury is then described as being a multidimensional concept, and thus various perspectives are presented from the traditional to the new and unconventional understanding of luxury. Following on from that, the concept is discussed in relation to defining the attributes of luxury and the consumer's perspective; from this perspective luxury is defined based on subjectivity and meaning-making. Luxury is also discussed from the perspective of luxury consumption, which presents the perspectives of conspicuous, inconspicuous, and the hedonic consumption of luxury. This discussion is necessary in order to understand the multidimensionality of the concept.

The ensuing subchapter discusses luxury service, experiences, and luxury tourism. The subchapter focuses on the service provider's perspectives on luxury services. That is, how the service provider is understood in the current academic luxury discussion; it also presents luxury tourism products and discusses the understanding of the perceived value of luxury as a basis for the service concept. In addition, it describes the service process and system discussion in luxury services. In the final section, the focus changes to depicting tourism in the Finnish context in order to understand how it can be seen as a luxury destination.

Chapter 3 describes in more detail the research strategy used in the studies. Furthermore, it includes a description of the scientific approach and methodological choices of the study. Chapter 4 presents the main results of the three articles, after which they are synthesized into the theoretical discussion and the main findings of the research articles. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the conclusion of the thesis together with the theoretical and managerial implications. In addition, the final chapter includes an evaluation of the thesis, and presents its limitations as well as suggestions for future research.



## **2 ASPECTS OF LUXURY IN RESEARCH AND TOURISM SERVICE PROVISION**

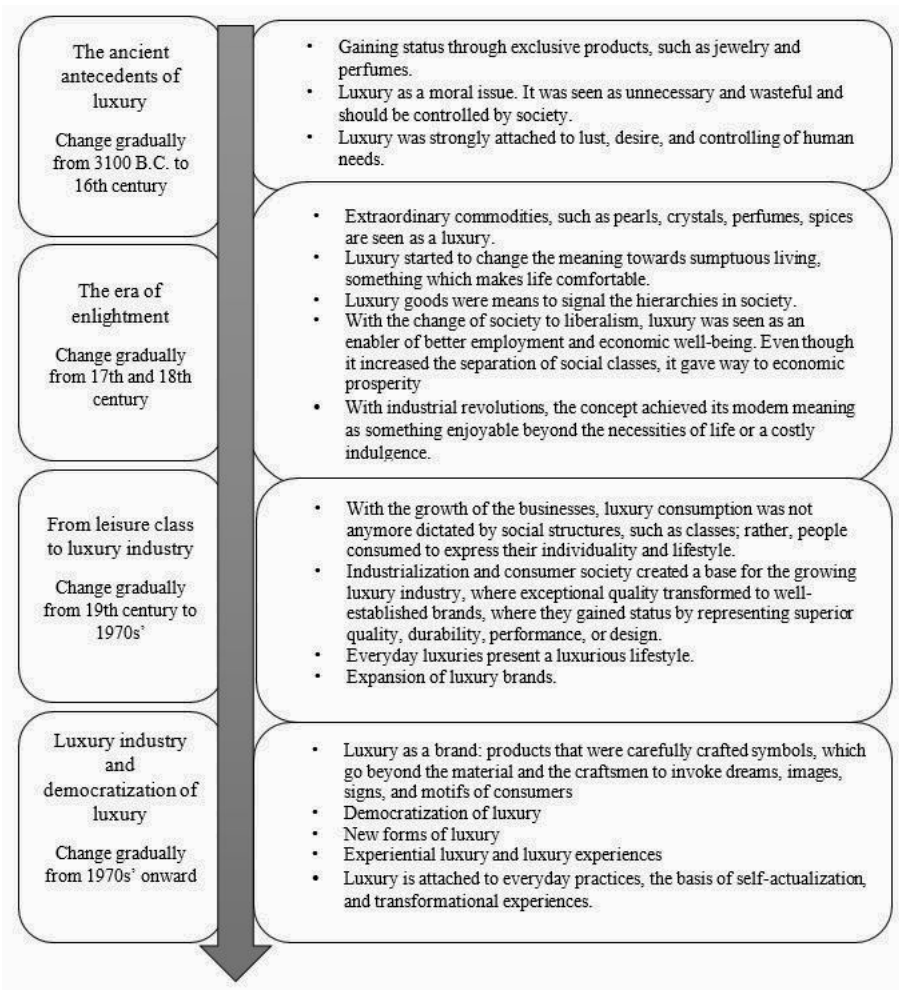
### **2.1 LUXURY – A CHANGING CONCEPT IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

#### **2.1.1 Evolution of luxury – from its origins to the present**

In the last few decades, academic literature on luxury has aimed, without success, at finding an overarching definition for the concept (e.g., Cristini et al., 2017; Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016). As an alternative, it has therefore been agreed that it is a complex concept with diverse perspectives and fluctuations as it depends on developments in society (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). This means that as societies develop and economic conditions change, in order to remain extraordinary, luxury needs to continuously evolve (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016). Therefore, comprehension of luxury and its antecedents throughout history provides valuable insights into the modern concept of luxury as it captures the forces that have shaped its existence and development.

The concept of luxury has a long history, in which it has had both positive and negative connotations (Brun & Castelli, 2013). The luxury trade is claimed to be one of the oldest businesses (Kapferer, 2015b). However, the exact origin of luxury is impossible to identify and it is believed that some form of 'luxury' has existed throughout humankind (Turunen, 2018). The antecedents of luxury have been approached through sociology; which has shown that as long as there have been organized societies with hierarchies and leaders, there has been some form of luxury. Objects and symbols have been used to signal the status of leaders, and this can be seen and considered as a function of luxury, although it has been recognized that at this time the concept of luxury itself did not yet exist (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). These objects containing symbolic power are dependent on time, culture, and society, and were used to differentiate those in higher positions from those in lower ones (Turunen, 2018).

Although some forms of luxury have existed since the beginning of organized societies, the origins of the word 'luxury' are younger and can be traced to Latin (Turunen, 2018). However, researchers do not agree on the Latin etymology and its roots, whether luxury is derived from excess or standing apart (Kapferer, Klippert, & Leproux, 2014). One of the arguments links the etymology of luxury to the Latin word of 'luxus' meaning indulgence, lavish or excessive lifestyle, with connotations of sumptuousness, luxuriousness, and opulence and coming from the root term 'luxuria' meaning excess, lasciviousness, and harmful self-indulgence and sinful living (Laurent, Dubois, & Czellar, 2005). However, according to Kapferer (2014), the etymology of luxury comes from the Latin word 'luxatio', meaning disruption. Furthermore, the term is argued to originate from the Latin root of 'lux', meaning light and referring to precious objects (Brun & Castelli, 2013). The contemporary understanding of luxury from its traditional perspective is closer to the original meaning of extravagance and excess. However, the debate on the etymological origins of luxury reflects the current ongoing debate about the concept as the historical developments of luxury has produced different perspectives on the concept's current meaning. The evolution of luxury is presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Evolution of luxury

### Ancient antecedents of luxury

The ancient world's civilizations associated luxury with wealth, exclusivity, power and with satisfaction through non-basic necessities (Brun & Castelli, 2013). It has been recognized that the ancient Egyptians expressed high elite status through exclusive products, such as jewelry and perfumes (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012) and that in ancient Greece, luxury was a topic of discussion for the philosophers (Turunen, 2018). The historical discussions interpret luxury from a normative view and approach luxury as a moral issue and condemn it as unnecessary and wasteful (Berry, 1994). For instance, Socrates (470–399 BCE) and Plato (470–347 BCE) highlighted that although luxury was

a necessity, it also had another side which lead to lust and desires, therefore, it needed to be controlled by society as otherwise harmony and justice would not prevail (Berry, 1994). Aristotle proposed that a life of luxury is worthless, meaning that it did not purposefully lead to the good of society (Berry, 1994). Luxury discussions focused on morality and negative connotations exceeding social norms (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016). Indulging in luxury was seen as a threat to society and caused conflicts as it was approached via two opposite perspectives; those that saw luxury as an opportunity, being aspirational and driver for improving society and those who saw luxury as a disruptive power and the enemy (Brun & Castelli, 2013; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Luxury was linked to pleasure and enjoyment, leading to sins (Turunen, 2018). Therefore, besides excess and symbols, luxury was strongly attached to lust and desire and controlling human needs (Cristini et al., 2017). According to Featherstone (2015), there was a belief that luxuries and opulent settings should only be for God's eyes and pleasure in the Middle Ages causing luxury consumption to have ambivalent characteristics. Therefore, indulging in luxury was seen in an ambiguous light and as having negative associations in the Roman era and up until the fourteenth century (Brun & Castelli, 2013). The medieval and renaissance periods were controlled by sumptuary laws as luxury was perceived to be a danger and must be limited to keep order in society (Wilkins, 2008). These laws were not concerned with the common good of society but instead aimed maintaining the distinction between the social classes and to increase locally produced luxury products (Cristini et al., 2017).

### **The era of enlightenment**

During the seventeenth century, luxury was found in extraordinary commodities, such as rare pearls, crystals, perfumes, and spices from other countries (Berthon et al., 2009). After the 17th century, the number of sumptuary laws were reduced (Berry, 1994). With the creation of the bourgeoisie and the rise of liberalism, luxury started to change its meaning toward sumptuous living, and making life comfortable. The monarchs and aristocrats in Europe signaled their personal power in society through luxury goods such as jewelry and precious objects (Brun & Castelli, 2013; Turunen, 2018). The social stratification of societies was manifested through the



existence of royalty, the church, and other principles and systems which gave society a structure, and luxury goods signaled these hierarchies in society (Turunen, 2018). According to Featherstone (2015), these hierarchies within society with their excessive display and consumption of luxuries provided a starting point for luxury consumption, their aim being to create distinctions between royalty, aristocrats, and the common people. The transformation of society with the advent of liberalism opened the realm of luxury to different social classes as liberalism provided a platform for a broader economic rationale (Brun & Castelli, 2013).

Furthermore, according to McCants (2007), luxury consumption was encouraged as it enabled better employment and economic well-being even though, at the same time, it increased the separation of social classes. The moral view of disruptive luxury as excess and a threat to society's order shifted to a new focus with economic prosperity (Cristini et al., 2017). During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the rise of world trade liberalism changed to mercantilism (Cristini et al., 2017). The industrial revolutions and the higher living standards helped more people to be able to buy luxuries, and luxury as a concept achieved its modern meaning as something enjoyable beyond the necessities of life or a costly indulgence (Brun & Castelli, 2013; Okonkwo, 2007). This time can also be pinpointed as the origins of the modern industry of luxury goods as in Europe some entrepreneurs established companies to create exceptional products to suit the social elite's lifestyle (Brun & Castelli, 2013). At this point, luxury was the product of great craftsmen, such as Louis Vuitton, the trunk-maker (Berthon et al., 2009). The significant change in thinking was that luxury was no longer seen only from the public perspective, as something to serve the common good; but instead was also allowed to satisfy personal needs and desires (Veblen, 1899).

### **From leisure class to the luxury industry**

The growth of businesses in the twentieth century led to a wider customer base, and the exclusivity and inaccessibility of luxury started to disappear with the arrival of an industrial and consumer society (Brun & Castelli, 2013; Turunen, 2018); this change meant a more significant shift on both societal

and individual level in values and lifestyles (Baudrillard, 1998). Consumption in societies was no longer dictated by social structures such as classes as people began to consume in order to express their individuality, lifestyle, and identities (Wilska, 2002). The debate on luxury shifted to an economic one, where consumption of luxury was a means of choice resulting in positive economic consequences to society (Berry, 1994). According to David Hume (see Berry, 1994), parallel with this change was a preoccupation with luxury's qualitative material aspects. Industrialization and a consumer society created a base for the growing luxury industry, where exceptional quality transformed into well-established brands, that gained status by representing superior quality, durability, performance, or design (Brun & Castelli, 2013). Furthermore, according to Featherstone (2015), the expansion and extension of the consumer culture created possibilities for a range of 'everyday luxuries', which was further fed by images of pleasurable luxurious lifestyles in Hollywood films and shopping malls, enhancing the sense of desirability and providing opportunities for consumption.

### **The luxury industry and the democratization of luxury**

The next enlargement of the luxury industry was in the 1970s through the trends that created a boom in traveling, expanded the range of luxury products, and produced a growth in distribution networks: these all further shaped the luxury industry (Brun & Castelli, 2013). At this point, luxury increasingly became the brand: products that were carefully crafted symbols, which went beyond the material and the craftsmen to invoke the dreams, images, signs, and motifs of the consumers (Berthon et al., 2009). The growth story continued in the 1980s, and luxury was linked strongly to products and brands as well as status (Kapferer, 2015b). People continued to buy luxury to increase their pleasure (Petersen, Dretsch, & Komarova Loureiro, 2018). From a historical perspective, it is argued that the latest change has been the appearance of worldwide luxury companies and conglomerates (Som & Blanckaert, 2015). Increased spending power and the availability of more leisure time have impacted the explosive growth of the luxury industry, leading to the establishment and development of luxury brands (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). The growth in luxury consumption offered the possibilities for

differentiation in the offerings and, at the same time, developing a consumer society (Turunen, 2018).

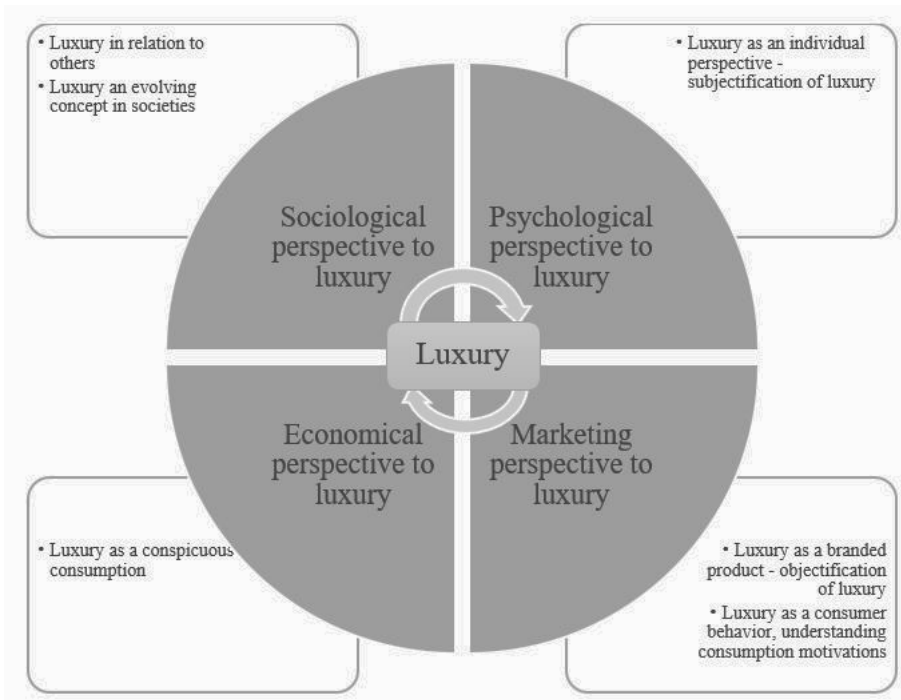
The development of luxury brands guided the expanding luxury industry. Turunen (2018) argues that luxury's democratization can be pinpointed as one of the most significant drivers that explain luxury's existing success. Overall, globalization, mass media, and the democratization of luxury created new forms of luxury and impacted the original concept (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). The growing availability of luxury products developed a new understanding of luxury in contemporary society as the democratization of luxury creates conflicts with the original meanings attached to luxury, such as scarcity and rarity (Turunen, 2018). Furthermore, the luxury market is currently available to the many instead of the few. From the brand perspective, the availability of luxury brands has grown, and at the same time, it has created diffusion with brand extensions as brands have become available in various forms, prices, and retail channels (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015). Therefore, the word luxury is argued to require a qualifier, such as new, old, accessible, über, hyper, modern, classic to prefix the word as a luxury has so many forms in the contemporary world (Bastien & Kapferer, 2013; Ricca & Robins, 2012). Many of the traditional meanings attached to luxury, such as class, elitist, exclusive, are still viable for the traditional forms of luxury, but in addition to these there are now new forms of luxury (Godey et al., 2013a; Thomsen et al., 2020). Furthermore, with the experience economy, luxury consumption has shifted to experiences, and the concept has also been attached to everyday practices (Banister, Roper, & Potavanich, 2019) and integrated into consumers' everyday lived experiences, where luxury has a more transient and private role (Bauer et al., 2011). In recent discussions, luxury experiences have also been a basis of self-actualization, offering transformational luxury experiences (Mora, Berry, & Salen, 2018).

According to Kapferer and Bastien (2012), the dichotomous concept of seeing luxury as good or bad has led to the concept's evolution. Gurzki and Woisetschläger (2016) propose that in historical developments of luxury, the cultural context and cultural changes have presented a significant role, emphasizing the noteworthiness of context in constructing luxury. An interpretation of the luxury phenomenon in terms of history reveals

structures of societies, symbolic values, and humans' desires at a particular time. Kemp (1998) notes that the perception of luxury changes from one society to the next. Luxury developed in isolation throughout the centuries (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012) as it was for a long time something only enjoyed by a small elite group, and therefore, it has been argued that it was able to obtain its idiosyncratic nature (Turunen, 2018). With the democratization of luxury, the number of people accessing luxuries has been increasing, and luxury is no longer only the preserve of a small elite (Turunen, 2018). Furthermore, the growing availability of luxury has diluted the perceived value of luxury goods (Turunen, 2018), and has shifted the search for extraordinary and exclusivity towards luxury experiences. At the same time, it has added multidimensionality to the concept of luxury.

### **2.1.2 Reflections on the academic approaches to the understanding of the concept of luxury**

Luxury has been researched in different domains of social sciences and humanities, for example, in sociology, cultural studies, anthropology, economics, and psychology (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016). Even though the academic literature on luxury has grown steadily, and the topic has been approached from many disciplines (Chandon, Laurent, & Valette-Florence, 2016; Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016), the theoretical advancements or attempts to define the luxury concept are criticized for being minimal (Cristini et al., 2017), and that philosophical or conceptual perspectives on luxury in academic studies are rare (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016). According to Gurzki and Woisetschläger (2016), there are ten major research clusters in contemporary academic research in the field of luxury, which are partly intertwined and thus create a multidisciplinary perspective. Consequently, this has resulted in an enormous amount of literature, which presents a challenge for research and understanding (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016). Therefore, it has been pointed out that instead of clarity there is more confusion than ever about luxury in academic discussions (Heine, 2012; Miller & Mills, 2012a). The main academic approaches reflecting the historical developments in conceptualization of the luxury concept are presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Historical developments reflecting the academic approaches to concept of the luxury.

The luxury concept has sociological roots as for something to become a luxury it must come into existence at the intersection of social surroundings, personal experience, and the product (Berthon et al., 2009; Vickers & Renand, 2003). For something to be seen or regarded as a luxury it has to reach all the way to the societal level (Turunen, 2018). That is, the luxury receives its form partly in relation to society. One of the main publications in the luxury domain is argued to be in the sociology by Bourdieu (1984), who discussed luxury phenomena as forms of economic, social, and cultural capital in social classes, and thus extending the economic perspective attached to luxury into social and cultural realms. Mansvelt et al. (2016) argue that Bourdieu's concept of a classed habitus leads to an understanding of how desires for luxury items are constructed culturally, and therefore they differ across living standards. In other words, luxury is partly influenced by forms of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital that place different values on objects

and practices. The concept of habitus recognizes that social variations in value can affect the reasons why consumers of different social classes choose and appreciate various luxuries as signs of a distinguishing factor (Bourdieu, 1986). The sociological perspective on luxury highlights the contextuality affecting the concept of luxury.

Turunen (2018) proposes that parallel with the sociological view from ancient times is the revolving discussion on luxury that attempts to balance between needs, necessities, and desires, which therefore presents a more individualistic and psychological perspective to luxury. Although the terms needs and necessity have been used interchangeably, there is a distinction between the concepts as “everything necessary is needed, but everything needed is not always thought necessary” (Turunen, 2018, p. 20). Furthermore, as societies develop, those items that may have previously had a luxury status may lose it and become necessities as luxury cannot be dissociated from the prevailing social and political structure of the times in question (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). However, the psychological perspective represents a definition of luxury more from the direction of the personally meaningful pleasures and indulgences obtained from luxury (Turunen, 2018), and it highlights the relativity of the luxury concept.

Both perspectives, sociological and psychological, from which the understandings of the luxury arise present two different sides of luxury as they represent a discussion on the way in which luxury can be interpreted; luxury for others and luxury for oneself (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009b; Laurent & Dubois, 1994; Tynan et al., 2010). One fundamental constant from a sociological perspective is that the social environment shapes the consumption of luxury, particularly in the configuration and the declaration of status through consumption (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). In contrast, the psychological perspective concerns the subjectivity and multidimensionality of the concept, which is influenced by the interplay between the individual and context (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016).

This dichotomous interplay of luxury both relating to others or oneself has been a basis in luxury consumption discussions. This economic perspective on luxury has dominated academic research until recent years, as the idea that luxury consumption is a way to signal status has been a strong research area

(Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016). The view of luxury as a form of conspicuous consumption originates in Veblen's (1899) theory of a leisure class, which approaches luxury from the symbolic meaning to others. Veblen's theory of a leisure class also served as the basis for other economic studies with conspicuous consumption, such as Leibenstein (1950) and Mason (1981). The research on luxury from an economic perspective has predominantly focused on high price as being an attribute of luxury, which also signals social status as a form of value (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016). Even though there is no argument about the value of the economic perspective and its intellectual foundation for luxury research, the current perspective on luxury consumption as a form of conspicuous consumption is argued to not be contemporary with recent developments in the research domain (Eckhardt et al., 2015). However, the economic perspective lays the foundation for the objectification of luxury via certain attributes, the dichotomous discussion on conspicuous consumption, and status as value, contrary to inconspicuous consumption and individual meaning-making.

Furthermore, reflecting on luxury's historical developments, it seems that the continuous industrial and consumer culture development affected the luxury concept; this means that luxury was seen as equal to luxurious branded products and thus linked the academic discussion to marketing. The research within marketing has revolved around the domains of branding and consumer behavior (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016). Consequently, luxury conceptualizations are commonly deduced from a product and brand-management perspective or a consumption perspective (Fionda & Moore, 2009). For example, marketing research has tried to define luxury (e.g., Berthon et al., 2009; Kapferer, 2015b; Vickers & Renand, 2003; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999), explore consumption and consumers (e.g., Vigneron & Johnson, 1999; Yang & Mattila, 2014, 2017) and luxury value (e.g., Hennigs et al., 2012; Shukla & Purani, 2012; Tynan et al., 2010; Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebles, 2007). From the product and brand management perspective, luxury brands are defined as having superior product characteristics, which positions them at the top in the ranking hierarchies of products and brands (De Barnier, Falcy, & Valette-Florence, 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009b). These products and brands are seen as physical manifestations of luxury, the attributes of which

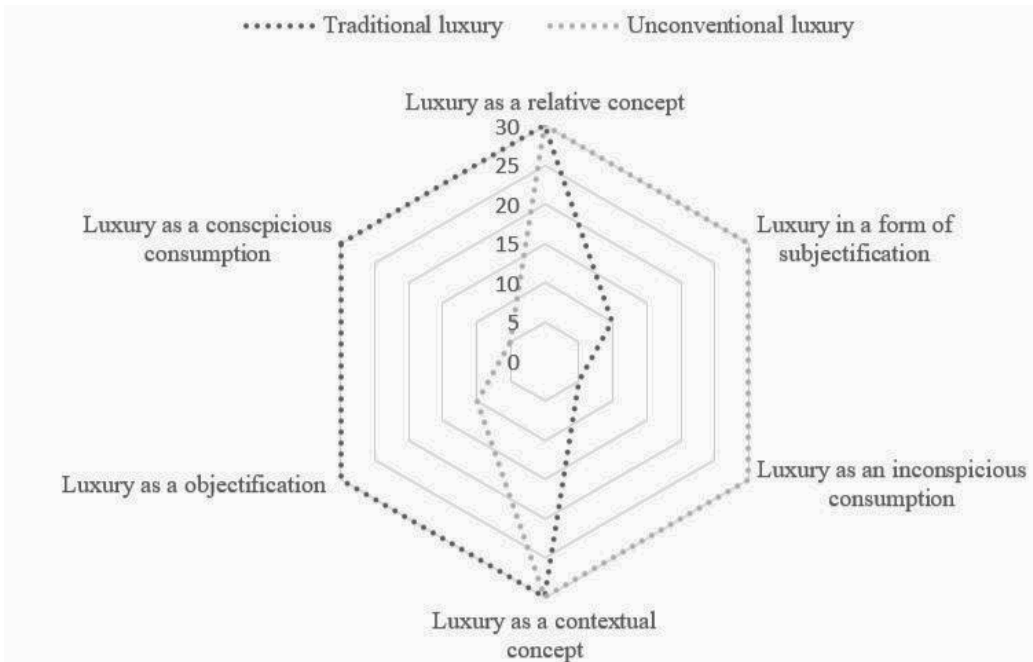
are a source of the perceptions of the brand's luxuriousness, and therefore, they are the ultimate examples of branding (Keller, 2009). Features such as excellent quality, heritage, scarcity and rarity, and aesthetics accompanied by a high price are typical characteristics associated with luxury brands (Turunen, 2018). Due to a turn to a more inner-directed perspective on luxury, the academic discussion within marketing has slowly moved on to consumer behavior (Bauer et al., 2011). In this discussion, luxury is defined as a means to capture consumers' dreams, and luxury serves as a medium of self-expression (Chandon et al., 2016), which can be seen to complement the discussion on the origins of luxury from a psychological perspective (Turunen, 2018). The research from this angle has been interested in the comprehension of consumption through concepts such as identity, motivation and values, and the way in which cognition and emotion has contributed to understanding consumers' perception of the attributes and dimensions of luxury (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016). However, it is argued that as the contemporary luxury consumer is more heterogenic, the understanding of luxury has become more abstract than that offered by traditional consumer behavior (Hansen & Wänke, 2011). From the conceptualization perspective, the discussion on luxury within marketing has linked luxury to the objectification of luxury as well as a subjective perspective on luxury.

## **2.2 A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONCEPT OF LUXURY**

### **2.2.1 Dimensions of the luxury concept**

A definition for the concept of luxury remains illusive, and so there is no generally accepted definition (Ko et al., 2019). As an alternative, researchers have agreed that defining luxury is hard, and the concept is filled with complexities (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016) and fragmented meanings (Cristini et al., 2017). Furthermore, a recent study by Wirtz et al. (2020) criticized the fact that many definitions of luxury focus only on the objectification of luxury through a few dimensions, such as high product quality, price, and exclusivity.



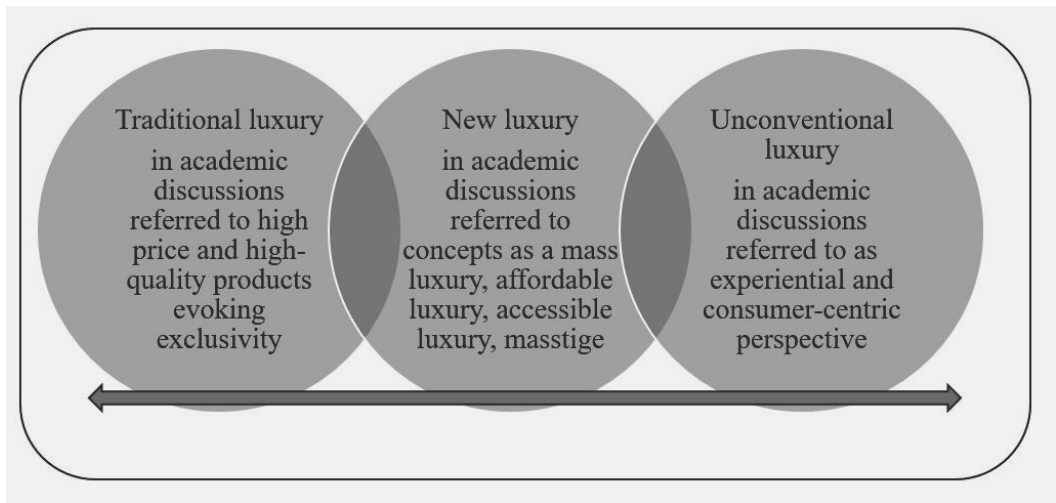


**Figure 4.** A multidimensional concept of luxury.

Figure 4 presents the multidimensional luxury concept, with all the main dimensions from the literature being displayed together. Figure 4 shows the dimensions and provides examples of the levels within multidimensionality as they may vary depending on the perspective on luxury, the context, and relativity. Even though there are no commonly approved theories and definitions about luxury among researchers, scholars have agreed that luxury is a multidimensional concept that is relative, subjective, and contextual (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019). The relativity of luxury can be attached to regional, temporal, economic, cultural, and situational aspects (Heine, 2012). Understanding the concept is subjective, and is affected by the social and cultural context where the individuals live (Nueno & Quelch, 1998; Yeoman, 2011). This context is by definition dynamic, fluid, and evolutionary, meaning that luxury has changed throughout the development of society and is continuing to change (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Yeoman, 2011); this obviously creates a challenge to a conceptual definition (Heine, 2012). Cristini et al. (2017, 105) identifies the complexity of luxury and concludes that “Luxury has more than one meaning depending in the context and while luxury

continues to transform, tangible and intangible luxuries still appear as to be controversial phenomena that by their inherent meanings and conditions rest on a paradox.”

The debate on the difficulty of defining the concept has been argued to be caused by the competing definitions (Ko et al., 2019) and the intertemporal changes (Cristini et al., 2017). Brun and Castelli (2013) highlight the differences in definitions between experts and academics, that therefore make the term ambiguous. Furthermore, Kapferer et al. (2014) state that even the manner in which scholars conduct the debate on luxury reflects the differences between the concept and conception, which are not recognized in discussions, thus, creating fuzziness within the concept. The analysis of Heine (2012) demonstrated that luxury differs substantially within the scientific community, and the differences in understandings are mainly rooted in the varying research objectives, which consequently makes it impossible to develop an overall luxury definition as luxury can vary from objects to intangible luxuries such as time and place. The contemporary understanding within academic discussion refers to traditional luxury, new and unconventional luxury (see Figure 5). The border between these understandings is not clear cut; instead, it is more like a continuum that attaches and intertwines concepts together. In addition, the discussion on the difficulty of defining luxury in academic research demonstrates that the understanding of luxury is in a continuous transition stage (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019). Heine (2012) argues that despite the confusion concerning the luxury concept, researchers within different disciplines share the understanding of luxury as being something more than necessary and something different to the ordinary (Kemp, 1998). In addition, luxury is associated with dreams (Phau & Prendergast, 2000). Therefore, according to Heine (2012, 42), the overarching definition of luxury is “luxury is anything that is desirable and more than necessary and ordinary”.



**Figure 5.** Luxury concepts presented in academic discussions

### **2.2.2 Traditional and new or unconventional luxury**

The traditional perspective on luxury has been quite clear among scholars. This concept of luxury has typically referred to scarce products attached to elitism and society's privileged elite (Nueno & Quelch, 1998). In the traditional approach, luxury is perceived through objectification as highly valuable, high priced, high quality, exceptional, and special (Bauer et al., 2011). The core assumption with traditional or "old" luxury is that brand managers define and develop luxury brands to be appealing to consumers so that they reflect these attributes of objectification (Bauer et al., 2011). Thomsen et al. (2020) describe this as luxury being receptive, meaning that luxury is defined by luxury companies and markets, where luxury is acquired and existing. This kind of luxury is experienced in enclaved luxurious spaces or contexts, or they are high-quality products, which are sold at a high price (Bauer et al., 2011; Ko et al., 2019). In addition, it has a strong public dimension, meaning that luxury is used as a method of social classification, demonstrating status and conspicuousness (Bauer et al., 2011; Godey et al., 2013a; Ko et al., 2019), highlighting the shared public meanings attached to a conspicuously consumed product or brand (Thomsen et al., 2020). In other words, luxury conceptualization focuses on luxury being ontologically scarce, expensive, accessible only to a few (Thomsen et al., 2020). Moreover the product-focus

is defined by product features, such as, creating public symbolism by being conspicuous and enduring (Thomsen et al., 2020) where the core is price, quality, and extravagance (Godey et al., 2013a). Luxury is part of a lifestyle, and luxury is luxurious across situations, meaning no distinction exists between usage and contexts (Bauer et al., 2011).

### **New and Unconventional luxury**

The democratization of luxury raised a discussion on new luxury (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009b; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003; Truong, Simmons, McColl, & Kitchen, 2008), which has been approached using various definitions. The first to describe the term new luxury were the business consultants Silverstein and Fiske (2003). They described a new and more affordable form of luxury that possesses higher levels of quality, taste, and aspiration than other goods in the category; the forms serve the self-interest of consumers who are affluent and can express their individuality and personality through consuming luxury (Silverstein & Fiske, 2008). According to Silverstein and Fiske 'new luxury' are goods that "evoke and engage consumers' emotions while feeding their aspirations for a better life" (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003, p. 48). When describing new luxury, the concept is referred to in hedonistic terms such as self-referring luxury; this term describes desires, dreams, emotions, and it is characterized by pleasure, emotion and feelings (Godey et al., 2013a). Consumers consume luxury to improve their life quality by focusing on experiences through travel or well-being, creating a continuous driver for the desire to have further new experiences and search for novelty and change (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2011). Furthermore, the new luxury is described as experiential, personal, authentic, and subtle or covert materialism (Yeoman, 2011), which offers enrichment and experiences (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2018).

Even though new luxury originally referred to consumer aspirations towards the good life, it has gained different perspectives and descriptions among scholars. For example, Granot and Brashear (2008) call new luxury populce-popular opulence stemming from mass-market shifts, where inconspicuousness is one of the main features, and it is radically different from traditional luxury. However, Turunen (2018) argues that the definition of new luxury matches the definition of premium and democratized luxury

as it is extravagant but still accessible to many. New luxury has also been attached to the term mass luxury (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009b; Miller & Mills, 2012b) and mass affluence (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012), which are based on the term *masstige* referring to mass-marketing and prestige (Kumar et al., 2020; Truong, McColl, & Kitchen, 2009). However, Kapferer (2015b) argues that *masstige* differs strongly from luxury, as a product or service marketed to masses is not associated with luxury (Hennigs, Wiedmann, Behrens, Klarmann, & Carduck, 2013) and consumers objectives of consumption between luxury brands and *masstige* brands differ (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009b; Miller & Mills, 2012b). According to Kapferer (2015b), even though common features in both consumption luxury and *masstige* are status and conspicuousness, consumers seeking a true luxury search for heritage and country of origin as *masstige* consumers want to portray a desirable, characteristic, ideal-self by using the brand. Furthermore, Turunen (2018) criticizes new luxury from a brand managerial perspective for having at its core a value formation that aims to meet the consumers' needs as this represents short-term value. According to her, true luxury brands pursue long-term value, creating a desire (Turunen, 2018).

Moreover, with the democratization of luxury, the concept of new luxury has been attached to different adjectives relating to the availability of luxury (Turunen, 2018). There has been a discussion on accessible luxury (Chang et al., 2016; De Barnier, Falcy, & Valette-Florence, 2012; Kapferer et al., 2014), affordable luxury (Mundel, Huddleston, & Vodermeier, 2017), and everyday luxury (Banister, Roper, & Potavanich, 2019) in contrast to intermediate (De Barnier et al., 2012) and inaccessible luxury (Chang et al., 2016; De Barnier et al., 2012), which refer to the traditional understanding of luxury. Accessible luxury has been attached to *masstige* (Kumar et al., 2020) and is dependent on how a brand is marketed and the other levels such as intermediate or inaccessible luxury (Chang et al., 2016; De Barnier et al., 2012). Accessible luxury is seen as a luxury product, which is publicly well-known and reasonably priced and non-essential, authentic, and prestigious; being specially targeted to middle or working socioeconomic classes to satisfy a luxury desire and achieve better social status (Chang et al., 2016). In the same vein, affordable luxury has been argued to come from practitioners' discussions and refers

to premium products, where the consumption is seen to originate from hedonic consumption motives as the products can satisfy the consumer's multisensorial and emotional needs and serve as a way to express a luxurious lifestyle providing a hedonic experience (Mundel, Huddleston, & Vodermeier, 2017). The recent study by Mundel et al. (2017) showed that consumers have similar expectations of luxury and affordable luxury and the study argued that the line between luxury and mass-produced products is not clear.

Contrary to brand and product-focused discussions on new and democratized luxury, consumer culture researchers discuss the evolving luxury concepts as a form of everyday luxury. This is seen as a more consumer-centric and experiential understanding of luxury, where interpretations of luxury can be embedded in consumers' everyday lives and the meaning of everyday luxury emerges from consumers' activities, experiences, and associated practices (Banister et al., 2019). Consumers practice everyday luxury with caretaking and escaping practices that give way to status or self-transformation by bridge the gap between consumption extraordinariness and ordinary everyday life (Banister et al., 2019; Bauer et al., 2011). Thus, everyday luxury can be a fleeting experience that generates transformation and incorporates both profoundly personal understanding and the understanding of others (Banister et al., 2019).

Even though it has been highlighted that the new form of luxury is associated with peoples' desire for opportunities to indulge themselves in experiences that are unique, emotional, rare, and memorable (Kapferer, 2015a), the discussion on new luxury within research has been mainly attached to the perspective of affordability and brands as the previous paragraphs show. Furthermore, even though the original discussion (e.g., Silverstein & Fiske, 2008) on new luxury linked the meaning of the concept to the consumer's needs, dreams, and aspirations, the new luxury discussion within academic research is linked to luxury brand extensions and masses (e.g., Granot, Russell, & Brashear-Alejandro, 2013; Truong et al., 2009) rather than emotions and hedonic forms of luxury (e.g., Godey et al., 2013a). The recent evolution in the contemporary understanding of the concept of new luxury is an unconventional luxury; this has been the subject of a whole special edition of the *Journal of Business Research*. Unconventional luxury

melds together different concepts of new luxury, as it is derived from the perspectives of inexpensiveness, accessibility and is held by many (Thomsen et al., 2020). Unconventional luxury “focuses more on luxury in terms of being epistemologically scarce, experiential and agentic” (Thomsen et al., 2020, 442). One of the main differences from the traditional perspective is that the concept is disconnected from social class and conspicuousness as it is not defined as being something for the masses or upper class or representing a medium to demonstrate wealth and status (Thomsen et al., 2020). Rather, with unconventional luxury, it has been acknowledged that luxury can be more than just a hedonic experience, as it goes beyond the transformative nature of experiences (von Wallpach, Hemetsberger, Thomsen, & Belk, 2020).

Unconventional luxury focuses on how luxury is experienced, that is, what kind of private meanings are attached to the luxury experience, which can be as an ephemeral moment in nature (Thomsen et al., 2020). From an unconventional perspective, luxury can be seen as a distinctive experience, which rests in the eyes of the beholder and has a strong private connection, where luxury supports the inner self of the consumer (Bauer et al., 2011). In the study of Kauppinen-Räsänen et al. (2019), luxury arose as a subjective interpretation of something significant for the consumer in contrast to the offering’s qualities as such. The meaning of luxury was seen as relative, subjective, contextual, and rooted in the consumer’s life, which goes beyond consumption (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019) as consumers have their own understanding of the luxury concept (Roper, Caruana, Medway, & Murphy, 2013). From the consumers’ perspective, instead of presenting particular attributes, luxury is understood as transient, ephemeral, immaterial, and fluid, manifesting itself in moments (Hemetsberger et al., 2012; Potavanich, 2015). This means, in other words, that an unconventional understanding of luxury is more concentrated on the consumer than the product and is more intrigued by what luxury does for the consumer than what luxury is (Thomsen et al., 2020).

Furthermore, recent studies discuss unconventional notions of luxury as liquid luxury, which is defined as being access-based, accessible, novel, and encoded to inconspicuous consumption (Bardhi, Eckhardt, & Samsioe, 2020). Liquid luxury’s base is in social transformations linked to services, experiences, and the digital economy, where the value comes from knowledge, speed,

openness, or flexibility (Bardhi et al., 2020). Hence, Mora et al. (2018) discuss conscious luxury in their study as a concept attached to well-being and understood as wealth and affluence incorporating sustainable, ethical, and environmental concerns as the drivers of luxury value formation. These new forms of luxury are especially argued to be grasped by young millennials, the aspirational class, and the technological subcultures (Bardhi et al., 2020; Mora et al., 2018) and highlight a parallel notion - the evolving concept of new or unconventional luxury and changes in perceived values of luxury by consumers and also the difficulties in providing an overall conceptual definition. The main differences in approaches are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Summary of the main differences in traditional and contemporary (new and unconventional) approaches to luxury

	<b>Traditional understanding of luxury</b>	<b>Contemporary understanding of luxury (New or unconventional luxury)</b>
<b>Academic literature and theoretical approach</b>	Branding literature	Experiential marketing literature Consumer behavior literature
<b>Described with the concepts</b>	traditional luxury, old luxury, status luxury, inaccessible luxury	New luxury, mass luxury, affordable luxury, accessible luxury, everyday luxury, liquid luxury, unconventional luxury, conscious luxury
<b>Luxury in the form of</b>	branded product	experience
<b>Determinants of luxury</b>	attributes (objectification of luxury)	subjective perception
<b>Consumption</b>	conspicuous	hedonic or inconspicuous
<b>Defined by</b>	marketers/industry	consumer
<b>Value formation</b>	status	individual meaning-making and value



### **2.2.3 Luxury as an objective attribute or a subjective meaning-making**

According to Wirtz et al. (2020), there are two schools of thought among academics that can be recognized to describe the concept of luxury, where exclusivity or rarity differentiates the perspectives. The dominating school's luxury literature concentrates on luxury as an object and defines luxury via characteristics or tangible attributes attached to the product or service, which is then seen as a determinant that makes something luxurious (Wirtz et al., 2020). The other school of thought within academic research approaches luxury from subjective luxury perceptions and focuses on the individual (Wirtz et al., 2020).

As luxury has been attached for decades to products, and luxury brands are obviously characterized by selling these products, luxury is most frequently defined by product-related characteristics, which may then lead to a certain understanding of the distinguishing features as regards the similarities, differences and taxonomies of luxury and non-luxury (Heine, 2012). This conceptualization comes from the traditional luxury perspective, where specific attributes are associated with luxury. Recognizing the attributes of luxury products helps develop an understanding of how luxury is created (Heine, 2012).

Laurent, Dubois, and Czellar (2005) defined luxury as consisting of six dimensions, depending on the combination of luxury product or service being discussed. These qualities are related to price, quality, uniqueness, aesthetics, personal history, and superfluity (Laurent et al., 2005). Based on the study of Laurent, Dubois, and Czellar, scholars De Barnier and Valette-Florance (2013) approached luxury from three different standpoints; economic, psychological, and marketing. According to De Barnier and Valette-Florance (2013), luxury's superfluous nature is no longer an essential feature of luxury for the consumer in the contemporary world, as it is no longer perceived as a feature that can create more value. Instead, consumers are looking for the functional values of luxury that can be combined with aesthetics and quality. In addition, consumers view luxury with a hedonistic attitude where the focus is on pleasure and enjoyment (De Barnier & Valette-Florence, 2013). They conclude that luxury has unique attributes when compared to

standard products and services (De Barnier & Valette-Florence, 2013; Vickers & Renand, 2003).

Kapferer and Bastien (2012) find that the common core in luxury is comprised of six criteria: 1) luxury is a very qualitative hedonistic experience or a product made to last, which is offered at 2) a price that far exceeds what their functional value would possibly dictate; it is 3) bound to heritage, unique know-how, and culture, linked to the brand, and 4) obtainable in purposefully restricted and controlled distribution, and 5) offered with personalized and tailored accompanying services and; it 6) might also represent a status or social marker, making the owner or beneficiary feel special, and have a sense of privilege (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). The weight of attributes may differ depending on the type of luxury in question (De Barnier et al., 2012; Kapferer, 1998; Kapferer & Laurent, 2016).

Cristini et al. (2017) propose, in turn, that the core meaning attached to luxury consists of inherent excellence, creativity, and exclusivity. To better understand the mechanisms of luxury and its effects, Cristini et al. (2017) analyzed the paradigm of luxury in their study. According to them, luxury refers to asymmetry, meaning that even though excellence, creativity, and exclusivity are adequate to define luxury, they are not necessary. They continue by stating that the traditional meaning of luxury is less universal in today's luxury approach, which is driven by brands as luxury today can still be perceived as luxury, even though one of these conditions is not at a high level (Cristini et al., 2017). Nevertheless, according to the Cristini et al. (2017) study, "ultimate luxury requires that all conditions are high. Respectively, a brand, product, or service lacking one or even all of these conditions hardly represent luxury in its own right" (Cristini et al., 2017, 105).

The debate about the objectification of luxury has also revolved around what can be defined as a luxury compared to a non-luxury. It is argued that the symbolic aspect distinguishes luxury from non-luxury goods, and they are part of the brands that reach beyond tangible features (Turunen, 2018). Furthermore, symbolic characteristics are seen as drivers for the consumption of luxury goods as they can be symbolic to the individual or symbolic to others (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009a). To respond to the challenge of conceptualizing the attributes that differentiate luxury from non-luxury, Vigneron and Johnson

(2004) argue that the psychological benefits of luxury products, rather than functional benefits, are key to this distinction. According to De Barnier and Valette-Florence (2013), aesthetics, quality, personal history, and high cost are the factors distinguishing luxury from the ordinary. Tynan et al. (2010) identified in their study the key factors that help to distinguish luxury from non-luxury and proposed that luxury refers to high quality, expensiveness, and non-essential products that are exclusive, authentic, and prestigious and the more of these attributes a product has, the closer it comes to being something luxurious. Therefore, luxury should be seen more as a hierarchical classification, where luxury is on a continuum (De Barnier et al., 2012; Vickers & Renand, 2003; Wirtz et al., 2020). In line with this, Kapferer and Laurent (2016) state that the proper question for a luxury research is no longer to identify the dimensions of the attributes that should be considered when defining luxury, but to answer the critical question of where luxury begins in each dimension because this level varies among consumers and countries (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016).

Objectifying luxury through certain attributes has faced critique from scholars. Heine (2012) argues that features are not clearly explained and tend to stay at an abstract level, such as referring to the product's high quality or aesthetics. The difficulty with the abstractness of attributes is that they may be partly perceived as subjective and, in addition to the individual, are also dependent on the social context, situation, and the object (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012). Turunen (2018) highlights the challenge to the objectification of luxury via attributes as it is not only the product characteristics that compose luxury in a brand, such as price, quality, and aesthetics as these are features that can be recognizable in any product even if they are not identifiable as a luxury. The characteristics are not the luxury in itself; as long as these attributes are not meaningful to consumers, they will not create a perception of luxury (Berthon et al., 2009; Okonkwo, 2007). By being interpreted and exhibited in special contexts, the attributes become meaningful and receive their symbolic importance (Turunen, 2018).

When luxury is conceptualized through consumers' meaning-making and value-in-use (e.g., Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019; Thomsen et al., 2020), luxury is seen as something more than just a product quality; it becomes a

social construct with certain perceived benefits, which go beyond the product quality (Kapferer, 2010) and change as societies' develop (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). The meaning of luxury does not have to be an offering (Cristini et al., 2017) or a luxurious context as it can arise from a lived experience or activity (Bauer et al., 2011; Hemetsberger et al., 2012; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019). Luxury is determined by customer perception and interpretation of experiences, processes, and tangible cues (Wirtz et al., 2020). The customer's socio-economic class influences the interpretation of luxury and customer segments are also influenced based on their needs and preferences, such as conspicuous consumption or privacy (Wirtz et al., 2020). Furthermore, the individual's situational needs also affect perception, for example, is the consumer searching for relaxation and rejuvenation or excitement and stimulation from the service (Wirtz et al., 2020).

The concept of the moment can help demonstrate how luxuriousness is in flux in the consumer's life, and is embedded in enjoyments that allow temporal escapism from daily life (von Wallpach et al., 2020). Because of the escapism, the moments become meaningful and unique and at the same time offer a way to re-energize people (Bauer et al., 2011). Moreover, even though consumers may attach luxury to materialistic products, such as the vacation destination, luxuriousness occurs in moments "when they feel free, alive, and reconnected with nature and humankind" (von Wallpach et al., 2020 p.499). This makes luxury moments, in addition to being private, less materialistic and less brand-related (Bauer et al., 2011). Moreover, luxury is attached to essential qualities of humans existence (e.g., von Wallpach et al., 2020).

Furthermore, luxury experiences help individuals construct their personal self-narratives (Bauer et al. 2011), as luxury makes individuals feel unique (Hennigs et al., 2012). Hennigs et al. (2012) state that the luxury experience consists of various emotional needs, and consumers' emotional needs are one of the the cornerstones when constructing a concept of luxury. Therefore, luxury also lies in the possibility of transforming common everyday situations into special moments. These moments of luxury are separated from pleasurable moments by their shared experiential qualities, which are related to concepts of being free, happy, perfect, scarce, caring, and exiting,

and thus are seen as luxurious, meaningful, and valuable (von Wallpach et al., 2020). Luxury moments, therefore, not only have common qualities with meaningful and extraordinary experiences (Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019), but also with peak experiences (Maslow, 1971) as well as happiness and well-being (Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

Turunen (2018) considers the discussions on the consumer-centered view and discusses the concept of luxuriousness, emphasizing the perspective of the 'symbolic to self' facet of luxury. In other words, luxuriousness is the consumer's interpretation of luxury within that consumer's own everyday life situation and surroundings, and the meaning is not necessarily defined in comparison to other people, brands, or products (Turunen, 2018). Luxury is not limited to the core offering as objects; rather, it is embodied in consumer activities and interprets objects based on situations and needs (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019). Therefore, luxury in the contemporary consumer culture, it might not be the brand or product that creates the experience of luxury, but rather the experience, which is attached to intangible desires, and the ultimate goal of meaningfulness, which will contribute to consumers' well-being (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the meaning of luxury is not related only to luxury offerings and experiences generated by the luxury industry; meanings are derived from the consumers' perspective, where luxury serves as a medium for meaning-making, and luxury is allied to the particular role of luxury for the consumer rather than the qualities of the offering itself, which may provide something good for the consumer (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019). In other words, a luxury experience may be derived from various needs and meanings referring to hedonic experiences, which aim to give pleasure and happiness (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) but in addition impart eudaimonic well-being (Hemetsberger et al., 2012); this directs a person through meaning-making and self-realization to personal growth and development (Waterman, 1993). Eudaimonia is a higher state of the well being of the self, which is shaped through an individual's self-realization and self-development (Ryff & Singer, 2008). The core of it is "the idea of striving toward excellence based on one's unique potential" (Ryff & Singer, 2008, p.14), which applies to longer-term

personal outcomes (Huta & Ryan, 2010). Happiness can be seen as a combination of pleasure and meaning (Wu, 2010). However, for pleasure to last long, it should be derived and sought from the context of meaning: a sense of meaning that guides pleasure and that in itself affords pleasure (Wu, 2010).

Therefore, it is not the product or offering that brings value but the experience or act of experiencing it, and therefore more of the intrinsic value elements and intangible desires remain, leading to meaningfulness as the ultimate goal (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019). Moreover, according to Wirtz et al. (2020), these two perspectives on luxury which focus on the object characteristics and attributes that can be considered a luxury, and what luxury means to the individual, should be integrated together in luxury services research to obtain a holistic view of experienced luxury services (Wirtz et al., 2020).

#### **2.2.4 Luxury as consumption - from conspicuous to inconspicuous and hedonic consumption**

When the definition of luxury is approached from the consumption perspective, the literature refers to conspicuous consumption and is rich with terms describing luxury consumption as a form of gaining status by consuming luxury goods (Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 1999; O’Cass & Frost, 2002). The history of luxury consumption was the basis for the discussion on economics in the seminal work “Theory of Leisure Class” by Thorstein Veblen, which is the most cited work within luxury research literature (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016). In his work, Veblen (1899) states that the leisure class spend their “unproductive” time, leisure-time, consuming goods conspicuously to demonstrate their wealth and status. Therefore, luxury consumption may be seen as a social phenomenon, where the lower social classes try to emulate the consumption of the higher social classes, and are thus motivated to consume conspicuously (Veblen, 1899).

Conspicuous consumption refers to the public display of wealth to impress others, where purchasing a luxury good differentiates and raises the consumer’s status and works as a means of social identification (Leibenstein,

1950). As societies developed further and consumption of luxury became widespread, the discussion on luxury consumption turned to economics to demand theories, which in addition to emphasizing the Veblen effect, that is, conspicuous consumption, also included the bandwagon effect and the snob effect. From these perspectives, luxury consumption is perceived to be connected to goods driven by other humans and society's social drivers; however, the concepts differ based on the emphasis on what is required from the consumption (Turunen, 2018). The bandwagon effect relates to belonging to some social group while in contrast the snob effect is driven by being distinguished from the social group and is related to interpersonal and personal meanings (Mason, 1981). However, combining these perspectives, the Veblen, bandwagon and snob effects offer a picture of how conspicuous consumption has moved from the extremes of being exclusive to an activity enjoyed by mass consumers (bandwagon), while at the same time fighting to keep it exclusive (snob) (Page, 1992).

In the marketing literature, conspicuous consumption has almost been synonymous with luxury ever since Veblen, in that brands and products have been seen as a vehicle to support consumer identities (Belk, 1988). However, the emergence of the consumer society questioned the view that social status could be externally determined and inherited. This means that luxury goods are material reflections of the view that status is socially constructed and therefore, luxury goods provide a suitable tool for structure construction and status reporting (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Furthermore, the change has been influenced by various personal and social aspects, which differ based on society's inner or other-directedness (Mason, 1981). Subsequently, Laurent and Dubois (1994) then argued that the word luxury encapsulates symbolic and cultural values, and luxury has an ambivalent and dual nature and is attached to abstract concepts such as space, time, or freedom. Furthermore, they contended, people's predisposition toward luxury is affected by their perception of the luxury world in general and their personal fit within that world (Laurent & Dubois, 1994).

As societies have developed and purchasing power has increased, conspicuous consumption is argued to have become a predominantly middle-class phenomenon in affluent societies, and it has changed considerably

from Veblen's depiction of ostentatious display (Page, 1992). Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) argue that the bandwagon effect is the main influencer in the democratization of luxury as in the contemporary world, luxury consumption is not only for the wealthy. Rather, luxury consumers' background is heterogenic, creating variations in luxury consumption expectations (Heyes & Aluri, 2018; Thomsen et al., 2020; Uriely, 2005). Roper et al. (2013) argue that balancing between continued pressure to denote individuality and the phenomenon of *masstige* has affected the construct of luxury and luxury needs to be rethought in the contemporary world, as luxury is both a socially constructed and a largely subjective experience. The basis of conspicuous consumption consists of the product's price and other people's perceptions, meaning that the desire for status through consuming has to represent status both to consumer and the surrounding people (Truong et al., 2008).

In the last decades, scholars have identified that luxury consumption has gained more inconspicuous forms (Eckhardt et al., 2015). According to Eckhardt et al. (2015), the driver for inconspicuous consumption of luxury brands reflects a shift in consumer attitudes as consumers prefer personalized experiences and have moved away from social class and seeking status. The signaling ability that has been traditionally attached to luxury goods is diluted by *masstige*, and therefore subtle brands are preferred, and luxury consumption has moved towards experiences (Eckhardt et al., 2015); consequently, luxury consumption is no longer related to social classes and conspicuous brand names (Hemetsberger et al., 2012). The other perspective to shift luxury consumption toward experiences and inconspicuous consumption is the interpretation that as contemporary consumers are living in a world "with an oversaturation of consumer goods, well-being is re-signified as wealth and affluence, hence the intangible quest for wellness and happiness becoming the ultimate sign of contemporary luxury" (Mora et al., 2018, p.177). In addition, recent studies have acknowledged that concepts such as prestige and extravagance that are traditionally intertwined with conspicuous consumption and luxury may have negative connotations among consumers (Eckhardt et al., 2015; Goor, Ordabayeva, Keinan, & Crener, 2020), therefore the constant growth in the wealth gap in societies may drive inconspicuous consumption practices (Belk, 2020). Consequently, luxury consumption



should be re-conceptualized and decoupled from conspicuous consumption (Eckhardt et al., 2015; Potavanich, 2015).

However, inconspicuous consumption research is still argued to be scarce (Eckhardt et al., 2015; Postrel, 2008). Luxury and inconspicuous consumption has been studied mainly in the context of brands (Wu, Luo, Schroeder, & Borgerson, 2017) and fashion (Makkar & Yap, 2018; Ting, Goh, & Salmi, 2018). Previous research into inconspicuous luxury has recognized that inconspicuous consumers consume luxury without intending to display their social status publicly (Wu et al., 2017); they desire more sophisticated inconspicuous signals (Turunen, 2018). This is creating domain-specific cultural capital among certain peers by offering a tool to differentiate from the mainstream and at the same time helping interaction with the preferred others (Berger & Ward, 2010). Luxury consumption is highly individualistic, and consumers pursue personal goals through consumption (Shao, Grace, & Ross, 2019), making luxury consumption more attached to experience and authenticity (Yeoman, 2011).

Seeing luxury consumption only as a perspective on conspicuous consumption does not therefore, in the contemporary world, represent the full nature of luxury consumption as it fails to incorporate the cultural sensitivity and experiential nature of luxury consumption (Potavanich, 2015). Furthermore, with the rise of experiential marketing, luxury consumption has been linked to emotional aspects, sensory pleasures, aesthetics (Wiedmann et al., 2009), and hedonic dimensions and emotions are now seen as central elements of luxury brand consumption (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2009). Hedonism refers to personal rewards as a subjective function of the consumption (Laurent, Dubois, & Czellar, 2005), and therefore, intrinsic aspirations are argued to be more substantial in luxury consumption than has previously been thought (Truong, McColl, & Kitchen, 2010). The discussion among scholars with luxury consumption has also revolved around consumption motivations (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999, 2004), and scholars have agreed that luxury consumption may be driven both by extrinsic motivations (e.g., wealth and social status) and intrinsic motivations (e.g., quality and self-directed pleasure) (Kapferer et al., 2014; Truong, 2010; Truong et al., 2010; Tynan et al., 2010). The intrinsic perspective refers to consumers' motivation to search

for aspirations, self-reward and enrichment, and self-actualization, to find a space where they have time for themselves and relax (Correia, Kozak, & Del Chiappa, 2020). In turn, extrinsic motivations refer to the consumer's search for signaling to others (Correia et al., 2020). Moreover, differences between consumption preferences arise from motivations; in other words, are the consumers extrinsically or intrinsically motivated (Shao et al., 2019) and is the variation in consumers' consumption preferences heterogenic, and whether certain types of consumers seek inconspicuous consumption through luxury (Wu et al., 2017).

The modern luxury industry serves more diverse and broader consumer segments, and in postmodern society, consumers acquire luxury products for conspicuous and inconspicuous reasons (Atwal & Williams, 2009; Eckhardt et al., 2015). However, most of the studies conducted in the luxury context do not define the consumer's economic or cultural background at a level where it would be able to reveal an understanding of the consumer's interpretation of luxury. This is despite the fact that it has been noted that the experience of luxury depends on the consumer's own interpretation, life situation, and what is considered a luxury at a particular point in time (Turunen, 2018). Moreover, in current studies, a consumer's background is reflected based only on luxury typologies such as the need for status (Yang & Mattila, 2014, 2017), generational aspects (de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019; Heyes & Aluri, 2018; Yang & Lau, 2015) or a psychological theory of mindsets (Seo, Ko, & Kim, 2021). It can be argued that the contemporary luxury market is full of dichotomies, and as the luxury concept is evolving, it is dependent on the social and cultural context and the consumer; however, consumers' heterogeneity as regards consumption and expectations has received little consideration (Turunen, 2018).

## **2.3 LUXURY TOURISM, SERVICE AND SERVICE PROVIDER**

### **2.3.1 Luxury tourism and service research and service providers in the academic literature**

In history, tourism was seen as a luxury experienced by the elite, for example, the Grand Tour in the 17th century, 18th and 19th centuries became a popular way of traveling for the English elite and upper classes (Correia, Reis, & Ghasemi, 2020). The changes in tourism, especially change in the airline industry and the ease of traveling worldwide, have diluted the luxurious meaning of travel, and it is seen now as relatively normal, and contemporary luxury travel is becoming affordable to a broader market of less-affluent consumers (Correia & Kozak, 2012; Okonkwo, 2009; Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2019). The concept of luxury is challenging within the context of tourism as traveling to any destination, even to the large number of destinations where over-tourism is clearly obvious, can be perceived as a luxury holiday as luxury meanings are heavily ingrained in tourism experiences (Correia & Kozak, 2012).

Even though experiential luxury and luxury services are among the most significant consumption areas within the contemporary luxury industry (Chang et al., 2016), academic research lacks studies on luxury service (Wirtz et al., 2020), and consequently luxury tourism studies have called for more research (Park et al., 2010; Swarbrooke, 2018). The current discussion on luxury tourism reflects the traditional understanding of luxury. From this perspective, the discussion within luxury tourism is placed on branded service products enjoyed in the traditional luxury context, meaning that the tourism experience is based on physical features and attributes focusing on a branded product in a luxury service setting (Holmqvist, Visconti, Grönroos, Guais, & Kessous, 2020). Therefore, the image of luxury tourism in the contemporary discussion is brand managerial and product-focused. In this discussion, a luxury service producer or provider is described as: five or four-star hotels (e.g., Cetin & Walls, 2016; Lu, Berchoux, Marek, & Chen, 2015); Michelin star or full-service restaurants (e.g., Yang & Mattila, 2014, 2017), cruise liners (e.g., Han, Hwang, & Lee, 2018; Han & Hyun, 2018), airlines (e.g., Hwang & Lyu, 2018), resorts (e.g., de-Miguel-Molina, de-Miguel-Molina, & Rumiche-Sosa,

2014), luxury retail stores (e.g., Holmqvist, Visconti, Grönroos, Guais, & Kessous, 2020), online store environments (e.g., Holmqvist, Wirtz, & Fritze, 2020), casinos (e.g., Gil-Lafuente, Merigó, & Vizueté, 2014) and golf clubs (Chang & Ko, 2017). Consequently, this gives a very one-sided image of luxury tourism experiences from the products and service providers' perspective. However, this perspective can be recognized in the following discussion in which the luxury discussion is reflected through service marketing and tourism marketing literature.

A luxury service provider in academic literature is often seen as a large Western branded company that provides prerequisites for services based, for example, on the features such as room size and hotel facilities, where quality and price premium are relative and affect the objectification of what is considered as luxury (Wirtz et al., 2020). Some scholars acknowledge the experiential aspects (e.g., Atwal & Williams, 2009; Williams & Atwal, 2013) of luxury consumption in services. However, it is approached from a brand managerial perspective, where luxury service is seen as a complement to a product and not as a service as such (e.g., Atwal & Williams, 2009) that could bring value to the customer. Thus, the luxury tourism and service literature relate to brand management research (Gurzki & Woisetschlager, 2016) in a service context (Wirtz et al., 2020), which may emphasize luxury service as relating partly to luxury service brands as products that offer a personalized service corresponding to their brand image (Holmqvist, Visconti, et al., 2020; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009b). Consequently, it emphasizes how luxury brands manage and control service encounters through their frontline employees (Dion & Borraz, 2017), leaving the customer in a rather passive role (Holmqvist, Wirtz, et al., 2020) as luxury brands are reluctant to loosen control of the service encounter (Tynan et al., 2010). However, contemporary tourism and service literature within the experience economy emphasize co-creation (e.g., Binkhorst, Den Dekker, & Binkhorst, 2009; Grönroos & Ravald, 2011; Grönroos & Voima, 2013) and multi-actor interactions (Holmqvist, Wirtz, et al., 2020), which place the customer in a more active role in luxury experience creation (Harkison, 2017a, 2018).

The product perspective has also been criticized in luxury service research in the service marketing literature as this perspective is mainly being conducted

as regards the attributes of luxury goods (Wirtz et al., 2020). Previous research has noted that the attributes of luxury products do not necessarily function with luxury services (Conejo et al., 2020). Product attributes are one part of luxury; however, their value is gained through consumption (e.g., Vickers and Renand 2003; Berthon et al. 2009). Wirtz et al. (2020) criticizes the objectification of luxury with attributes as difficulties arise when the characteristics of services are taken into account. Meaning that with services, the level of quality deviates and is subject to several factors; employees, the customer, other customers; and they are inseparably produced and consumed in relation to time and are thus perishable (Wirtz et al., 2020). Furthermore, in services, attributes such as high quality, including conspicuous consumption and pleasure by owning the product, are argued not to be valid as such, as service is related to the experience, which cannot be stored or own (Wirtz et al., 2020). Rather, for example, the value of the service is derived from the value-creating elements rather than ownership as such (Lovell & Gummesson, 2004). With a focus on luxury service, Wirtz et al. (2020) identified that the key dimensions of luxury service are non-ownership and exclusivity; an exclusivity that can be termed monetary, social, or hedonic. Holmqvist, Diaz Ruiz, et al. (2020) noted that the luxury attributes, in the experiential context, consist of exclusivity, aesthetics, escapism, and authenticity. Exclusive experiences distinguish luxury services from ordinary services (Wirtz et al., 2020). Luxury service attributes are affected by objective quality features and subjective perception, which places a service on a continuum, and therefore, services should also be viewed more from the perspective of individual perceptions (Wirtz et al., 2020) by understanding what kinds of motivations, meanings, and values are behind luxury consumption (Turunen, 2018). In addition, the consumers' personal understanding of luxury is derived from interpretations in regard to their own perceived life circumstances and social contexts (Turunen, 2018).

By subordinating luxury services to more prominent luxury products, significant service aspects are underrepresented and even ignored (Conejo et al., 2020). For example, even though it has been recognized that managing the customer's journey is vital for tourism and hospitality companies (Knutson & Beck, 2004; Walls, 2013), it is not visible in luxury tourism and luxury service research. Rather, the experience is expressed as a customer experience that

occurs during phase of the trip and does not consider it an experience during the pre-or post-parts of the journey, which is how the customer actually uses the service (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Previous studies describe the luxury experience in luxury tourism contexts with various expressions, for example, pleasurable (Han, Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2018), unique and exclusive (Bakker, 2005), hedonically based consumption experiences (Lee & Hwang, 2011), where consumers seek emotional and aesthetic content to gain pleasure (Bahri-Ammari, Van Niekerk, Ben Khelil, & Chtioui, 2016). However, the description stays at an abstract level from a product perspective and does not relate to how the prerequisites for the experience are created (e.g., Bakker, 2005; Yeoman, 2008) or how the consumer experiences it; therefore omitting the unconventional perspective from the discussion. As the traditional perspective on research of luxury is characterized by expectations that the characteristics of a product or brand produce meanings for social distinctions, with attributes such as high price and quality, uniqueness or scarcity and superfluity and aesthetics, the latest studies argue that in many cases luxury moments are meaningful, and these moments go beyond those attributions (von Wallpach et al., 2020). Recent research within luxury services suggests that consumer escapism is a primary driver of luxury experiences (Holmqvist, Diaz Ruiz, et al., 2020; Holmqvist, Visconti, et al., 2020), meaning that an outstanding luxury service experience creates a prerequisite for customers to become embraced in the experience, which becomes a temporary escape and is pleasurable and desired as part of the customers' value process (Holmqvist, Visconti, et al., 2020).

The new and unconventional luxury notions focus on being and experiencing instead of having or owning (Cristini et al., 2017). The studies are still scarce, but the consumer is presented as being more active (Holmqvist, Diaz Ruiz, et al., 2020; von Wallpach et al., 2020) in the consumption experience, where luxury is inconspicuous and has private symbolism (Thomsen et al., 2020). These moments of luxury consist of feelings of being free, happy, perfect, rare, caring, and exciting, which sets luxury experiences apart from other pleasurable moments (von Wallpach et al., 2020). According to Hemetsberger et al. (2012), consumers' perceptions of luxury adopt both object- and experience-related, as well as abstract and concrete views of luxury.

Experiencing luxury exhibits qualities of high intensity and high involvement with the situation (Hemetsberger et al., 2012), and the luxury experience may relate to losing a sense of time and place (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019). Therefore, consumers' luxury revolves around complex experiences of having (materialistic self), doing (liberating, oscillating, integrating and relating self), being (harmony of selves), and becoming (achievement-oriented and self-transformational) (Hemetsberger et al., 2012).

From a consumer perspective, luxury is not characterized by boldly exhibited products, and brands as the branding literature suggest but is constituted of exceptionally valuable, potentially hidden moments of luxury, which serve to support the self in everyday living (Hemetsberger et al., 2012). As a result, luxury experiences are much more than just a perceived extension of consumers' selves (e.g., Belk 1988). Experiential luxury gives the opportunity to live out different selves, reflected by symbolic consumption, indulgence in special moments and activities, moments of harmony, self-enhancement, and self-transcendence (Hemetsberger et al., 2012). None of the luxury experiences are superior to any another; instead, having and owning are as valuable in providing luxury experiences as are doing, being, or becoming (Hemetsberger et al., 2012).

Even though service and tourism marketing literature emphasize experience as the core of tourist product, and service providers should create prerequisites for unique customer experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Tussyadiah, 2014; Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010), there are only a few studies that approach luxury tourism from the perspective of the experience (e.g., Cetin & Walls, 2016; Harkison, 2016, 2018; Harkison et al., 2018a; Walls et al., 2011). In these studies, the experience is described in the form of a customer experience. Customer experience is a holistic concept that encompasses every aspect of a company's offering (Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010) and originates from the interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organization (Gentile et al., 2007). Customers do not recognize the structure or the components of the customer experience, rather they perceive the feeling it creates (Gentile et al., 2007). The value for the customer and the company is created through these interactions (Addis & Holbrook,

2001); therefore, the customer always has an experience when they interact with a firm (Haeckel, Carbone, & Berry, 2003).

It is noted that comparing tourism with other services is challenging as it is a complex consumption experience including various functional, tangible, objective components and also hedonic, emotional, and subjective aspects (Williams & Soutar, 2005). Furthermore, it has also been noted that it is not only pleasure that tourists are seeking, because, at the same time, tourists also want to have intellectual aspirations and self-development as part of their holiday (Calver & Page, 2013; Richards & Wilson, 2006; Voigt, Howat, & Brown, 2010). According to Dias and Dias (2019), tourism experiences should be developed based on the customers' need for education, escapism, novelty, and meaning. Therefore, successful tourist products are the ones that allow customers to achieve these motivations, and the tourist experience is the aim of the service provider's value creation (Batat & Frochot, 2015).

Additionally, from a service provider's perspective, experience distinguishes excellent service providers from average ones (Edvardsson, Gustafsson, & Roos, 2005). The company's viability in the tourism industry depends on managing experiences and becoming customer-focused and experience-centric (Knutson, Beck, Kim, & Cha, 2007). To successfully create a customer experience, service providers need to know what type of experiences are desired by consumers and offer them (Haeckel et al., 2003). Luxury tourism consumers are wealthy tourists with substantial material resources (Popescu & Olteanu, 2014). However, as noted earlier, the product alone is not sufficient anymore as, for example, millennials describe ideal luxury experiences with character and personality rather than attributes attached to traditional luxury (Heyes & Aluri, 2018). Therefore, the material elements attached to the product no longer define luxury; instead, for the consumer, it is the perceived value and experience (Kiessling, Balekjian, & Oehmichen, 2009), thus luxury tourism products have moved away from traditional luxury products (Bakker, 2005). This means that five-star hotels have been changed to a wide variety of authentic luxury experiences (Bakker, 2005; Veríssimo & Loureiro, 2013) as luxury tourists seek exotic experiences that offer novelty and a glimpse of a different culture (Veríssimo & Loureiro, 2013).



Service providers are not able to provide the service experience but only the prerequisites for the various experiences (Komppula, 2006). In other words, companies are not able to give experiences to the consumer as such, as they can only create the circumstances and environment in which consumers may have an experience, as, in the end, an experience affects the inside of the person. Therefore, the outcome depends on how that individual in a specific mood and state of mind reacts to their interaction with the staged event (Mossberg, 2007). However, as Jensen and Prebensen (2015) state, tourist experiences can, to some extent, be designed, processed, and facilitated by the service providers. Therefore according to Mossberg (2007), to be successful, the tourism service provider needs to know how to provide circumstances that may enhance the customers' experience.

According to Wirtz et al. (2020), luxury service indicates a special service experience for customers, which raises their expectations. It requires creating successful service delivery throughout the customer's value process (Holmqvist, Visconti, et al., 2020). From the service provider's perspective, the services are incredibly intangible, and therefore the value is challenging to communicate (Wirtz et al., 2020). The study of Holmqvist, Visconti, et al. (2020) showed that the service provider has an active and important role in the customer's value creation process in a luxury service context. Furthermore, customers then create value independently after the service interaction with the provider (Holmqvist, Visconti, et al., 2020). Therefore, "value is now centered in the experiences of consumers" (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 137).

### **2.3.2 Understanding the perceived value for the customer as a basis for value creation in the service concept**

Customers experience activities with the company, and these form the customer's perception of value (Bitner, 1992). Understanding customer value, especially concentrating on how a customer perceives value, is; therefore, a central component in the service marketing literature (Holmqvist, Visconti, et al., 2020); this is because the consumers' desire for luxury consumption is considered to result from the perceived value (Hennigs, Wiedmann, Klarmann, & Behrens, 2015; Tynan et al., 2010). The perceived value of a

luxury is formed by the consumers' senses and beliefs (Berthon et al., 2009; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009b; Tynan et al., 2010), and the meaning is influenced by the consumers' cultural backgrounds (Godey et al., 2013a, 2013b; Hennigs et al., 2012; Stathopoulou & Balabanis, 2019).

The value structure of how a consumer perceives luxury is recognized to be multidimensional and consisting of several underlying dimensions (Tynan et al., 2010; Wiedmann et al., 2007, 2009). There is no specific agreement among researchers concerning the number and types of dimensions because value perceptions have been criticized or being poorly understood in the context of luxury (Hennigs et al., 2015) as research is argued to lack the correct tools to measure customers' perceptions (Shukla & Purani, 2012) and thus the different value dimensions of luxury have become intertwined (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019).

Early studies based their thinking on luxury value, predominantly on the theory of Veblen (1899) concerning conspicuous consumption, and thus scholars argued that status value was a leading factor for luxury consumption. Subsequently, it was noticed that consumers gained personal aspects from luxury consumption in addition to status value. The first value frameworks for luxury were proposed by Vigneron and Johnson (1999), who were inspired by the conceptual work of Mason (1992) with the status-seeking framework and the work of Laurent and Dubois (1994). Vigneron and Johnson studied and later tested (2004) prestige-seeking behavior and noticed five motivations behind value formation, capturing both personal values and social values. According to their studies, prestige-seeking behavior consists of conspicuous, unique, and social values, which refers to the Veblenian, Snob, and Bandwagon motivations. Furthermore, Vigneron and Johnson recognized (1999) emotional and quality values arising from hedonist and perfectionist motivations. Therefore, prestigious brands are seen typically to deliver five types of benefits as a form of status signaling: perceived conspicuousness, perceived uniqueness, perceived quality values, perceived social value, that is, perceived extended self, and perceived hedonic value as fulfilling emotional desires (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999, 2004).

During the years, several theoretical luxury value models have been suggested. For example, Vickers and Renand (2003) suggested in their

framework that perceived luxury value consists of three dimensions: utility value, experience value, and symbolic value. Two of the most cited luxury value dimensions frameworks in contemporary luxury research are those of Wiedmann et al. (2007, 2009) and Tynan et al. (2010). Wiedmann et al. (2009, 2007) approaches the value perceptions for the purpose of segmentation and defines the concept of customer perceived value based on Zeithaml's (1988, p.14) work as the "consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product (or service) based on perceptions of what is received and what is given." According to Wiedmann et al. (2007, 2009), luxury values consist of functional, financial, social, and individual values, which are partly overlapping and contradictory as behind these values there are other value dimensions. For example, functional value consists of usability value, quality value, and uniqueness value. The model also considers the consumer's situational variables and individual characteristics (Wiedmann et al., 2009, 2007). However, Wiedmann et al.'s (2009, 2007) model has been criticized as the proposed framework is based on literature reviews (Liang, Ghosh, & Oe, 2017).

Another value framework that is widely used in luxury research was developed by Tynan et al. (2010), who based their work on Smith and Colgate's (2007) customer value creation. Based on previous studies, they expanded the value types by identifying attributes such as excellence (Holbrook, 1999) and craftsmanship (Kapferer, 1997). Furthermore, they argued that other frameworks are firm-centered, which positions the customer in a relatively passive role and therefore consumption should be studied from a more experiential view as a luxury product, and service providers can at some level provide different benefits to consumers such as sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational benefits (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). Therefore, their model aligns with the perspective of value co-creation as in the service-dominant logic of Vargo and Lusch (2004); as in their model, luxury consumers actively engage in value creation during the consuming process. Tynan et al. (2010) conducted a multiple case study and suggested a model with five value dimensions. The contemporary value frameworks are presented in more detailed in Table 4.

Both of these value models have been used in experiential luxury contexts (e.g., Chen & Peng, 2018; Hwang & Lyu, 2018; Wu & Yang, 2018; Yang & Mattila,

2016). However, they have been criticized for referring to luxury services as complementing luxury goods, therefore neglecting the characteristics of services (Wirtz et al., 2020; Wu & Yang, 2018). Value dimensions in frameworks are also stated as representing a straightforward one-sided image of perceived luxury value (Turunen, 2018). Furthermore, even though both of the frameworks extend the managerial perspective typical to traditional luxury brand management into a more consumer perspective and make a justification about consumers' luxury consumption, Bauer et al. (2011) argue that these models are still managerially oriented in the context of the new and unconventional luxury. Consumers seek the best quality and service rather than financial factors (Yang & Mattila, 2016); therefore, Batat's (2019) model suggests that financial value is no longer needed for personal luxury experiences. Instead, in her model (2019), luxury value consists of utility/functional value, ideological value, experiential value, and social value. The social value is similar to Tynan et al. (2010), consisting of status and esteem dimensions. The functional value in Batat's model consists of efficiency and excellence. Furthermore, the ideological value dimension of the model refers to ethics and spirituality. The experiential value in Batat's model consists of hedonism (escaping daily life, having fun), affection (the emotional value that emerges in luxury consumption), and aestheticism (immersing in beauty through the senses) (Batat, 2019).

**Table 4.** Contemporary luxury value frameworks

Type of value	Wiedman et al. 2007, 2009	Tynan et al. 2010	Batat 2019
Cost/sacrifice	<b>Financial value</b> (Price value)	Perfectionism effect Exclusivity Rarity	
Utilitarian	<b>Functional value</b> (Usability value, Quality value, Uniqueness value)	Excellence Craftmanship	<b>Utility/function-al value</b> Excellence Efficiency
Experiential/hedonic	<b>Individual value</b> (Hedonic value)	Hedonic effect Aesthetics Experience	<b>Experiential value</b> Hedonism Affection Aestheticism
Symbolic/ expressive	<b>Social value</b> (Conspicuousness value, Prestige value)  <b>Belongs to individual value</b> (Self-Identity value, Materialistic value)	<b>Outer-directed:</b> Conspicuous consumption/Veblen effects/bandwagon/ snob/ status/esteem/ sign/social identity, uniqueness, authenticity <b>Self-directed:</b> Personal identity, aesthetics, self-gift giving, uniqueness, nostalgia/ authenticity	<b>Social value</b> Status Esteem
Relational		Consumer-brand relationship Brand community	
Ideological			<b>Ideological value</b> Ethics Spirituality

Turunen (2018) states that luxury values are measured in big data sets and applied in studies to identify consumer group differences at the micro-level, and therefore, they abandon identifying qualitative differences between consumers. Furthermore, emphasis on value dimensions has changed over time; if the earlier studies emphasize the symbolic value as a basis for perceived value with luxury, the recent development with luxury literature shows the transition from functional and symbolic value to emotional value (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019). In addition, Turunen (2018) argues that functional and symbolic dimensions in luxury have been highlighted as criteria when a luxury brand is being defined. At the same time, as brands are built from a managerial perspective, they neglect the consumer and experiential dimensions, referring only to hedonic experiences (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) or the relevance of service aspects (Atwal & Williams, 2009; Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Recent studies into perceived luxury value describe that there is a growing desire for pleasure and emotional value over functional, financial, and utilitarian benefits (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019) in the form of self-oriented value, as consumers seek more profound meaning and meaningfulness from their experiences (Cristini et al., 2017; Hemetsberger et al., 2012). Furthermore, it is noted that symbolic value is not necessarily relevant in the context of luxury experiences (Yang & Mattila, 2016), and the focus on luxury experiences in service contexts is rather on the service itself as a value rather than other factors such as the price of the service (Yang & Mattila, 2014, 2017).

The perceived luxury value studies in luxury service and tourism contexts have been conducted mainly in commercial settings such as cruise ships, shopping centers, and restaurants and have been related to consumption and brands. The study by Kauppinen-Räsänen et al. (2019) examined consumers in their own life contexts and showed that consumers experience luxury value in both commercial and non-commercial contexts. However, the similarity between the contexts and the perceived value was only visible with the experiential value dimension. In their study, consumers perceived functional, financial, symbolic, hedonic, and experiential value in the commercial context. In non-commercial contexts, the perceived value dimensions were experiential value and prudential value. The findings of

the study by Kauppinen-Räsänen et al. (2019) revealed that experiential value was also emotionally charged and was seen differently between consumers in commercial and non-commercial contexts; meaning that in commercial contexts, the value dimensions consisted of activity and newness and in non-commercial context beside activity there consumers' expressed freedom and relaxation. Moreover, their study (2019) findings indicated that meaningfulness, meaning, and well-being factors arose only in non-commercial contexts leading to prudential value. The prudential value was evoked by consumers' attempt to seek deeper meanings and was not defined by objects or material; instead, it only served as an instrumental element, deriving value and leading to well-being (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019).

Turunen (2018) argues that interpretation is required to perceive elements as meanings that are subjectively valued and suggests the concept of perceived luxuriousness, which is a personal interpretation, and acquires its value in regard to the perceiver. Therefore, it may be seen in all kinds of products and services and is not dependent on how others view it or how it is marketed (Turunen, 2018). According to Turunen (2018), perceived luxuriousness is compounded of four elements, which are interactive by nature: the extended product (the value in use and consumption), perceived uniqueness, authenticity, and the specificity of the context. From this combination consumers derive personal meaning, which is also reflected in the interpretation process (Turunen, 2018). The interpretation process combines perceptions, interpretation, and experiences, and considers the personal context of individuals, emphasizing that the interpretations of luxury are formed through personal experiences (Turunen, 2018). For example, ultra-wealthy consumers are likely to understand luxuriousness based on different presumptions than consumers with a lower income (Turunen, 2018).

Many of the studies conducted with luxury tourism do not highlight the consumer's economic background nor do they take the qualitative aspects of the consumer into account when discussing the perceived value (e.g., Correia, Kozak, & Del Chiappa, 2020; Correia, Reis, et al., 2020). Furthermore, recent studies have highlighted conspicuousness and social value as a form of status, two of luxury tourism's main antecedents (e.g., Correia, Kozak, et al., 2020; Correia, Reis, et al., 2020). For example, instead of referring to postmodern

consumer culture or the characteristics of the experience economy, Correia et al. (2018; 2016) suggest that luxury consumption expanded into luxury tourism as consumers value the same characteristics in luxury goods as in destinations. Therefore, in their study on tourism luxury values, they refer to the antecedents of luxury tourism using the concepts of: uniqueness, conspicuousness, social value, and the consequences of public display, self-esteem and reverence. All these aspects create meaning in luxury tourism and are intertwined in consumers' minds (Correia, Reis, et al., 2020). According to Correia, Reis, et al. (2020), in order to have the perfect luxury experience, tourists need to have time to enjoy unforgettable days in a five-star hotel or on a cruise. To be perfect, the luxury experience also needs to have privacy, excellent views, family or relations, and even more than this, it has to be an experience to remember (Correia, Reis, et al., 2020). Nevertheless, luxury tourism experiences in traditional luxury tourism contexts, such as luxury cruises, have been questioned as to whether they provide an authentic tourism experience (Gutberlet, 2019).

However, the study of Correia et al. (2014) recognized that people with different socio-economical backgrounds attach different meanings to luxury tourism. Most of the meanings attached to luxury tourism are related to social status, which signifies that the higher the person's status, the less likely the status as a value will impact their holiday decisions (Correia et al., 2014). The idea of luxury is that it provides exceptions to the normality of life (Hansen & Wänke, 2011) and therefore brings into context a person's real-life cultural experiences, needs, and social background; therefore, the perception of luxury depends on a person's social status and economic leverage (Heyes & Lashley, 2017). In a previous study by Correia et al. (2014), luxury tourism for celebrities was associated with being with the family undisturbed in private resorts with prevailing hedonic values. Luxury was defined as intimacy, privacy, and having a good time without censorship, enabling them to be themselves (Correia et al., 2014). However, for ordinary people, the luxury tourism experience was something different, exquisite, and thrilling (Correia et al., 2014). The study by Correia et al. (2014) supports the view of Wirtz et al. (2020, p. 679) that luxury services should be seen as a service continuum as "the service itself can have various degrees of



exclusivity and extraordinariness, and the customer's perception of these characteristics varies, too".

Service providers respond to the customer's value search with a service concept, which expresses the prerequisites of the kind of value the service provider will offer for the customer to consume, that is, the value propositions (Edvardsson & Olsson, 1996). The service concept refers to the desires, goals, and purposes of the customer's needs (Woodruff, 1997) and how customers expect the alternative products to satisfy them (Konu, Tuohino, & Komppula, 2010). Furthermore, the service concept expresses the kind of value the customer expects to experience and is based on their needs and motives (Komppula, 2006). It describes the customers' value expectations of the service offering, reflecting their desired value. Recent studies refer to luxury services as offering extraordinary experiences (Wirtz et al., 2020) that are special moments outside daily life (Holmqvist, Diaz Ruiz, et al., 2020). Luxury is not only enclaved in luxurious spaces and contexts (Bauer et al., 2011) as consumers may experience different moments of luxury, such as enjoying beautiful scenery while hiking or in mundane situations, for example, walking in a forest with family, all of which nourish deep self-experiences and self-realization (von Wallpach et al., 2020). These experiences are particularly meaningful experiences that embellish normal life or disrupt daily continuity and involve a major contrast to everyday life (von Wallpach et al., 2020).

Furthermore, these are the once-in-a-lifetime moments, bucket-list experiences that make a dream become reality, which consumers never expect to experience again (von Wallpach et al., 2020). Therefore, recent research of Holmqvist, Visconti, et al. (2020) identifies escapism as a medium for customer value in luxury service contexts, as escapism drives value in use and offers a hedonic break. Luxury service experiences temporarily transform a customer's identity (Holmqvist, Diaz Ruiz, et al., 2020). Furthermore, escapism is jointly generated to support value co-creation (Holmqvist, Visconti, et al., 2020). According to Wirtz et al. (2020), the key to understanding luxury services is the service provider's aim to provide prerequisites for gaining an experience and reinforcing the hedonic value of luxury services through an initially exclusive experience, which may be monetary, social, or hedonic.

### **2.3.3 Service process and system characteristics in luxury tourism products and experiences**

Tourism consumption is different from other services in multiple ways: the continuance of the service experience is longer, it is outside of the daily life experiences (Batat & Frochot, 2015), it is constituted of several service modules (Komppula, 2006) and service encounters with possibly other actors and service providers in the service setting (Batat & Frochot, 2015). From consumers' perspective, a tourism product is the total tourist product, which tourists experience during the whole trip. The service process includes and describes the customer process, i.e., creating customer experiences during the trip (Komppula, 2006). For the customer, the service process is expressed in the form of a service offering presented to the customer as a detailed description of each service module (e.g., accommodation, meals, activities) and/or an itinerary in the promotion materials. The service process is a description of the formal product for the service provider, meaning the determination and definition of the chain of activities in the customer and production processes (Komppula, 2006). That is, how the service is facilitated from the service provider's perspective, which service modules and encounters are included in the service and the interaction with the customer (Edvardsson & Olsson, 1996).

As most of the studies conducted in luxury service contexts are from the customer's perspective, the service process and system are presented from an abstract perspective. The luxury tourist product is expected to be equated with details that add a sense of high quality to the experience, accompanied by a valued sense of total escape, novelty, and exoticism but within safety (Manthiou, Kang, & Hyun, 2017). Stays in luxury hotels are described as high involvement services, where style, comfort, service, and pampering are in focus (Chu, Tang, & Luo, 2016). The experiences described in the luxury hotel industry make use of elements such as dining, traveling, or wellness activities that focus on creating authentic and exclusive experiences for guests (Wiedmann et al., 2018) and generating a sophisticated atmosphere of peace and harmony with modern commodities that provide a pleasant and comfortable experience (Yang, Zhang, & Mattila, 2016). Furthermore, the discussion around luxury tourism has revolved around the product

perspective, referring to high prices, five-star hotels that provide experiences by referring to traditional luxury with high-quality material features. These include such offerings as dining experiences, 24-hour room service, parking, location, and a high-quality service, cleanliness, security and business facilities (Harkison et al., 2018b). Studies conducted in a cruising context describe activities such as dining and entertaining as service modules in more detail (e.g., Hwang & Han, 2018; Manthiou, Kang, & Hyun, 2017).

The luxury service contexts have often referred to service as a means of pampering (Manthiou et al., 2017; Park et al., 2010), prestige (Hwang & Hyun, 2013), and personalization (Ahmad, 2014; Jin, Line, & Merkebu, 2016) referring to high-quality service. However, as the studies are heavily related to the brand managerial perspective, the studies do not define the service delivery, service process, or service encounter in detail. In the luxury restaurant context, for example, they may rather tend to describe the service as an exceptionally full-table service with expensive silverware and glassware as in the study of Jin, Line, and Merkebu (2016). Many of the studies conducted in the luxury service context have approached the service marketing discussion from the perspective of service quality (e.g., Lai & Hitchcock, 2017; Mohsin, Rodrigues, & Brochado, 2019; Padma & Ahn, 2020), where customer satisfaction is one of the key aims. Even though service quality can be seen as a personalized service or good service, it has received criticism as it originates from product quality (Knutson, Beck, Kim, & Cha, 2010). Furthermore, the debate with service quality in academic discussion concerns the aspects as Hemmington (2007) notes that consumers do not buy service quality; instead, they buy memorable experiences. More recently, Conejo et al. (2020) argue that there is a difference between service quality and luxury service value. Service quality refers to the benefits provided and service delivery (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2010), and it is therefore related mainly to the post-execution phase (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). In contrast, luxury value refers to the service aspects that create high-end perceptions, for example, features of luxury such as authenticity, rarity, or expensiveness (Nueno & Quelch, 1998) and originate in consumers' general pre-acquisition perceptions of value (Woodruff, 1997). Therefore, Conejo et al. argue (2020) that quality can be seen as part of the broader luxury value construct, but it is only one luxury value component

and does not capture the full nature of services. According to them, focusing only on service quality will overemphasize the quality perspective, and at the same time, neglect other aspects of luxury, such as identity or image building or enjoyment, which might lead to a skewed perspective on luxury services (Conejo et al., 2020). Furthermore, adopting the perspective of service quality frameworks, the basis of the assumption is that luxury services and regular services are similar (Conejo et al., 2020). On the contrary, it is noted that luxury services are rich and diverse (Conejo et al., 2020; Wirtz et al., 2020) and are more complex than regular services (Chang & Ko, 2017; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

The service system includes the resources available to the service process for realizing the service concept (Komppula, 2006), that is, the internal and external resources (Edvardsson & Olsson, 1996) and intangible components, which means that the service system includes the resources available to the service process to realize the service concept (Komppula, 2006). Applying the vocabulary of Walls et al. (2011), the service system includes elements of physical experience and elements of human interaction. The physical experience elements refer to the atmosphere in the facilities (cleanliness, comfort, décor, and style), the dimensions stimulating various senses (lighting, color scheme, soundscape, and smells), space/functionality, and symbols, signs, and artifacts (Walls et al., 2011). The human interaction elements, comprising both personnel and other customers (Mossberg, 2007; Walls et al., 2011), may support or destroy the experience (Komppula, Ilves, & Airey, 2016).

Previous studies conducted in luxury service contexts highlight the importance of both the human interaction elements and the physical aspects affecting experiences (e.g., Ariffin et al., 2018; Harkison et al., 2018; Walls et al., 2011). A high-quality service encounter requires many details, from the physical environments to the human interaction elements (friendliness and attitude) affecting the intangible elements such as the atmosphere (Wu & Liang, 2009). The studies have referred to details, style, lightning, atmosphere (Walls et al., 2011; Wu & Liang, 2009), emphasizing the visual aspects of servicescape (Holmqvist, Visconti, et al., 2020) and how they guide customers' behavior (Dion & Borraz, 2017). Furthermore, luxury hotels

target all senses (Wiedmann, Labenz, Haase, & Hennigs, 2018), referring to distinctive presentations in a superior physical environment (Jin et al., 2016; Kucukusta, Heung, & Hui, 2014).

The importance of the human touch (Ariffin et al., 2018; Harkison, 2017b; Wu & Liang, 2009) in luxury services is recognized as a most valuable factor, even though it has been argued that research lacks the perspective of the staff (Harkison, 2017b). Personnel performance determines the experiential value and pleasantness of the experience (Wu & Liang, 2009). Luxury service contexts are seen as service-intensive, requiring a high staff ratio to create high interpersonal guest contact within an opulent environment (Brien, Ratna, & Boddington, 2012). However, the study conducted in branded luxury service contexts typically refers to management styles to enhance brand building through front-line employees with supportive leadership (e.g., Xie, Li, Chen, & Huan, 2016) and empowering management style (e.g., Klidas, Van Den Berg, & Wilderom, 2007), which enables customer-oriented culture. Previous studies have researched the role and ability of employees' interactions within service encounters to emphasize clients' feelings by displaying attention or overplaying formalities (Dion & Borraz, 2017; Holmqvist, Visconti, et al., 2020). Furthermore, the friendliness and attitude of personnel through their performance (Wu & Liang, 2009), appearance, proactivity (Walls et al., 2011) are regarded as valuable in service delivery. However, the more detailed descriptions of service delivery seem to vary depending on the luxury service context and the company's size. In a recent study by Holmqvist, Visconti et al. (2020), in Ladurée shop, the employees focused on the details in the care given through the servicescape; these details included stimulation of the senses, the uniforms, the scripted interaction, and behaving in similarly respectful ways towards each other as well the customer. In that study, the servicescape aims to grant bold service ritualization minimizing disembodiment, where the service employee becomes almost an actor (Holmqvist, Visconti, et al., 2020). Disembodiment is seen as a beneficial and enhancing value process that minimizes the employees' personal touch and human imperfection and thus increasing the customers' humanity; this then becomes more salient and makes the customer the sole protagonist as the personnel never befriends the customers (Holmqvist, Visconti, et al., 2020).

In contrast, Buckley and Mossaz (2016) conducted a qualitative study among Swiss special travel agents working within the luxury service sector and gave a more profound perspective on the professional requirements of the luxury service. The study notes that travel agents' expertise is high, and they make their decision rapidly and intuitively, relying on their personal experience with destinations and tourism products, but also at the same time keeping in mind their authority and responsibility (Buckley & Mossaz, 2016). The special travel agents expressed that customers' expectations needed to be met at every phase of the supply chain, and they wanted to provide unique, memorable, and/or unforgettable experiences, and the prerequisite was that they should have also experienced it in person (Buckley & Mossaz, 2016). Furthermore, the special travel agents expressed that empathy as being one of the essential qualities, meaning it allowed agents to project themselves into the customer's perspective and provide an experience that matched and exceeded the customer's expectation (Buckley & Mossaz, 2016).

The study of Holmqvist, Visconti, et al. (2020) showed that contemporary luxury service providers in luxury service contexts create the prerequisite of escapism in the customer experience, which plays a significant role for the customer. The focus in a luxury service setting is how a service provider can make the customer feel unique and valued (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012), and this requires treating each customer as someone special; that is the behavior of the service provider, and the feeling it creates for a customer is most significant (Holmqvist, Visconti, et al., 2020). Recent studies highlight how the service interaction makes customers feel through allowing them a brief escape, which arises from the service provider's skills at constructing the intensity of the interaction as well as their involvement in the interaction (Holmqvist, Visconti, et al., 2020). According to Canziani et al. (2016), luxury service providers should actively manage the degree to which their service staff react to the cues customers' give as regards social class and how these should affect the actual service encounter. Holmqvist, Visconti et al. (2020) emphasized the service provider's continuous aim to gain insights about their customers during the whole customer journey for use in customer service, and also learn about customer value for internal marketing to improve their service processes.

### **2.3.4 Finland as a luxury tourism destination**

Previous research has noted country-specific differences with luxury perceptions (Hennigs et al., 2012). Nordic countries are democratic and egalitarian, meaning that flat hierarchies and human equality are the nations' core values (Turunen, 2018). Furthermore, the Nordic countries do not have their own luxury brands, rather Nordic consumers define luxury from the experiential and hedonic perspective (Turunen, 2015), instead of interpreting it through status or loudly signaling luxury goods (Kauppinen-Räsänen, Björk, Lönnström, & Jauffret, 2018; Turunen, 2015). Moreover, in countries that are equal and democratic, the viewpoint about and image of luxury are remote (Laurent et al., 2005). Furthermore, according to the studies of Nyrhinen, Wilska, and Leppälä (2011) and Talvio (2011), luxury is not perceived as part of Finns' everyday life. Finland has roots in agriculture, and therefore, only those things that were not able to be produced by themselves have been bought (Nyrhinen & Wilska, 2012). This has shaped Finnish consumer behavior toward rational consumption decisions (Nyrhinen & Wilska, 2012) and, consequently, probably Finnish service culture toward self-service. In contrast to rationality, luxury consumption is very emotional and hedonic, and service is always a part of luxury (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). As Finnish culture does not emphasize luxury, there is an inconsistency between the cultural heritage and the traditional concept of luxury. In recent years, however, Finland has attracted the attention of luxury tourists, celebrities and influencers (Lehtikanto, 2021), and luxury tourism has been raised as one of the main themes of the National tourism board Visit Finland (Business Finland, 2018).

As a tourism destination, Finland has been divided into four main destination areas; the Helsinki region (Metropolitan area), Lakeland, the Coastal region and archipelago, and Lapland (Business Finland, 2019). According to Business Finland (2019) statistics, a total of 7.1 million foreign overnight stays were recorded during 2019 in Finland, of which 43% were registered in the Helsinki metropolitan area, 25% in the Lapland metropolitan area, and 16% in both Lakeland and the Coastal Archipelago area. Foreign overnight stays accounted for less than a third of all registered overnight stays in Finland. Most foreigners were registered for overnight stays in the

Helsinki Metropolitan area, 3.0 million, and this figure accounts for almost half of all overnight stays. After Helsinki, most foreign tourists were attracted to Lapland, where 1.8 million overnight stays of foreigners were recorded. In Lapland, too, the share of foreigners was almost half of all overnight stays in the area (Business Finland, 2019). The Metropolitan area and Lapland are the main destinations, even though the number of foreign tourists is also rising in Lakeland and the Coastal and archipelago areas (Business Finland, 2019). The number of luxury tourists is not recorded.

The Metropolitan area has a different geography, culture, and style to the remote northern part of Finland (Konu, Murphy, Komppula, & Mikkonen, 2020). Lapland is an ideal destination for active, outdoor, and nature holidays with a landscape that includes a combination of fells, untouched forests, wetlands, lakes and wilderness; it also has the world's purest air (Aro, Suomi, & Saraniemi, 2018; Konu & Komppula, 2016). This area is also associated with unspoiled nature, mysticism, magic, and beauty (Aro et al., 2018; Konu & Komppula, 2016). In a study by Aro et al. (2018) about destination brands and brand love, Lapland was reported as positively surprising first-time visitors, creating no disappointments; moreover, Lapland gave an unforgettable experience with hedonic pleasures in the form of internal peace and relaxation, joy, and other positive and warm feelings. Lapland was described as providing uniqueness which was the result of the magic of Lapland complemented by pleasant memories, the people, the special atmosphere, and the beautiful landscape which provided possibilities for various activities and relaxation (Aro et al., 2018). Furthermore, Lapland has special connotations and a strong emotional bond for some Finns in the form of place attachment and destination brand love creating a reason to travel and a place in which to identify themselves (Konu & Komppula, 2016; Konu et al., 2020). The same kind of associations are part of experiencing Finland as a destination that can provide nature, activities, wellness, and well-being in the rural tourism context (Pesonen & Komppula, 2010) and the Eastern Finland Lakeland area (Konu et al., 2010). Well-being, purity, and nature are at the core of the marketing presented by Visit Finland's luxury tourism materials, referring to Finnish luxury tourism experiences as unforgettable experiences that offer an opportunity to slow down, breathe, and connect with one another ("Luxury — VisitFinland.com,"



2021). The experiences are described as affordable from the perspective of luxury, but at the same time, they are something that money really can't buy ("Luxury — VisitFinland.com," 2021). From this perspective, Finland seems to be a luxury tourism destination that offers unique experiences with nature but is also one that relies more on inconspicuous and unconventional forms of luxury.

As luxury tourism is a new phenomenon in Finland, there has as yet been little research conducted on the topic. Although much of the recent research in luxury literature argues that luxury experiences now offer moments where the focus is on well-being, self-development, and transformative experiences (e.g., Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019; Mora et al., 2018; von Wallpach et al., 2020), the earlier studies in the traditional luxury tourism context do not express this. Furthermore, the authenticity and memorability of these experiences in tourism are not yet visible in luxury tourism literature. Therefore, it raises the question of what kind of offerings as regards luxury tourism experiences, apart from hedonic benefits, can also lead to self-development? How can the products of luxury tourism experience increase happiness and support people's efforts to lead full and satisfying lives? These questions indicate a need for a fresh perspective on what is meaningful in luxury tourism experiences and how luxury tourism can intentionally contribute to people's quality of life and reduce the destructive (long- and short-term) side effects of unsustainable consumption.



## **3 RESEARCH STRATEGY**

### **3.1 SCIENTIFIC APPROACH AND METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES**

This study adopts a constructivist world view, meaning that ontologically the research approach is that reality is socially constructed. In addition, it is subjective as multiple realities exist because of the different individual and group perspectives, and these realities are always changing. As Saunders et al. (2019) describe this philosophical underpinning, reality is constructed through social interaction in which people create partially shared meanings and realities, and it is constantly in flux. This study relies on subjectivism, which epistemologically means that the individual's subjective lived experience produces knowledge (Arndt, 1985). Therefore, epistemological view of the thesis is that reality is understood as subjective, where perceptions and experiences may differ for each person, and they might change over time and in different contexts.

As this thesis aims to understand the service provider's experiences in an unconventional luxury context, where there is no previous research about the topic, the qualitative approach supports the need for understanding. Furthermore, it is vital to recognize the subjective nature of the service provider's experiences in this case. Consequently, the perspective of the thesis on research is interpretive. The primary approaches to gaining knowledge in the social sciences are positivist and interpretive paradigms, which differs from how they define the philosophical assumptions and goals (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) associated with quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The philosophical assumptions behind an interpretive view of the world are multifold, complex, holistic, and shaping. It is therefore rather futile to look for any causes and effects, as the primary focus when undertaking the research is the way humans attempt to make sense of the world (Saunders et al., 2019). While the positivist view tries to generalize or find causalities with quantitative methods, the interpretive view aims to study specific phenomena at particular times and in particular places and

is context-dependent (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). However, it needs to be noted that according to Hudson and Ozanne (1998, p. 511), “interpretive research does facilitate generalizations within the context or case, and some interpretivists do make generalizations between contexts.”

To gain deeper information about the phenomenon under examination, studies in service marketing and management and tourism have highlighted the need for interpretative approaches and qualitative methods (Edvardsson, Kristensson, Magnusson, & Sundström, 2012; Helkkula, Kelleher, & Pihlström, 2012; Ryan, 2010; Zomerdijs & Voss, 2011). Furthermore, the need for interpretive research has also been expressed in luxury literature (Conejo et al., 2020; Holmqvist, Diaz Ruiz, et al., 2020; Thomsen et al., 2020). In the current thesis, the luxury tourism phenomenon is examined using qualitative methods to interpret and understand the phenomena and meanings (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016), creating new, richer understandings (Saunders et al., 2019). Although the positivist perspective used in quantitative research methods has dominated the scientific work conducted in social sciences, qualitative methods can provide a better understanding of issues that have remained unclear using quantitative methods (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). This study's research strategy can be characterized as an intensive case study, as the research aims to understand luxury tourism from a service provider's perspective in a particular country, Finland. An intensive case study aims to understand the workings of the case in a specific economic, social, and cultural context, focusing on one or a few unique cases to produce a contextualized and holistic description, interpretation, and explanation (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). According to Yin (2014, p. 16), “(a) case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident”. Furthermore, the case study has an intrinsic nature, meaning that the main interest is the case itself (Stake, 2005).

Data collection and analysis in qualitative research are sensitive to the social and cultural context, the aim being to understand the studied topic (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). As the interpretive view is also holistic and contextual, it is vital for the researcher to know the context as meanings

are formed based on the context (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Therefore, it is essential to study the context in detail to understand what is happening and how realities are experienced, as there may be different narratives or opinions (Saunders et al., 2019).

The luxury tourism experiences phenomenon from the service provider's perspective is examined using qualitative methodologies in the current thesis. This choice of methodologies is based on the problem-setting of the study and the research questions in the articles. The research articles conducted for the current thesis approach luxury tourism from different perspectives using the same datasets and data collection methods and to some extent the same type of analysis in Articles 2 and 3. Article 1 uses the sample, which is collected from previous academic literature, and analyzes the data with two different analysis methods. In Article 3, the co-author contributed to the theoretical composition of the article. Table 5. summarizes the research articles and methods used.

**Table 5.** Summary of research articles

	<b>Article I</b>	<b>Article II</b>	<b>Article III</b>
<b>Title</b>	Luxury tourism – A review of the literature	Luxury Tourism Service Provision – Lessons from the industry	Service Providers’ Perspective of the Luxury Tourist Experience as a Product
<b>Authors</b>	Riina Iloranta	Riina Iloranta	Riina Iloranta Raija Komppula
<b>Forum</b>	European Journal of Tourism Research	Tourism Management Perspectives	Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism
<b>Year</b>	2022	2019	2021
<b>Research questions</b>	How academic researchers approach the context of luxury tourism? What is the state of academic research in luxury tourism?	How service providers understand and define the concept of luxury? What are the prerequisites for providing Finnish luxury experience?	What does the Finnish luxury tourist experience offer? What kind of challenges the service provider may encounter in offering it?
<b>Data</b>	Qualitative: Systematic literature review (N=119)	Qualitative: Semi-structured narrative interview (N=11)	Qualitative: Semi-structured narrative interview (N=11)
<b>Analysis Methods</b>	Systematic literature review Content analysis (summative)	Qualitative content analysis (conventional)	Qualitative content analysis (directed)

## **3.2 DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS**

This section includes an overview of the data collection approaches, methods used, and the analysis. All the articles utilized qualitative methods, as the study aimed to gain an understanding of the phenomenon. A more detailed explanation is presented with each article.

### **3.2.1 Systematic literature review and synthesis**

According to Baumeister and Leary (1997), there are many reasons in science to conduct a literature review. One is to build an overall picture of a particular issue (Baumeister & Leary, 1997), as was the case with the first article. Article 1 is a conceptual paper, which discusses luxury tourism as a concept in academic literature. The article examines how luxury tourism is approached in academic discussions to describe and contextualize luxury tourism research and identifies the state of the academic research by using a systematic literature review. By doing so, the study synthesizes different theoretical approaches used in discussions on luxury tourism research.

The method of a systematic literature review has been largely adopted in the social sciences (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003), including research in the hospitality and tourism domain (e.g., Gomezelj, 2016; Law, Sun, Fong, Fong, & Fu, 2016; Tavakoli & Wijesinghe, 2019). A systematic literature review is an approach that seeks to provide an overview of a problem, topic, or discourse, which can reveal shortcomings in previous studies that highlight the need for new research. Fink's (2005, p. 3) definition of a systematic literature review sees the method as "a systematic, explicit, comprehensive, and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners". A literature review, like any other method, must satisfy general science requirements for the method. Therefore, the systematic literature review aims to identify, evaluate, and summarise the relevant studies conducted on the topic in the form of a replicable and transparent process (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003).

This systematic literature review focused on studies published in a recent 15-year period (2004–2019). This period was chosen as a significant shift in

luxury consumption was recognized at the beginning of the 2000s. First, there was a change in consumption to more experiential forms of luxury during this period, and luxury also became democratized (Silverstein & Fiske, 2008). Secondly, during this period, it was recognized that luxury can be based on other factors not just status and exclusivity, such as emotional desires and hedonic values (e.g, Godey et al., 2013a). Moreover, in this change, luxury was allowed to become more personal (Bauer et al., 2011) and inconspicuous (e.g., Eckhardt, Belk, & Wilson, 2015).

The evolving concept of luxury makes it challenging to determine the precise boundaries of what should or should not be included in the sample as experiential luxuries can include fine dining, luxury travel, and pampering services (Kim, 2018), all of which can also be seen in universal tourism experiences. Consequently, the layered nature of tourism products and the various synonyms for the concepts of luxury or alternative labels impacted the sampling of this work, and therefore the sampling process started from a broad view of what can be defined under the term luxury tourism.

The search terms included “luxury tourism”, “luxury travel”, “luxury holiday”, “luxury restaurant”, and “luxury hotel”. Six databases ScienceDirect, Ebsco, Sage Online Journals, Proquest, and Emerald Insight, and Google Scholar, were investigated using these search terms. Between September 2019 – December 2019, the resulting samples from the collected studies were then screened using a three-step inclusion criteria. First, only those studies and books published between the chosen period were retained. Second, only academic journal articles and books were included in the sample, thus eliminating articles published in newspapers, magazines, and books that did not have a scientific background. Third, articles that appeared multiple times in different databases were eliminated so as to be only included once in the sample. This resulted in 135 studies. However, it was noted that there were only five books and theses in the sample. Therefore, to obtain more eligible data, the books and theses were removed from the sample. In addition, eleven studies were excluded as they were written in a language other than English or did not describe the context or the attributes of the luxury tourism in question. Consequently, based on the search terms and inclusion criteria, the final study sample resulted in 119 articles in 57 journals.



In addition to categorizing the journals, the systematic literature review categorized the data based on the year, geographical origin of the study, study context, the objective of the study, the subject of the research, theoretical and methodological approach, and the findings of the study. This analysis method resulted in an overview of the current state of the research, which also served as a basis for synthesizing the theoretical approaches of the different research streams in luxury tourism research. As the theoretical approaches to the data were fragmented, the theoretical streams were synthesized to obtain an overview of the state of the current research into luxury tourism based on the systematic literature review. By synthesizing the theoretical streams, it was possible to identify the patterns of theoretical approaches that have characterized the development of the luxury tourism discussion over the current 15-year period. As luxury has considerably evolved in this period, this kind of conceptual research was necessary. Ritchie (1997) argues that this kind of approach is a balance between a detailed understanding of previous research and a synthesis of the research streams, leading to an assessment that offers an insight into future possibilities. Furthermore, as Li and Petrick (2008) describe, this kind of approach aims at recognizing whether there is a gap in the research between academic research and real-world practices and to discover if there is a need to re-evaluate the current state of research.

### **3.2.2 Qualitative interview - semi-structured narrative interview**

Articles 2 and 3 used the same method and data set. In Article 2, the aim was to specify the Finnish luxury experience and service provision elements. Article 3 concentrates on the elements of the luxury tourist experience products. As the aim was to gain an intensive and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) from service provider's experiences, qualitative interviews were chosen as the data collection method. According to Silverman (2013), the qualitative interview typology can be approached from three perspectives; positivist, emotionalist (subjectivist), and constructionist. The positivist perspective is interested in facts, the emotionalist grasps the participant's authentic experiences, perceptions, understandings, and concepts, and the constructionist focuses on meanings (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). This study approached the interview typology

from an emotionalist and constructionist perspective, combining what and how questions in semi-structured interviews, which is the most successful interview approach (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004). The advantage of this kind of interview is that it is somewhat systematic; however, it also leaves freedom to keep the interview informal and conversational (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). The interview questions were formulated from deliberations on the previous literature of the studied phenomenon.

The sample selection began by using a list of eight luxury tourism companies recognized by the National Tourism Board (Business Finland, 2018); these companies fulfilled the level required to be accepted to be promoted on the tourism web page of the tourism board. To ensure that all relevant Finnish companies offering international luxury travel services would be included in the sample, additional informants were searched for on the Internet, using the words “luxury experience,” “luxury tourism,” “luxury holiday,” and “luxury travel” in Finland. The sample was further confirmed by selecting those companies that emerged on the webpages of well-known international luxury tour operators (e.g., Abercrombie & Kent), alluding to luxury tourist experiences in Finland. Furthermore, the selection criteria included the fact that the potential companies had to offer accommodation and additional services as part of their product. Finally, the list of potential luxury tourism service providers consisted of seventeen companies, which were contacted by email. If the company did not respond to the invitation, two reminder emails were sent. Two companies rejected the interview request, referring to busy schedules, and four of the companies did not reply to the interview request.

The data was collected in semi-structured interviews with eleven Finnish luxury service providers operating in Finland’s luxury tourism and hospitality sector. The companies size varied as well as number of staff varied between 2 to 150 full-time employees. In addition, during seasonal peaks, companies used additional part-time employees. The companies operational years varied from 3 to 130 years. Most of the companies were privately owned; only three companies belonged to a larger hotel group. Four interviews were conducted in the Metropolitan area in Southern Finland and five in Lapland, Finland’s main tourist destinations. Two of the companies operated in other

regions. The interviewees were the owners or founders of the company, or they worked at a managerial level. The interviewees' ages ranged from 31 to 56 years old, five being female and six male, and they had worked in the hospitality and tourism industry from 5 to 38 years. The interviews, lasting 50 to 90 minutes, were carried out in Finnish, at the respondents' venues between February and June 2018. As the interviews were conducted at the respondent's venue it enabled the researcher to become familiar with the company, its location, and the servicescape.

At the beginning of the interview, the researcher explained the research ethics and the aims of the study but did not make any presumptions or define the topic. Following the company and interviewee's short presentation, the interviews continued with open-ended questions of how the interviewees defined luxury in their company and what elements existed in their company. During the interview session, open-ended questions and the conversational type of interview led the interview toward a narrative interview. As open-ended questions gave interviewees more control to say their thoughts freely, it was noticeable that interviewees were willing to express their thoughts about the topic through narratives of their experiences working with the personnel and customers. According to Bruner (2004), the narrative form is the only way to describe lived experiences as it represents an interpretation of their experiences. The narrative interview is individualized, contextualized, and relevant to the interviewee as it may emerge more specific content from the immediate context defined by the participant (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). Furthermore, for the researcher, it produces insights that the researcher may not have anticipated (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016).

Smith and Weed (2007) argue that people use a narrative form as it has value in understanding an experience. The narrative is a way for people to create meaning for experiences (Polkinghorne, 1988) as narratives may represent the context and organize human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). By reflecting on the experience, people grasp its meaning, and this reflection is easier to express to others in the form of a narrative story (Smith & Weed, 2007). Therefore, the narrative is a way to communicating with others, and at the same time, a tool to make sense of the experience for themselves of what they have seen and done (Callahan

& Elliott, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1988). As Wiles, Rosenberg, and Kearns (2005, p. 90) note, "narratives reflect, communicate and shape the world and our understanding of it".

Furthermore, from the perspective of luxury, the narrative is an inherent choice as, according to Ardelet, Slavich, and de Kerviler (2015), narratives offer a natural way of thinking about luxury. Thus, luxury is communicated through stories more than just through facts as there are specific pleasure and passions being related that have brought emotions into the life of the consumer (Wittig, Sommerrock, Beil, & Albers, 2014). In addition, there is a great story behind almost every luxury brand, which generally has a strong brand heritage (Wittig et al., 2014). The luxury industry is characterized by a solid symbolic component, pleasure, and a hedonic value consumption and because of these emotional subjective dimensions of luxury, narratives may suit describing experiences better than analytical processing (Ardelet et al., 2015).

A narrative interview is open, and there are no prior hypotheses or propositions, and participants are encouraged to express themselves in their own words and points of view (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The stories a participant tells, reflects conscious and unconscious cultural, societal, and individual processes that can focus on specific experience and emotions (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The researcher must present open-ended, narrative-directed questions as well as content-oriented, factual, and information-collecting questions and let participants talk freely and uninterrupted (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Therefore, in a narrative interview the researcher's responsibility is to be a good listener, and the interviewee is a storyteller rather than a respondent, who will dictate the content, pace, and direction of the interview as they determine what to say and what not to say (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). In addition, establishing rapport and trust early on in the interview is required (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Therefore, the interviews followed a very conversational structure, where the service providers were encouraged to talk frankly and without interruption in order to obtain rich data. When necessary, more detailed and clarifying questions were presented to enhance the understanding of the expression of the phenomenon. That is, questions such as can you tell me a little more

about this topic. This encouraged further conversation, which developed detailed and profound descriptions of the service provider's experiences. Finally, at the end of the interview session, the researcher confirmed that all the questions and themes around the topic had been covered and explained the next steps in research process. The interviews were recorded and fully transcribed, creating a total of 162 pages of verbatim transcriptions. Anonymity was guaranteed to all participants. After every interview session, a research diary describing the situation was written in order to later recall the actual interview situation if necessary.

### **3.2.3 Qualitative content analysis**

The origins of content analysis are found in quantitative approaches quantifying textual data (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004); however, contemporary descriptions of the method have rooted it also in the more interpretative approaches within the qualitative paradigm (Schreier, 2012). Qualitative content analysis is a flexible and widely used analysis method focusing on language characteristics in communication by interpreting its content or contextual meaning (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In qualitative content analysis, the data can be approached to emphasize what is said and done or by looking at the contextual meaning on how something is said and done and why (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). The content analysis aims to attain a condensed, holistic, and broad description of the phenomenon, which provides a comprehensive perspective about the phenomenon under study, and the outcomes of the analysis are concepts or categories describing the phenomenon, which can be a detailed and include a rich interpretation of the contextual meanings (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). This is also seen as the prerequisite of successful content analysis, where data can be decreased to concepts that represent the research phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) by generating, for example, concepts, categories, or a conceptual map (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

All three articles utilized content analysis as an analysis method. However, as the research method is flexible in nature, the approaches to content analysis varied between the articles. Content analysis can utilize three different

approaches: conventional (inductive), directed (deductive), and summative, where the main differences relate to how initial codes are developed as categories (Assarroudi, Heshmati Nabavi, Armat, Ebadi, & Vaismoradi, 2018; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Even though all three approaches are utilized to interpret meaning from the content of the text data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) argue that only conventional and directed content analysis can be referred to as qualitative content analysis, as it differs from the summative content analysis that aims to quantify categories. However, the analytical process commonly follows the same phases in every form of content analysis: formulating the research questions to be answered, selecting the sample, defining the categories, outlining the coding process and training the coder, executing that process, judging trustworthiness, and analyzing the results (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The first article used content analysis as summative to analyze how scholars describe and conceptualize luxury tourism in their research. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), this approach to content analysis differs from the other two, as the data is not analyzed as a whole, but rather uses keywords derived from the literature review, which are identified both before and during data analysis. The first article utilized a sample of 119 articles between 2004-2019 selected through six keywords from six databases. With the three-step inclusion criteria process, the original sample of 135 articles and books was reduced to 119. The analysis started with reading the sample data introduction, a literature review, and methodology sections and identifying and quantifying certain words or content in the text to understand the contextual use of the words and content. Identifying the key attributes was conducted in Excel, which enabled a possibility to quantify the words. The first round of analysis yielded nine categories for the research question of how luxury tourism is described and contextualized in academic research. These categories describe luxury tourism as a product, experience, price, status and conspicuous consumption, stars, other luxury values, brand, comparison, and class. However, reading the text repeatedly, a tenth category describing the luxury tourism consumer was created. These categories were quantified as a chart to detect the current state of contextual meanings attached to luxury tourism.

The second article utilized the conventional approach to content analysis, as the aim was to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) of luxury tourism elements in the Finnish context. In conventional content analysis, codes, concepts, or categories are derived from the data during data analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The challenge in conducting this kind of analysis is avoiding general summaries and descriptions, which could remain at a surface level (Graneheim et al., 2017). According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the advantage of conventional content analysis is that information is derived straight from the interviewees, and theoretical perspectives do not guide the data formation. In the first step of data analysis, the verbatim transcribed interviews were read through repeatedly so as to become immersed in the data and understand the phenomenon as a whole. The next step included highlighting the key thoughts and concepts from the interview data. In this study, the key thoughts answered the research question of how service providers define Finnish luxury and the prerequisites for service provision. After highlighting the key thoughts, the researcher made notes of her first impressions about the phenomenon, which followed the initial analysis, meaning coding, and categorizing those thoughts. The next step in the analysis process was organizing the categories into meaningful clusters, identifying relationships, and how the codes related and linked to each other. In this study, a conceptual map in the form of a tree diagram was developed to see the hierarchies and connections. Finally, the categories, subcategories, and codes were developed as a definition.

The third article employed content analysis as directed content analysis to analyze the content and meanings of the interviews. This approach is also called concept-driven (Schreier, 2012), where codes are gathered from existing theory or prior research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Furthermore, they are also defined before and during data analysis. Thus, the directed content analysis allows the researcher to extend or refine the existing theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). However, the approach has also been criticized for the risks entailed by formulating categories based exclusively on an established theory or model (Graneheim et al., 2017). In addition, the researcher needs to decide how to treat the data that does not fit the selected theory or explanatory model (Graneheim et al., 2017).

The first step of this analysis process included repeatedly reading the transcribed interview data to become immersed in the phenomenon and gain a common understanding. As the article aimed to use Komppula's (2006) framework of tourism products based on ideas of Edvardsson and Olsson (1996), the transcript was read through, highlighting all the text in the first impression associating with the research question. In the next step, highlights were coded based on predetermined codes referring to the service concept, service process, and service system. All the other texts that could not be categorized under predetermined codes were given a new code. The initial codes were then divided into subcategories. In the last step, the categories were given a definition. This analysis also utilized a conceptual map to determine the hierarchies and connections in the form of a tree diagram. The content analysis formed 14 main categories, which consisted of 85 subcategories. Furthermore, within two subcategories, one more extra layer was created to make the themes more concise. In the subcategories, there were a total of 1497 different codes.



## **4 RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **4.1 MAIN FINDINGS OF THE ARTICLES**

This chapter summarizes the research articles' main findings and supplements them by reflecting on the findings on the theoretical discussions of this thesis presented in Chapter 2.

#### **4.1.1 Article 1: Luxury tourism – a review of the literature**

The aims of the first article were to give a holistic picture and describe the state of academic research as regards luxury tourism. The first paper's main goal was to increase the understanding of how researchers describe and contextualize luxury tourism in academic literature and examine the state of luxury tourism research. The data was gathered using a three-step selection criteria for the sample gathered from the six databases, resulting in the final sample of 119 academic articles. The sample was then analyzed by using content analysis and a systematic literature review. Furthermore, the different theoretical perspectives on luxury tourism research were synthesized based on the systematic literature review.

The premise of the study was to illustrate the academic research of luxury tourism. The content analysis and literature review revealed that the discussion on luxury tourism is firmly attached to traditional luxury tourist products. Therefore, the study's findings revolve around aspects of unconventional luxury, fragmented value perceptions, utilizing qualitative research, and different cultural contexts, all of which may impact a future understanding of luxury tourism in the academic discussion. Currently, the discussion of these aspects is minimal or absent in luxury tourism discussions. The findings of the study can be summarized into two main points. Firstly, the findings indicated that luxury tourism should not be defined via one attribute. Instead, it is a multidimensional concept that requires conceptualization with various attributes as the understanding is more abstract. Using only one attribute would have several limitations, especially those attached to unconventional luxury tourism experiences.

Secondly, the current state of research is conducted in a context that represents a traditional form of luxury, using quantitative methods and a product perspective, which gives a one-sided image of luxury tourism. This may explain why the studies do not describe aspects such as how consumers experience luxury tourism products and enrich their existence or actualize themselves via luxury tourism. In addition, it may also affect the perceived value discussion. Consequently, even though it has been recognized that luxury nowadays serves intrinsic value elements (Bauer et al., 2011; Hemetsberger et al., 2012), status as a value dimension is still dominating luxury tourism research. The broader perspective with the heterogeneity of consumers should also be taken into account in future studies. The first study gave a more profound justification to the other studies in the thesis.

#### **4.1.2 Article 2: Luxury tourism service provision - lessons from the industry**

In the second article, the concept of luxury is discussed in relation to the Finnish context and service provisions. The study highlights luxury tourism and broadens an understanding of the features of luxury services. In addition, the study explored the context-specific concept of luxury, as there is no mutual understanding as regards this topic. The purpose of the study was to investigate how to define “Finnish luxury tourism” and understand the prerequisites for the luxury service experience. The data were collected from 11 luxury service providers with a semi-structured narrative interview at the respondents’ venues, enabling the researcher to familiarize herself with the companies, locations, and servicescape.

The findings extend the understanding of luxury by showing that some luxury features are present in traditional and new forms of luxury. The findings of the study can be summarized into four main points. Firstly, the study shows that a luxury experience is more than the material features traditionally attached to the idea of luxury, and they might even be the opposite of traditional luxury to a certain degree. Therefore, the findings of this study broaden the definition of new luxury, as Finnish luxury is as unconventional and simple as it is inconspicuous. In addition, it is based on factors that may be hard to productize and perceive as a luxury, such as the purity or

tranquility of the nature, when the focus of the view or perspective is that of traditional luxury. Secondly, service providers expressed that understanding of luxury is based on customer's expectations, the service provider's own experience of luxury and what luxury should feel like, and what the context offers. All these factors create a prerequisites for an understanding of how to create an authentic luxury tourist experience.

Thirdly, the findings of the study provide details of the service features behind the provision of luxury tourism services. The prerequisites for an experience, facilitated by the service provider, aim to give the customer an authentic, unique, extraordinary, and holistic experience. This study also expands the view of a luxury experience with sustainability and storytelling features, which are relatively familiar in tourism literature but have not been broadly recognized in academic luxury literature. With these features, the service provider aims to enrich the consumer's experience so that it becomes more meaningful. Therefore, in the Finnish context, the service provider aims to provide a customer with the prerequisites for a hedonic or even a eudaimonic well-being experience, aiming to make the customer feel special. The material features serve as a basis offering hints of luxury to support the overall experience in service provision. However, the value comes from the accompanying personal encounters, human interactions, and the functional clues of service and adding the details in immaterial features (storytelling, aesthetics, quality, sustainability, and multisensory aspects).

The fourth and most valuable finding of this study pertains to the different levels of luxury service provision, especially the aspect of privacy; the attribute of privacy and its significance for the service provider has not been previously examined. The aspect of privacy is imperative for the facilitation of ultimate luxury, and it alters the whole service structure and relationship between the service provider and customer to a more host-guest or friend-like relationship. Providing ultimate luxury experiences was applicable for smaller companies. The findings also extended to the body of knowledge in the hospitality literature. Telfer (2000) has questioned whether genuine hospitality can be provided in a commercial context, as there will be tension between generosity, as one of the features of hospitality, and the economics of business, i.e., the financial control over the product; the guest will therefore

be continually reminded of the economic relationship. From this point of view, the ultimate type of luxury described in this study might be the closest form of genuine hospitality in a commercial context.

#### **4.1.3 Article 3: Service Providers' Perspective of the Luxury Tourist Experience as a Product**

The third article aimed to enrich the understanding of the luxury tourist experience products and utilized the literature on luxury, the tourist experience, and the luxury tourist experience. The study's objective was to investigate what the Finnish luxury tourist experience offers today, and the challenges service providers may encounter when offering such experiences. The study was conducted with 11 semi-structured narrative interviews, and the luxury tourist experience product was expressed in the form of a framework proposed by Komppula (2006).

The study results can be summarized in three main points. First, products designed for the Finnish luxury tourist experience aim to respond to the contemporary luxury traveler's quest for unique, authentic, physically, and intellectually stimulating experiences that add novelty and meaning to their lives. The traditional luxury tourist product is experienced in a commercial context, such as cruise ships or five-star hotels. However, the Finnish luxury tourist product is a combination of non-commercial contexts, i.e., nature, and commercial product features, i.e., luxury villas. Together these may provide the prerequisites for experiencing the more common value dimensions attached to luxury, and, possibly the more intrinsic value aspects. Mutually they would therefore create the possibilities for meaningfulness and authenticity during the experience as meaning, meaningfulness, and well-being can only arise in non-commercial contexts, where experiential value contains activity, freedom, and relaxation (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019). Furthermore, these elements may enable a eudaimonic experience because the service provider designs the experience product according to the customer's needs and wishes.

Second, according to the findings of this study, service providers in Finnish luxury tourism aim to make their customers feel special. Service providers must balance between the different luxury value expectations of their

heterogenic luxury consumers. By gathering insight from the consumer, the service provider can design every product from the beginning for that specific customer, answering the luxury value expectation of that particular consumer. The findings of this study are in accordance with the findings of Correia, Kozak, and Reis (2014), that indicated that for ultra-rich customers for whom “money is not an issue”, a luxury tourist experience refers to privacy with their family in a resort that supports a hedonic value, but for wealthy “ordinary” consumers it may refer to a different, exquisite experience. Therefore, luxuriousness relates to something extraordinarily different from our daily life.

The third finding of the study highlights the active role of the customer. It is recognized in tourism research that tourists, in general, seek intensity from their activities, which entails discovery and hands-on, multisensory experiences of tourism, as well as interaction and involvement (Bryon, 2012). However, in previous studies conducted in traditional luxury environments, this kind of involvement has not been visible. In contrast, earlier studies typically refer to reactive values such service excellence, suggesting that the customer plays a passive role and is served and pampered by employees (e.g., Bahri-Ammari et al., 2016; Chen, Peng, & Hung, 2015; Lee & Kim, 2019). The recent study of Holmqvist, Diaz Ruiz, et al. (2020) recognized hedonic escapism as part of unconventional luxury experiences, a view also supported by this study.

Furthermore, the study supported several other studies that have presented different aspects of luxury services and experiences. The study indicated that the luxury tourist experience product is a holistic experience where quality, a hassle-free atmosphere, unique convenience for the customer, and ease and comfort are the central elements. However, the findings suggest that there is a difference in the expectations of the service level and composition of the product based on different customer groups, which confirms the notion of Wirtz et al. (2020) that luxury services should not be categorized as such but rather they should be seen as a continuum. In this study, the intensity of co-creation varied throughout the customer journey. In the highest ultimate luxury level, or as Wirtz et al. (2020) described the “elite luxury” level, the product offering is tailor-made in collaboration with the customer

in the pre-trip phase. At the other end of the continuum is the ready-made regular luxury service packages aimed at the masses. Customer insight and co-creation are regarded at different levels during the trip phases based on the customer groups. At the ultimate level, guides and personnel acting on a front line with the customer play a vital role in creating prerequisites to the meaningfulness of that customer's experience by storytelling and keeping the product flexible. Storytelling affords a sense of authenticity and allows a "behind the scenes" experience that may add value to the luxury traveler's experience in the form of cultural capital. Furthermore, as the co-creation of the product may be very meaningful to the customer, the relationship with the service provider is more profound, which can be seen in the post-trip phase, when possibly the style of relationship ultimately becomes more of a friendship.

In addition, the study noted that the material features provide the basis for the servicescape atmosphere, which needs to be of a high quality. This is in line with Harkison et al. (2018b), who note in their study that more staff, more marble, and other expensive elements do not necessarily create the prerequisites for a luxury experience. In contrast to this, the main value of the products of the Finnish luxury tourist experience is formed by connections with nature, which may boost happiness and pleasure, expand self-understanding, and create greater self-awareness (Capaldi, Dopko, & Zelenski, 2014). The focus of the product in the Finnish luxury tourism service system is on the elements of human interaction and encounters with the customer, which is in line with Ariffin et al. (2018), and these create the most customer satisfaction in the luxury service experience. Therefore, it is also understandable that customer insight and personnel aspects were regarded as the most significant challenges in the provision of a luxury tourism service from the service provider's perspective. The findings further support Harkison et al. (2018a) in emphasizing the essential place of teamwork, guidance, and attitude among personnel in supporting the creation of a luxury experience.

## **4.2 SYNTHESIZING THE THEORETICAL DISCUSSIONS AND MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH ARTICLES**

### **4.2.1 The heterogenic luxury consumer and the implications of such tourists to the luxury service industry and luxury service provider**

As denoted by the theoretical discussion on luxury presented in Chapter 2, there has been a clear shift in the concept of luxury and luxury consumption (e.g., Cristini et al., 2017; Eckhardt et al., 2015; Thomsen et al., 2020). Even though it has been recognized that the luxury concept is multidimensional and there are new forms of luxury, the findings of Article 1 noted that the image of luxury tourism relies heavily on traditional luxury products, which gives a one-sided image of luxury tourism. The contemporary academic literature represents luxury tourism in the form of branded five-star hotels that offer status as a value through, for example, experiencing dining in a high-quality material environment and referring to the service quality. Furthermore, Article 1 notes that many of the studies conducted within luxury tourism use quantitative methods, which do not necessarily consider luxury consumers' heterogeneity and subjective perception of luxury. As discussed in Chapter 2, Wirtz et al. (2020) note that luxury services should also be perceived through the subjectification of luxury due to the intangible nature of luxury services. However, the quantitative perspective on luxury tourism studies as noted in Article 1 does not consider luxury to be a matter of subjectification. In addition, it gives a somewhat generalized picture of the luxury consumer, allowing only a limited focus on the lifestyle factors of people's background. However, due to the democratization of luxury, the contemporary luxury consumer is more varied, ranging from billionaires to middle-class consumers and varying between different generations (e.g., Heyes & Aluri, 2018); all having their own perception of what is, for example, considered expensive or exclusive (Turunen, 2018). This was also visible in Article 2. Therefore, contemporary academic understanding does not capture the full nature of what is considered a luxury and how luxury value and experience are understood, and therefore, current understanding, for example, with value perceptions, is fragmented.

The response of service providers through their products to the subjectification of luxury and consumers' heterogeneity was visible in Articles 2 and 3. These studies highlighted that the service providers aim is to make the customer feel special. Article 2 notes that service providers understand luxury based on their own experience of luxury, giving them a knowledge of how luxury should make a person feel. This has led to designing luxury tourism experiences based on emotional aspects and hedonism rather than high service quality. In addition, their understanding affects the context that brings the experience's authenticity and uniqueness to the focal point of the experience development—the final combination of the understanding of what luxury is for a certain consumer is formed from the customer's expectations. By balancing these three points, the service provider is designing every luxury experience from the start. Article 3 raised the point that luxury is something different from daily life; therefore, material elements do not necessarily bring the experience for ultra-wealthy consumers; however, the democratized luxury consumer may find the physical environment a luxury experience. Service providers expressed that they constantly analyze the customer and obtain insights from a particular person to design that person's experience, making them feel special. Article 3 raised the focus that the customer insight about luxury is the focal point of the service providers perspective, meaning that at the ultimate luxury level, the amount of customer insights is at a totally different level in the pre-, during, and post phases of the customer journey. With the insights, the service provider has an image of what kind of luxury this person is looking for, and how service providers can provide prerequisites as an experience that brings value to customers and makes them feel special. For some the material elements may give them the feeling of extraordinariness from daily life; but for the ultra-wealthy consumer who has all the wealth to buy every material aspect, it may not bring the value or feeling of specialness (e.g., Turunen, 2018); this was noticeable in Article 2 and 3. The material aspects need to be in the experience giving the hint of luxury. However, the material aspects do not form the luxury experience as such for ultra-wealthy consumers. Therefore the service providers do not offer only tailor-made service modules for specific customers, rather with their insights, they tailor-make and personalize the whole experience and



how a customer is encountered at every step of the experience. Furthermore, the service provider does not focus on what luxury is through their brand and how personnel will enhance the brand through communication in service encounters - instead, they focus on what luxury is for the consumer and how to enhance it in the context.

As luxury has democratized during the last decades, it has been argued that it has ruined the traditional meaning of luxury as being exclusive to certain people (e.g., Turunen, 2018). However, Article 2 noted that there are different levels of luxury, the ordinary and ultimate luxury. It might be that wealthy customers are using the same service as the democratized luxury consumers. However, privacy was the distinguishing factor affecting the whole relationship with the service provider, and small companies could provide these services better. As ordinary luxury services are becoming accessible to a broader consumer base, it may relate to the fact that part of the traditional luxury tourism products, such as five-star hotels or cruise ships, are losing their luxurious image and becoming more like masstige brand products. Furthermore, it is making the evolution of luxury to be related again to exclusivity in the form of privacy. Thus, the study supports Wirtz et al. (2020) conceptual article that presents luxury services as a continuum.

Customer insights on what is considered a luxury and different levels of luxury services answer the research question by arguing that service providers not only rely on the objectification of luxury through material aspects, but also and more profoundly on the subjectification of the luxury service product when designing experiences. Therefore, the study argues that luxury literature and especially luxury service literature needs to take better account of the luxury consumer and the relativity and contextual aspects of luxury in their research because it affects what is considered a luxury experience. This varies in the services from ordinary luxury to ultimate luxury, thus affecting the holistic understanding of the concept and its dimensions.

#### **4.2.2 Time for self, others, and nature – well-being and authenticity as a key to the happiness in Finnish luxury tourism experience**

As indicated by the theoretical discussions presented in Chapter 2, luxury tourism experiences have been studied either from the customer experience perspective (e.g., Harkison, 2016; Walls et al., 2011) or as relating to the luxury tourism product in the form of a brand, where the objectification of luxury was the main focus of the discussion. Article 1 showed that luxury tourism could not be described through one attribute as the understanding is more abstract. Furthermore, this finding relates to Article 2, showing that unconventional luxury service provision has partly the same attributes as traditional luxury. However, Article 2 showed as well that some attributes may be very simplistic if the perspective taken on luxury is the traditional one. The service providers expressed that material elements create the basis for attributes, which function as a mechanical clue of the luxury environment. Moreover, the experience is formed within co-creation, meaning that eventually, the value is formed with intangible elements by functional clues and human interaction, making it a holistic experience stemming from the context. Together the prerequisites for service provision in Article 2 and luxury experience product in Article 3 are in line with the view of Holmqvist, Diaz Ruiz, et al. (2020), referring to the experiential attributes of luxury as a form of aesthetics, exclusivity, escapism, and authenticity.

As the theoretical discussion in Chapter 2 showed, most of the studies conducted within luxury tourism are in a commercial environment; in contrast, in Finland, the experience has a solid connection to a non-commercial environment with nature. In Article 2, service providers expressed nature as the crucial element of Finnish luxury. In Article 3, many of the service modules were connected to nature. At the same time, this created a challenge, as it was seen simple from the perspective of traditional luxury, and if the customer's expectation was closer to traditional luxury, it required the service provider's continuous translation to the customer through storytelling. Furthermore, nature was sometimes seen as hard to commercialize. However, as expressed in the theoretical discussion in Chapter 2, luxury experiences can be experienced in mundane life situations, which becomes luxurious at the

point it induces luxury moments in a consumer's life (Holmqvist, Diaz Ruiz, et al., 2020; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019; von Wallpach et al., 2020). The Finnish luxury experience arises from those moments that can give time for the self or are related to spending time with family or loved ones, having a walk in a forest, enjoying scenery. As the study of von Wallpach et al. (2020) shows, these kinds of precious little moments may trigger the feeling of freedom, happiness, and render the consumer emotions that are rare, caring, or exciting, and which give opportunities for personal growth and advancement, permitting blissful and even eudaimonic experiences, that may consist of awe, unity with the others, and self-transcendence and is seen as a luxury. Finnish luxury stems from nature, tranquility, and purity making luxury inconspicuous. Material elements do not provide luxury, rather it is the moments in nature and interaction with humans that add to the well-being.

Tourism marketing studies have noted that tourism experiences influence tourists life satisfaction (Uysal et al., 2016), and tourism is a medium to improve life (Filep & Pearce, 2014) as usually tourism affects people's wellbeing positively (Garcês, Pocinho, Jesus, & Rieber, 2018). It has been acknowledged that nature and beautiful views provide a perfect environment for well-being holidays, which creates prerequisites for relaxation, comfort, and escape (Pesonen & Komppula, 2010). Furthermore, the relationship between nature and well-being is apparent (Garcês, Pocinho, Jesus, & Rieber, 2018; Willis, 2015). Nature, tranquility, silence, and purity can be seen as luxuries themselves (Cristini & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2020; Kapferer, 2015a). Furthermore, the aspect of holiday creates prerequisites being freed from pressures and schedules and being free of social and cultural constraints. Enjoying the feeling of freedom without other people or the hassle of the city, the possibility to relax and escape daily life is seen as a luxury moment allowing engagement with the family and close ones (von Wallpach et al., 2020), at the same time, moments slow down, and forgetting of the time and place (e.g., Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019). Therefore, this study supports von Wallpach et al. (2019) that luxury is attached to fundamental qualities of human existence and life, which give a through moments possibility for hedonic escapisms for the consumer (Holmqvist, Diaz Ruiz, et al., 2020).

However, in the Finnish context, the service providers did not only referred to hedonic experiences. Moreover, the hedonic and eudaimonic experiences were touched upon in Articles 2 and 3, which both discussed creating meaningfulness in experiences. The importance of meaningful experience was stressed through service providers' expressions, emphasizing the sustainability and authenticity of the experience stemming from the context, encounters, and interactions of personnel, insight about the customers' needs, and responding to the needs and wishes with the product's flexibility. Tussydiah (2014) notes that designing for tourism experiences requires a broad perception of experiences from the perspectives of tourists, both their experiencing something as consumers (i.e., in tourism contexts situations) and in addition as human beings (i.e., in various sociocultural contexts of their life). Meaningfulness can be seen as relating to the meaning of life as well as meaning in life, which are experiences of evolving identity and personal growth (Park, 2010). Meaningfulness stems from memories that are personal, emotional, and relational experiences that are interrelated as significant moments in life (Park, 2010). In luxury literature, meaningfulness relates to transformations (Llamas & Thomsen, 2016). In tourism literature, meaningfulness has been attached to nature experiences (Morse, 2014; Tuohino & Pitkänen, 2004) and culinary tourism (Mason & O' Mahony, 2007). The study of Kirillova et al. (2016) notes that the travel experience was a vehicle for an individual to connect with their personally meaningful value system, and therefore, the meanings that tourists assign to tourism experiences can be a part of a larger meaning-making. In this study, the meaningfulness did not only relate to the consumer but was also strengthened through relational storytelling and sustainability, forming a holistic and authentic experience visible in Articles 2 and 3. This study supports the argument of Kustrak Korper et al. (2021) that the service provider adds the role of meaning and integration as one of the main building blocks of service innovations. The changes in the luxury consumption and perceptions of luxury value reflect the change of traditional luxury with branded products to unconventional luxury, experiences, and luxurious moments from subjective meaning-making; these are not necessarily driven by the physical environments, but

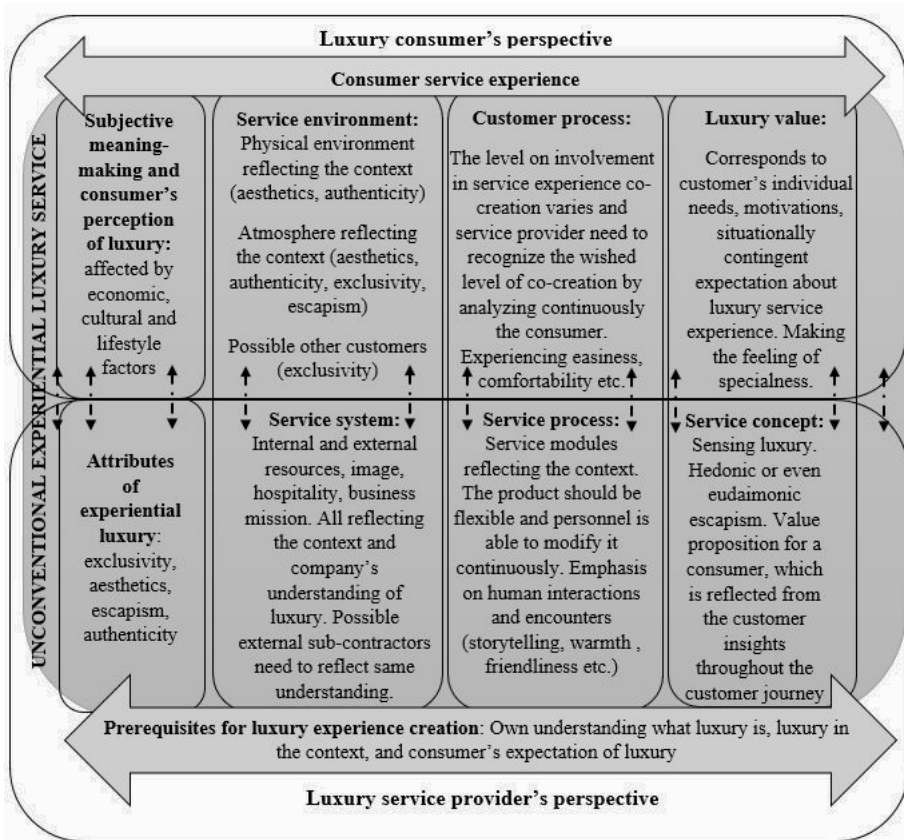
rather the relationships and interactions of humans with everyday mundane experiences, which enhance the quality of life.

Service providers create the prerequisites for unconventional luxury tourist experience products in nature and human interactions by reflecting the authenticity of context. This may add well-being moments to consumers' lives. As the service provider designs the product based on the insight gained from the consumer, it might be a memorable experience, and furthermore, a service provider may be creating prerequisites for a meaningful experience. Therefore it may not only refer to hedonic pleasure in the form of escapism of daily life; moreover, besides hedonism, it may lead to eudaimonic experience aiming at self-transformation and self-actualization. To answer the research's objective, a service provider designs the luxury experience based on customer's wishes, adding their luxury moments to connect with nature, themselves, and loved ones. Therefore, the study argues that the unconventional luxury tourism experience consists of hedonic pleasure via escapism from the ordinary that adds to the customer's wellbeing, rendering luxury inconspicuous. Because it is designed to each customer's needs, it can be meaningful and thereby lead besides hedonism to eudaimonic experience.

#### **4.2.3 The value creation in unconventional luxury experience - the challenge of the service provider**

As the theoretical discussion in Chapter 2 revealed, the value perceptions on luxury are argued to be poorly understood (Shukla & Purani, 2012; Turunen, 2018). Luxury value has a long history, where consumption is seen to be based on conspicuous consumption, referring to gaining status as a value. In the last decades, there has been a shift to more inconspicuous consumption (e.g., Eckhardt et al., 2015). However, Article 1 noted that the current literature with luxury tourism refers to the traditional luxury context, where status and conspicuous consumption are often seen as a basis of value creation. The other value perceptions in luxury tourism discussion are fragmented. As noted in Articles 2 and 3, the service provider creates an understanding of luxury using customer insights based on customer expectations. Therefore, the service provider creates the value proposition

based on the situational contingent analysis and what kind of value with luxury experience the consumer is expecting. That is, is the consumer searching for example, for relaxation, fun, activities, or pampering from the experience, and what is the luxury value for that particular customer. Figure 6 summarizes the service provider's perspective and how it reflects the customer's perspective in experiential luxury service, highlighting the study's findings. Article 3 presented a luxury tourism experience product, in which the service concept presented a value proposition in the form of sensing luxury, feeling pleasure and/or meaningfulness by indulging unique hedonic and/or eudaimonic well-being experiences, which aimed to make the customer feel special. Therefore, the service provider forms the prerequisites throughout the service experience for a consumer, which corresponds to the customer's needs and motivations. The service provider aims to create prerequisites for the customer to feel special. Therefore, the unconventional luxury experience may refer to the more intrinsic values of the customer while answering the quest for unique, authentic, and intellectually, emotionally, and physically stimulating experiences.



**Figure 6.** Summary of the service provider's perspective and how it reflects the consumer's service experience

Furthermore, Article 3 approached the luxury value discussion, noting that the consumer is actively co-creating experience with the service provider in an unconventional luxury setting. In contrast, in traditional luxury settings, customers are relatively passive, referring to service excellence. As the customer is in an active role, the experience may be more immersive, and it may lead to another experiential value sector of playfulness and escapism, which is in line with Holmqvist et al. (2020).

In Article 2, service providers expressed that the material environment creates the basis clue for luxury. However, the value is formed with functional clues from the service and human interactions. From the service provider's

perspective, Article 3 raised the team's requirement as regards qualifications and attitudes as a core of the functional service and consumer process. It highlighted the service system with human interaction and knowledge, where everyone working with the customer has the same image about what luxury service is and how this service makes the customer feel. In addition, it describes what the business mission of the company is and how the company maintains its ability to keep the product flexible and fulfill the customer needs. This allows the approach to the product to remain holistic as everyone in the team can design the product and meet the customer with an empathetic mindset; a mindset that recognizes what this specific customer desires and the level of involvement that the customer wants from the co-creation service experience. Furthermore, as the Finnish luxury tourism experience is a combination of commercial product in a non-commercial context, it may also lead to other value elements than those traditionally attached to luxury tourism experiences; this would be the prudential value expressed by Kauppinen-Räsänen et al. (2019).

The summary of the study findings for the service experience is presented in Table 6. The unconventional luxury perspective reflects the findings of this thesis. In addition, Table 6 compares traditional luxury service experience characteristics based on previous research presented in Chapter 2.



**Table 6.** Service provider in a luxury service experience

	<b>Traditional luxury</b>	<b>Unconventional luxury</b>
The perspective as regards service encounters	What is the luxury brand, and how will the personnel enhance their communication of this brand in service encounters?	What is a luxury in our company and what is a luxury for this person, and how may the personnel enhance the combination of feeling through service encounters?
The role of the customer	Passive, reactive, being pampered	Active, playful, and co-creative, if the customer wants. The service provider gathers insights about the level of wished co-creation.
The aim of the service experience	Service excellence	Hedonic escapism, extraordinary experience, even a eudaimonic experience
Experiencing luxury	Luxury is experienced in enclaved luxurious spaces and contexts, where luxury is luxurious across situations.	Luxury is experienced in moments and can be integrated with everyday lived experiences.
Servicescape and determining luxuriousness	Material features and service quality, objectification of luxury.	Material features serve as a basis for the mechanic clues as to the expectations of luxury; however, the value comes with human interactions and the functional clues of the service as value is co-created. The luxuriousness is formed jointly by the objectification of luxury and subjective perception.

Employee	Similar in service delivery, actor-like, highlighting the embodiment of humanity through service. Never a friend of the customer.	The personality of the employee may be revealed as it adds authenticity and humanity. However, the employee has an image in their mind of what is expected from luxury and service in their organization, and they are able to design experiences based on that and the expectation of the customer. At the ultimate level, the relationship with the employee changes to a more guest-host relationship or a friend-like relationship.
Value emphasis	Status as a value relating to conspicuous consumption, and therefore it has a strong public dimension. After the status value the other luxury value dimensions follow on.	Different value formations based on the subjectivity of the consumer. Therefore, a strong private connection, where luxury supports the inner self of the consumers. The customer actively co-creates value.
The challenge	Keeping the overall high-quality luxury level and communicating brand values through employees in the service encounter.	Recognizing the customer's luxury expectation and value formation through insights, such as, what is meaningful for this customer. Finding the right personnel with the right attitude and skills, with empathy, friendliness, etc. who are able to continuously design experiences.

As Table 6 presents, there are differences in service experience based on the context which may reflect either traditional or unconventional luxury. For example, the study of Holmqvist, Visconti, et al. (2020) argues that the embodiment of the service employee's humanity in the service delivery is relevant by keeping the quality of service experience at a high level and should never be a friend-like relationship. However, in this study, in an unconventional context, especially with the ultimate luxury level, the service providers expressed encouraging host-guest relationships or even a friend-like relationship through: showing hospitality from the heart, highlighting the right attitude of personnel, empathy, friendliness, and the role of storytelling in the experience in the form of a relational guide. Furthermore, it required the experiential luxury attributes from the context to enhance authenticity, aesthetics, exclusivity, and escapism.

All three articles touched on the value perception of the consumer on luxury from a heterogenic perspective. Consequently, Articles 2 and 3 highlighted that the service provider's value proposition on luxury is designed from the beginning together with every customer. This was especially visible in Article 2, as the service providers expressed that the ultra-wealthy consumers expect privacy from their experience, but for an ordinary luxury experience the presence of other customers was salient. Therefore, it may be argued that the ultra-rich consumers' value expectations affected by the ability of the service provider to provide private experiences, which was especially applicable for smaller companies. On the other hand, ordinary luxury may be sufficient for most consumers to provide value in the luxury experience and are comprised more of mass-produced luxury experiences that are tailormade and closer to prestige. To answer the research question, it can be argued that the service providers analyze the luxury value perception of heterogenic consumers and design their value proposition based on this perception and also attempt to enhance the meaningfulness in the experience. Therefore, it can be argued that unconventional luxury tourism experiences may be a response to more private and intrinsic values and the more active roles taken by the consumer, which aim to create different value dimensions than those in traditional luxury tourism experiences.



## 5 CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

First, this study contributes to luxury literature and the conceptual discussion of luxury in accordance with Kauppinen-Räsänen et al. (2019), Holmqvist, Diaz Ruiz, et al. (2020), and von Wallpach et al. (2020) by presenting how unconventional luxury is embedded and triggered by context. The feeling of something being luxurious relates to the feeling of specialness and extraordinariness from daily life. It is a combination of several things, a sum of details from objectification in relation to the subjective perception of luxury, which is also situationally contingent. This study argues that the physical environment as such does not necessarily provide a luxury experience in an unconventional context; rather, a luxury in an unconventional context is also formed from intangible elements and is attached to the moments that enhance the well-being and quality of life of the consumer.

Second, this study contributes to branding literature by arguing that in the contemporary world, most academic studies are conducted in a traditional luxury service context, meaning the Western-branded hotel and restaurant chains, represent ordinary luxury (Iloranta, 2019) or standard luxury as expressed by Wirtz et al. (2020). This type of luxury is approachable and available to many. Due to the luxury democratization, ordinary luxury starts to be with certain conditions, i.e., price reductions with revenue management in hotels, to be closer to the concept of *masstige*. However, the ultimate luxury (Iloranta, 2019), or so-called elite luxury (Wirtz et al., 2020), where the main differentiator is privacy, differs from the service structure throughout the customer journey, as this study has shown. This ultimate level of luxury was more applicable to smaller companies, who are able to control the quality of the experiences, making it at the same time holistic with a genuine hospitality mindset. Therefore, future academic studies conducted in the luxury service context should also consider the context and the level of luxury and how they may be reflected in the study results and conceptual definitions

of luxury. This is especially important in branding literature as most of the current definitions of luxury come from the branding discussions (e.g., Fionda & Moore, 2009).

Third, the study answers several calls in the service marketing literature (Conejo et al., 2020; Thomsen et al., 2020; von Wallpach et al., 2020; Wirtz et al., 2020) and contributes by presenting different levels of luxury and the heterogeneity of luxury tourism consumers and their implications to the service provider. Consumers' heterogeneity as regards luxury consumption has received little consideration (Turunen, 2018). The significance of this thesis highlights the service provider's notions of heterogeneity of contemporary luxury consumers and how luxury perceptions and value expectations are changing, especially regarding the economic background of consumers and in relation to their lifestyle factors. The study argues that from the service provider's perspective in unconventional contexts is informed by the need to interpret what kind of luxury value the consumer is searching for - as it changes between consumers and corresponds to customer's individual needs and motivations; these are also situationally contingent expectations on the luxury service experience, and depend on what kind of experiences the customer is searching for. Therefore, by understanding what kind of luxury, and meaning the consumer is looking for from the service experience, the service providers may enhance the customers feeling of specialness.

Fourth, this study contributes to the tourism marketing literature by arguing that the aspect of meaning is one of the main components in the unconventional luxury tourism experience, which requires more active co-creation in the luxury experience between the service provider and the customer than in traditional luxury experiences. Luxury tourism experiences in an unconventional context emphasize meaningfulness as a part of luxury tourism experiences, referring to happiness and personally meaningful moments, which are luxury experiences in the form of moments that are a temporary escape from the consumer's daily life. By understanding what is meaningful for the consumer and by engaging the customer in more active roles in co-creation at every step of the customer journey, the service provider creates the prerequisites not only for hedonic experiences but also eudaimonic experiences and thus renders the luxury tourism experienced in

an unconventional context to the closer to transformative travel. This reflects the discussion on societal and economic change in Western societies by Boswijk et al. (2013), who state that the experience economy is transforming into an economy of meaning, where the fulfillment of peoples potentials are also striving towards meaningful values and where the harmony and balanced living of the consumer are in central focus (Brand & Rocchi, 2011).

Furthermore, the theoretical contributions of the study illuminate the luxury value discussions on the fact that unconventional luxury tourism experiences aim to engage consumer's intrinsic value dimensions more than luxury experiences experienced in traditional contexts. From the service provider's perspective, this means that besides the material clues giving a basis for the objectification of luxury, service providers take into account the relativity, context, and subjectivity perception of luxury in the unconventional luxury tourism context and provide the customer a more active role in co-creation. Therefore, to create the prerequisites for customer's to gain value from an experience, the premise is that all company personnel need to know the product being offered by luxury tourism experience in their company; meaning they should know what luxury is and how it should feel, and be ready to design it continuously in relation to the context and customer's expectation. This is done by gathering continuous customer insight throughout the customer journey and keeping the product flexible in every step of the service experience. Therefore, the study argues that the challenge of creating prerequisites for luxury experience from a service provider's perspective in an unconventional context relates to the continuous interpretation of the customer's luxury expectation and value formation through insights into what is meaningful for the customer. Furthermore, finding the right personnel with the right attitude, skills, and knowledge of the context to be able to flexibly design the experience stemming from the context with the perspective of luxury experiential attributes and active co-creation of the customer. Service providers aim to create more prerequisites for experiences that respond to intrinsic luxury value dimensions in unconventional contexts. Therefore, it may be even more challenging to create prerequisites for luxury experiences in an unconventional context than in luxury experiences provided in a traditional luxury context; this is because in traditional contexts, the brand

and physical environment often aim to support luxury value with tangible notions that are at the same time directed to status and outer-directed motivations and values.

## **5.2 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Besides presenting the notions of unconventional luxury, the managerial implications of the thesis also culminate in presenting luxury services from different levels and highlighting the heterogeneity of contemporary luxury consumers. The study argues that the more profound prerequisites for the luxury service experience are aimed to provide, the more insight and understanding is needed about the customer and their perception of what is luxury for them complemented by the flexibility of the luxury experience product. In addition, the service provider needs to understand the situationally contingent factors and context they are operating in, to enhance experiential luxury attributes. From the operational perspective, it needs an organizational structure and culture to understand the company's luxury, the value that the particular customer is searching for, and how luxury should make the customer feel. Moreover, the human-centric approach with service or experience design methods may help recognize the value propositions of the services. As Writz et al. (2020) note, the recruitment, training, and enhancing the motivation of the personnel is crucial when continuously designing and managing both the service process and the servicescape.

Furthermore, as luxury experiences move toward the economy of meaning, the emphasis is on recognizing how meaning can be embedded in the operations of the luxury service organizations to align with consumers' individualistic values and resonate with consumer's inner self. From the strategical perspective of practitioners, the managerial implications suggest that luxury service practitioners should highlight the experiential luxury attributes and combine them with well-being-related attributes. The pampering perspective of luxury has been suggested to be synonymous with wellness (Correia, Reis, et al., 2020), which gives luxury service companies possibilities to offer services highlighting well-being aspects in various forms



of luxury products and services with physical and psychological benefits that improve the quality of life, which is also reflected as happiness (e.g., Sirgy & Wu, 2009). These well-being aspects can be attached to eating experiences as well as guided tours and adventures related to nature. Nature can provide peaceful feelings for the consumer and induce awe through its majesty, which can induce bliss through little and silent moments, giving opportunities for active co-creation if the consumer wishes to. Furthermore, companies should find ways in which to highlight meaningfulness in moments. As von Wallpach et al. (2020) suggest, investing in both great experiences and little meaningful moments is relevant for the consumer.

Furthermore, the managerial implications of the study argue that in providing the prerequisites for unconventional luxury experiences, the meaning and meaningfulness do not only relate to the customer's search for meaning. Moreover, at the strategical and operational level ecological, economic, social, and cultural sustainability related to the operational environment in an unconventional context is the overarching theme. Sustainability is more than just a premise when producing unconventional luxury products; otherwise, it would ruin the features and basis of the experience, i.e., nature, tranquility, and purity of the local food, employee's interactions with customers. In practice, enhancing the meaning through sustainability can be embedded in the luxury experience at the operational level with continuous guiding and storytelling by personnel. It is also visible in strategic decision-making with personnel, locals, and as regards the destination. Even though the study emphasized that smaller companies are more able to provide ultimate luxury services, through these little meaningful moments, companies may give the possibilities for enhancing the feeling of luxury also in more prominent luxury service brands. The possibilities are unlimited and can be connected to brand essence; moreover, this requires thinking about the product differently, the brand we have, and what kind of luxury the consumer is searching for. This may be necessary as the brand may not be the only value-enhancing component in luxury experiences in the future. Furthermore, to aim for more ultimate luxury tourism experiences, larger companies should analyze how they can add the feeling of privacy into their experiences.

At a tourism destination level, the potential of well-being as a form of luxury tourism and a means of marketing affecting consumer decisions has been noticed as a good strategy that may motivate travel to destinations that promote positive outcomes for people's well-being (Pyke, Hartwell, Blake, & Hemingway, 2016). Furthermore, international tourists prefer travel destinations that indicate a level of greater happiness (Gholipour, Tajaddini, & Nguyen, 2016). Therefore, these destinations have a good opportunity to promote inconspicuous and unconventional luxury experiences based on well-being as a part of happiness for luxury tourists. Furthermore, these kinds of luxury tourism experiences may answer millennial's and future generations' quest for luxury experiences (e.g., Bardhi et al., 2020; Heyes & Aluri, 2018; Mora et al., 2018).

### **5.3 EVALUATION OF THE STUDY**

The study was a first attempt to increase an understanding of luxury tourism in an unconventional context from the service provider's perspective. Therefore a qualitative approach was applied. In any scientific research, evaluation of the study is essential; in qualitative interpretive research, trustworthiness is suggested to be a method of strengthening the value of the qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness is a combination of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of the study. These criteria guided the research design in this study as well, and they acted as best practices for conducting the research. In addition, it has been noted that the reflexivity of the researcher is a prime measure of securing trustworthiness in qualitative research (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Reflexivity in this research has been acknowledged by recognizing the researcher's own situatedness within the research and its effects on the phenomenon being studied and its interpretation.

Credibility is about good research practices (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008), which in this study were enhanced by organizing the interview sessions in a comfortable setting, where the participant was given the ability to relate their experiences about the topic freely. Furthermore, in the interviews researcher's

interpretations were discussed and checked with the participants. In addition, peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used to question the researcher's interpretations. During the research process, the study was shown to peers at academic conferences in order to challenge the researcher's assumptions and interpretations. This reflection with several academics has been useful to clarify the ideas.

Dependability shows how consistent the research process has been (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The researcher kept a research diary of the journey during the research process, recording the research situation, the atmosphere, and first thoughts in a research setting with the participants. Confirmability of the study refers to the idea linking findings and interpretations as being evident for others (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Trustworthiness in qualitative content analysis is sometimes difficult to confirm as data collection, method, and analysis description can be defective (Elo et al., 2014). The interpretive nature of the method where every part of the process can be readily portrayed, might also be partially dependent on insights or intuitive actions of the researcher, which may be very challenging to describe and express to others (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). It is argued that a challenge for the researcher is to make clear whose voice is heard in the various parts of a research report, that is, the participants' voice or the researcher's interpretation (Graneheim et al., 2017). Furthermore, incongruence between the degree of interpretation and the level of abstraction in the same analysis creates challenges for the credibility and authenticity as well as overall trustworthiness of the study (Graneheim et al., 2017). Therefore, the logic of how the categories and themes were abstracted, interpreted, and connected to the aim and to each other should be visible (Graneheim et al., 2017). From the perspective of validity, Schreier (2012) notes that it is important to report how the results were created so that readers will be able to follow the analysis and resulting conclusions. In this study, the visibility between data and interpretations was enhanced by presenting the sample, showing the categories in the analysis process, and the quotations from the interviews in an easily understandable form. Transferability of the research means the applicability of the research in different settings and finding the similarities in other research contexts (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The luxury literature

has evolved and acknowledged luxury's multidimensional perspective during the research process of the current thesis. The research justification has also been witnessed in the latest research within luxury service literature and strengthened the idea of unconventional luxury tourism experiences as a phenomenon worth examining. Trustworthiness requires that every step of the analysis process is transparent, meaning that the preparation, organization, and reporting of results need to be described at a level that can indicate to the reader the study's overall trustworthiness (Elo et al., 2014).

The interpretivist researcher must also be aware that it is impossible to totally remove from the research any biases from participants' stories (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988), which leads to the significance of reflexivity when studying others (Fawcett & Hearn, 2004). An axiological implication is that researchers need to acknowledge their own values and beliefs that might affect the research, as for example, with the interpretive perspective, researchers cannot detach themselves from the research (Berger, 2015). An interpretive researcher is interacting and co-operating with research participants, and a researcher needs to identify those thoughts that may impact the research setting as the findings of the research portray the researcher's interpretation of constructs developed and communicated by participants (Horsburgh, 2003). Reflexivity is vital as there is the discussion of the researcher's position being insider versus outsider in relation to the studied phenomenon (Berger, 2015). This is how researchers comprehend a phenomenon they have not personally experienced. By acknowledging reflexivity and the perspective through which the researcher examines the phenomenon under investigation, the researcher secures credibility, trustworthiness, and nonexploitative research (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Horsburgh, 2003); thus making the study a transparent vehicle throughout all the phases of the research process (Pillow, 2003).

During the research process, I have acknowledged my own reflexivity and been aware of my preconceptions and experiences related to the topic. I share the same nationality as the interviewees, and know the culture and country for the context of the study as a Finn. Furthermore, I have a practitioner's background understanding of what it means to work in the tourism and hospitality industry. Working in a global environment has shown me the

traditional aspect of luxury. Therefore, it was easy to understand and reflect on their experiences. At the same time, as the academic literature has slowly moved toward unconventional and inconspicuous forms of luxury, there has been an opportunity to maintain a distance to the phenomenon under investigation. The slow shift of academic discussion has also raised some challenges as a young researcher. The lack of a solid theoretical definition of luxury within the academic discussion has resulted in constant external questioning of the existence of inconspicuous and unconventional luxury. Consequently, there has been an internal need to justify the importance of the theme in research. It may have been easier for a young scholar to choose a topic with a more narrow research perspective or a longer perspective on the new forms of luxury. However, it has inspired me to see it as an emerging topic, which may have significance in future luxury literature.

#### **5.4 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The current thesis represents a Nordic welfare society perspective on the unconventional luxury tourism experience. As such, it may not be generalized to other areas in the world. However, it creates an understanding of how service providers are creating prerequisites that may be useful in other contexts than those that present traditional luxury.

As the concept of luxury is continuously developing parallel to the development of society, economic environment, and consumer culture, the research avenues for the concept and its application in different service contexts are wide. Furthermore, luxury research should re-evaluate the biases and understand the possible evolvement of the concept as new generations emerge, and sets of values arise based on other things than in previous generations. In addition, regarding the future research directions of luxury, luxury service, and luxury tourism, there is a considerable lack of research on the subjective perspectives of luxury that consider luxury premises and practices. More detailed knowledge, especially of the consumers using ultimate luxury services and their value expectations and perceived value of these consumers is needed. Future studies may, for example, explore, from

the consumer's perspective, what elements of the luxury experience most fulfill and enhance the internal expectations of luxury and how luxuriousness is interpreted in these experiences.

At the same time, this raises the question of whether traditional luxury tourism experiences of five-star hotel services no longer create the prerequisites for luxury experiences for ultra-wealthy consumers as the level of the services insights may not be that profound, and the privacy aspect may be missing. In turn, are part of the traditional luxury experience contexts already changing experiences for the masses and democratized consumers? How will these traditional luxury brands bring value to consumers in the future? On the other hand, the dichotomous perspective on luxury and luxury consumption may remain the same. Future research is needed in different contexts to understand the development and interpretations of luxury better. Furthermore, as expressed in Chapter 5.1 of the thesis, more understanding of the different levels of luxury in the continuum is needed. These may also be better at revealing the elements needed for updating the contemporary luxury value frameworks.

This study showed that more research is needed, especially on the new versions of luxury, and future studies should better recognize the heterogenic luxury consumer. Furthermore, future research should focus on and analyze the context as both subjectivity and relativity of luxury affects our understanding of what is considered a luxury. This relates to the need to have a more profound understanding, especially with inconspicuous and unconventional luxury. The studies should consider the meaningfulness in experiences as well as eudaimonic experiences of luxury and how these add to the consumers' well-being from a longer perspective. Furthermore, future research should deepen the understanding of sensing luxury, how these internal value expectations and eudaimonic experiences of luxury go beyond cognitive understanding. This would also require a widening range of methodological approaches. As much of the research has been conducted utilizing quantitative research methods, future studies should utilize a variety of qualitative methods to understand the topic better.

Furthermore, the call for research recognized by Wirtz et al. (2020) that luxury literature cannot be found in service literature and service literature

is missing from luxury literature is valid. Therefore, luxury services should be studied more from a service marketing and management perspective to deepen the image of the service and experience elements related to luxury. Finally, from a business perspective, luxury services should be studied in small luxury companies as the Western branded luxury hotels present a different perspective on luxury consumption and perceived customer value. These may include many different perspectives varying from employee-related topics to the level of details in the physical and immaterial environment given to the customer and their embodiment in the luxury environment.





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# **ORIGINAL ARTICLES**

## **ARTICLE I:**

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Iloranta, R., (2022). Luxury tourism – A review of the literature, *European Journal of Tourism Research* 30, 3007.

## Luxury tourism – a review of the literature

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### Abstract

This study aims to provide a holistic and comprehensive picture of the current state of luxury tourism research. In order to do so, 19 articles published between 2004-2019 were analysed by content analysis and a systematic literature review. Based on the analysis of the systematic literature review, the study synthesised the theoretical research streams on luxury tourism research. The studies approached the context via ten different key features. The findings suggest that current luxury tourism research concentrates on quantitative studies, conducted mainly in contexts that present traditional luxury tourism products. The synthesis of the theoretical streams identifies that research is based on marketing literature, and this is discussed with four different approaches (1) consumer consumption, (2) brand management, (3) service marketing, and (4) consumer behaviour-oriented perspective. Luxury tourism is a multidimensional and broad concept that requires attention in academic research. The study also gives suggestions for future research opportunities.

**Key words:** luxury tourism, new luxury, experiential luxury, luxury service, unconventional luxury

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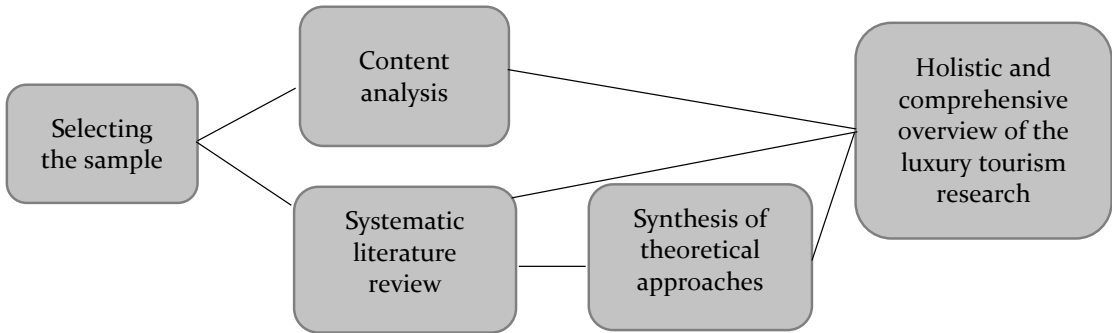
## Introduction

In the past 20 years, the consumer market has been affected by the transition to an experience-based economy (Atwal & Williams, 2009; Carù & Cova, 2007; 2003; Pine & Gilmore, 1999), meaning that rather than just buying products or services, consumers are searching for experiences to fulfil their needs and desires. The same phenomenon is visible with luxury consumption as a significant trend in the luxury market is the consumers' shift from product consumption towards experiential luxury consumption (Cristini, Kauppinen-Räsänen, Barthod-Prothade, & Woodside, 2017). Furthermore, the concept of luxury has evolved and become multifold and besides the traditional understanding of the concept is a new form of luxury, that is, unconventional luxury (Thomsen, Holmqvist, von Wallpach, Hemetsberger, & Belk, 2020). The traditional understanding of luxury highlights the conspicuous consumption of luxury, which means that luxury is seen as elitist, exclusive, symbolic, prestigious, expensive, and attached firmly to the products and their attributes (Godey *et al.*, 2013). In this perspective, consumers gain value as a form of status via public symbolism (Thomsen *et al.*, 2020). The new understanding of luxury approaches luxury as epistemologically scarce, experiential, and agentic (Thomsen *et al.*, 2020), which means luxury is seen as a consumer-defined approach, where the meaning of luxury is more self-driven, emotional, and emphasising the experiences, quality, and enrichment of life (Bauer, von Wallpach, & Hemetsberger, 2011; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2011).

Even though research on luxury is constantly broadening within academia (Chandon, Laurent, & Valette-Florence, 2016, 2017; Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2016) and luxury spending in the service industry has boomed (Chang, Ko, & Leite, 2016), it has been argued that little attention has been given to research on luxury services (Yang & Mattila, 2014, 2016, 2017). In fact, in their recent study Wirtz *et al.* (2020 p. 665) argue that “services are largely missing from the luxury literature, just as the field of luxury is mostly missing from the service literature”. Pure luxury services are a rapidly growing sector where the nature of luxury has shifted towards experiences and intangible things (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Furthermore, as the luxury market is an essential segment in the travel and tourism industry (Park, Reisinger, & Noh, 2010) and there is neither a clear or general definition of luxury tourism nor a luxury traveller (Bakker, 2005) luxury tourism requires further research (Park & Reisinger, 2009; Swarbrooke, 2018). In terms of the discussion on luxury hospitality and tourism within academia, it is essential to understand and define the nature of luxury tourism more profoundly in order to gain an overview of luxury tourism research. Furthermore, Thomsen *et al.* (2020) have called for a more comprehensive understanding of luxury. Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by reflecting the current understanding of the concept of luxury tourism in academic literature.

The objective of the study is two-fold. Firstly, the objective is to describe and contextualise luxury tourism research. That is, how researchers approach the context of luxury tourism. Secondly, the objective of the study is to give an overview of current academic research on luxury tourism. By reflecting on luxury tourism research, the study contributes to the discussion of experiential luxury and tourism as well the discussion on luxury services. Thus, this study (see Figure 1) uses the approach of Ritchie (1997) in the analysis, with the aim of explaining the phenomenon more comprehensively by balancing between a detailed understanding of past research and by providing an overview of the current insight into the state of luxury tourism research; this is done by combining different research streams. Systematically analysing the state of development in an academic discussion is essential to the growth and maturity of any discipline (Williams & Plouffe, 2007). This study analysed a sample of 119 articles using content analysis and a systematic literature review, and then synthesised the theoretical research streams of luxury tourism into a framework. Bringing together diverse conceptions, the study offers a perspective on the research which contributes to our understanding of the phenomenon. Taking the time to consider a discipline's state of knowledge can make an investment in future research more

productive for both academics and managers by providing potential areas for the future direction of the research (Williams & Plouffe, 2007). Furthermore, this kind of perspective gives a more holistic view of the phenomenon, which is needed in business research (Holmqvist & Diaz Ruiz, 2017). In so doing, it brings new value to the academic discussion on experiential luxury, luxury services and luxury tourism and argues that luxury tourism research is currently lacking studies on the new luxury experiences with different cultural and geographical origins.



**Figure 1.** *Research design*

The article first explains the sample and selection criteria used for the study. Then it proceeds to present the findings of the content analysis and discusses the challenges of defining luxury tourism via these key factors. Following the findings of the content analysis, the findings from the systematic literature review are presented. The third section addresses the synthesis of the theoretical research streams that have emerged on luxury tourism and discusses the respective paradigms. Finally, the article concludes with an overview by discussing these emergent issues and offering suggestions for further research.

### **From the roots of luxury consumption to the contemporary discussion with luxury**

The theoretical roots of luxury consumption have been recognised by Thorstein Veblen in his book “Theory of leisure class” as being based on conspicuous consumption, although some of the aspects of conspicuous consumption had already been previously noted by Rae (Leibenstein, 1950). In his seminal work, Veblen argues that as wealth increases and spreads through society, satisfying subsistence needs ceases to drive consumption and instead it becomes driven by attempts to attain the esteem and envy of fellow humans (Veblen, 1899). As a result, lower social classes try to emulate the consumption of higher social classes, which often motivates individuals to consume conspicuously (Veblen, 1899). Somewhat later, luxury consumption began being discussed using demand theories, which in addition to emphasising the Veblen effect, that is conspicuous consumption, also included the bandwagon effect. The bandwagon effect is when the demand for a commodity is increased because others are also consuming the same commodity; this is accompanied by the snob effect, which is the extent to which the demand for goods is decreased as others are also seen to be consuming the same commodity (Leibenstein, 1950). Combined these perspectives, the Veblen, bandwagon, and snob effects offer a picture of how conspicuous consumption has moved from the extremes of being exclusive to an activity enjoyed by mass consumers (bandwagon), at the same time fighting to keep it exclusive (snob) (Page, 1992). Between these extremes, various scholars have tried to identify and define luxury and the motivations for consumption (Page, 1992), and, as societies have developed to be more affluent, there has been a change in the consumption of luxury (Mason, 1981). Furthermore, the change has been influenced by various personal and social aspects, which differ based on society’s inner or other-



directness (Mason, 1981). Subsequently, Laurent and Dubois (1994) then argued that the word luxury encapsulates symbolic and cultural values, and luxury has an ambivalent and dual nature and is attached to abstract concepts such as space, time, or freedom. Furthermore, they contended, people's predisposition toward luxury is affected by their perception of the luxury world in general and their personal fit within that world (Laurent & Dubois, 1994).

As societies have developed and purchasing power has increased, conspicuous consumption is argued to have become a predominantly middle-class phenomenon in affluent societies, and it has changed considerably from Veblen's depiction of ostentatious display (Page, 1992). Prior research (e.g., Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, 2014) shows that luxury is not only for the rich and sophisticated and it is no longer about exclusivity alone (Kumar, Paul, & Unnithan, 2020). The background of luxury consumers and the variation in their expectations have expanded (Heyes & Aluri, 2018; Thomsen *et al.*, 2020; Uriely, 2005). Rather, luxury consumption has been democratised and become available to the masses as luxury brands have extended their brands downward with masstige brands (Kumar *et al.*, 2020). This phenomenon of masstige stands for mass prestige and results from a luxury brand reducing its price to become affordable to the masses without compromising the product's quality too much (Kumar *et al.*, 2020). Luxury has traditionally been based on rarity (Kapferer, 2015); with the development of masstige, what is luxury, has become more challenging to define. Non-luxury and luxury are seen as two extremes in a continuum, and where the ordinary ends and luxury starts is in the eyes of the beholder (Tynan, McKechnie, & Chhuon, 2010). Besides the term masstige, there has been a discussion in academic literature on accessible luxury (Chang *et al.*, 2016; De Barnier, Falcy, & Valette-Florence, 2012), affordable luxury (Mundel, Huddleston, & Vodermeier, 2017) and everyday luxury (Banister, Roper, & Potavanich, 2020) in contrast to inaccessible luxury (Chang *et al.*, 2016), which refers to the traditional understanding of luxury.

Even though there are no commonly approved theories and definitions about luxury among researchers, scholars have agreed that luxury is a multidimensional concept that is relative, subjective, and contextual (Kauppinen-Räsänen, Gummerus, von Koskull, & Cristini, 2019). Furthermore, in the contemporary world, luxury is also argued to be based more on inner-directed values than outer-directed (Bauer *et al.*, 2011) and has gained more inconspicuous forms (Eckhardt, Belk, & Wilson, 2015; Makkar & Yap, 2018). As products are losing the rarity and exclusivity aspects usually attached to luxury there has been a rise in experiential consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Pine & Gilmore, 1998); this means that consumers are turning to luxury experiences as they are a more inconspicuous form of consumption and more difficult to imitate (Eckhardt *et al.*, 2015) creating prerequisites for experiential services such as luxury tourism. Luxury experiences are regarded as more valuable than material things as they are unique (Tynan *et al.*, 2010). This supports consumers desire to use luxury as a tool for self-expression (Chandon *et al.*, 2016), where luxury is no longer only about quantities and ownership, but instead, includes quality and experiences, where consumers consume luxury, for example, as a demonstration of their culture, lifestyle, and taste (Kapferer, 2014). According to Wirtz *et al.* (2020), two perspectives on luxury and luxury consumption have been recognised in current academic discussion, and these need to be integrated together in luxury services research. The dominating discussion revolves around focusing on the object characteristics that can be considered a luxury, and the second perspective focuses on what luxury means to the individual (Wirtz *et al.*, 2020).

## **Methodology**

Ritchie (1997) argues that the method of a study is a balance between a detailed understanding of previous research and a synthetisation of the research streams; this then leads to an assessment that offers an insight into future possibilities. Furthermore, Li and Petrick (2008) describe the objective of

this kind of approach as a means of recognising whether there is a gap in the research between academic research and real-world practices and to discover if there is a need to re-evaluate the current state of research.

This research focused on studies published in a recent 15-year period (2004–2019) since there was a significant shift in luxury consumption at the beginning of the 2000s. First, this period was marked by a change in consumption to more experiential forms of luxury, and luxury also became democratised (Silverstein & Fiske, 2008). Secondly, during this period, it was recognised that luxury can be based on other things than status and exclusivity such as emotional desires and hedonic values (e.g., Godey *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, in this change luxury was allowed to become more personal (Bauer *et al.*, 2011) and inconspicuous (Eckhardt, Belk, & Wilson, 2015).

The constant shifting of the concept of luxury makes it challenging to determine the precise boundaries of what should or should not be included in the sample. Experiential luxuries can include matters such as fine dining, luxury travel, and pampering services (Kim, 2018), all of which are universal tourism experiences. Consequently, the layered nature of tourism products and the various synonyms for the concepts of luxury or alternative labels impacted the sampling of this work, and it is therefore based on a broad view of what can be defined under the term luxury tourism.

The search terms included “luxury tourism”, “luxury travel”, “luxury holiday”, “luxury restaurant”, and “luxury hotel”. Six databases ScienceDirect, Ebsco, Sage Online Journals, Proquest, and Emerald Insight, as well as Google Scholar, were investigated using these search terms. Between September 2019 – December 2019, the resulting sample of collected studies was then screened using a three-step inclusion criteria. First, only those studies and books published between the chosen period were retained. Second, only academic journal articles and books were included in the sample, thus eliminating articles published in newspapers, magazines and books that did not have a scientific background. Third, articles that appeared multiple times in different databases were eliminated so that they were only included once in the sample. This resulted in 135 studies. However, it was noted that the number of books and theses in the sample was only five. Therefore, to obtain more eligible data, books, and thesis were removed from the sample. In addition, eleven studies were excluded as they were written in a language other than English or did not describe the context or the attributes of the luxury tourism in question. Consequently, the final study sample, based on the search terms, resulted in 119 articles in 57 journals. The sample is listed in Appendix 1.

The first phases of analysing the sample utilised content analysis, which requires the examining and interpreting of the particular body of material in order to identify and group patterns and themes (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Williams and Plouffe (2007) argue that using a content analysis of published research gives the possibility to see the whole instead of the details that one item of research work has contributed. In other words, it allows all the knowledge generated within a discipline to be assessed, rather than focusing on individual studies (Williams & Plouffe, 2007). This study utilised summative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). By examining the introduction, the literature review, and the methodology section of the 119 studies carefully, the attributes or features of luxury tourism that the studies refer to, were identified. That is, how the contexts in these studies were described, as it was considered that this would reveal what is believed to be essential in luxury tourism in the current academic discussion. The content analysis resulted in ten different categories of how luxury tourism as a context is approached.

The second phase of the analysis was a systematic literature review, which is a useful method when focusing on exploring what is known about a specific phenomenon. The goal was to identify, evaluate, and summarise the relevant studies made about the topic in the form of a replicable and transparent process (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). The systematic literature review categorised the data based on the year, geographical origin of the study, study context, the objective of the study, the subject of the research, theoretical and methodological approach, and the findings of the study. This analysis method resulted in an overview of the current state of the research, which also served as a basis for the synthesis of the theoretical approaches of the different research streams in luxury tourism research.

By combining these two analysis methods and synthesising the theoretical research streams, the study offers a comprehensive and holistic picture of the state of luxury tourism research. This paper presents the results of the content analysis and systematic literature review of 15 years of research in the domain of luxury tourism. The overview, which evaluated 119 articles published in peer-reviewed journals, provides a descriptive snapshot of how luxury tourism in contemporary academic discussion is being approached. It also includes the patterns of theoretical approaches that have characterised the development of luxury tourism over a recent 15-year period. As luxury has considerably evolved in this period, this kind of conceptual research is necessary, and experiential luxury such as luxury tourism literature is undeniably ready for this kind of overview.

**Findings of the content analysis – how luxury is described and contextualised in tourism research**

The content analysis revealed ten different categories that indicated how researchers approached the context of luxury tourism; that is, how they describe and contextualise luxury tourism in their studies. The categories are listed in Figure 2, and Appendix 2 shows the typical expressions that were used in forming a certain category. The category of the brand did not describe the features of the luxury brand as such; rather, it collected those luxury tourism and hospitality companies that researchers gave as an example of a luxury brand. Besides describing the study context with key factors in the 40 studies, there was a clear definition of what is meant by a certain concept. For example, Hwang and Han (2018, 484), who based their definition on De La Vina and Ford (2001), gave the following explanation of the study context: “A luxury cruise is defined as a cruise trip that starts at a rate of \$350 per day and serves upper-class consumers”.

Key factors describing luxury tourism

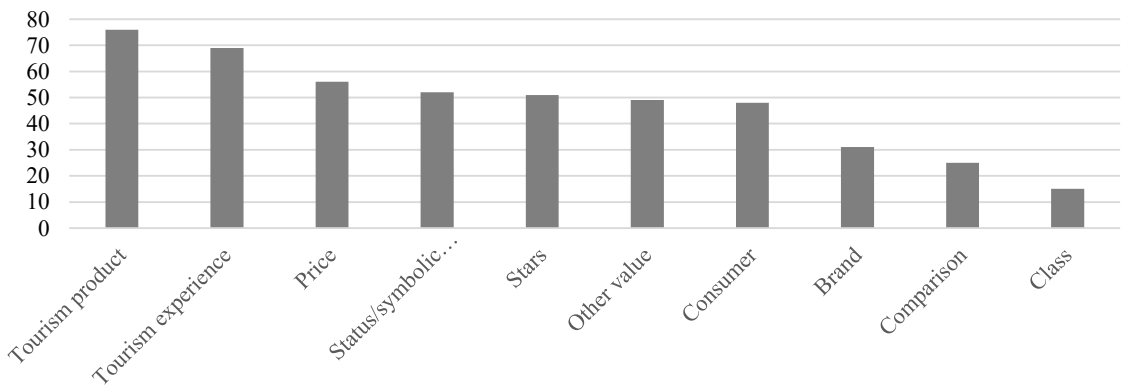


Figure 2. Key factors describing luxury tourism

*Luxury tourism as a tourism product or tourism experience*

The most significant categories for describing the luxury tourism context, approached luxury tourism from the perspective of the product (n=76) or the experience (n=69). In these studies, luxury was defined from both perspectives in 48 cases. Luxury tourism from the perspective of a luxury product was seen as a hotel or restaurant with certain material features, physical surroundings, where the aesthetics, atmosphere and the décor of the facilities were the main criteria describing the context. In these cases, luxury tourism referred to a product which offered excellent quality, exclusivity, and full or customised high-quality service and food. Additionally, features such as security, amenities, and location were mentioned. When the context of luxury tourism was defined as an experience, the approach was to view consumers as obtaining different benefits and memorable experiences when using the product (Ariffin, Maghzi, Soon, & Alam, 2018).

As an experience, luxury tourism was mostly described as experiential, emotional, and hedonic, with high quality present in the overall performance. Furthermore, the experience was described as unique, personalised, exclusive, memorable, and holistic; with pampering, comfort and convenience being central for the customer. The luxury experience was also seen in some cases as a prestigious and conspicuous consumption experience. Feelings of privacy, novelty, escape, authenticity, as well as aesthetic appreciation and safety were all part of the experience. In those cases, where both the product and experience were used to describe the context, the view was first product-based and then further described with experiential factors. The basis of these categories describing luxury tourism as a context arises from the intersection of traditional and new luxury. When luxury tourism is seen as a product it is linked to materialism, where luxury is exclusive, expensive, high-quality, conspicuous, and tangible (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2011), it is deemed traditional luxury. Whereas with new luxury, luxury tourism is defined more from the perspective of an experience (Tynan *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, defining tourism products based on material factors may relate to the argument of Wirtz *et al.* (2020) that luxury service literature is heavily based on luxury goods, even though, it is also noted that services and goods differ in fundamental ways and that a goods logic is only partly applicable to services.

*Price as an indicator of luxury tourism*

From the findings, price, expensiveness, or high cost was attached to the description of luxury tourism in 58 studies (e.g. Han, Hwang, & Lee, 2018; Kim, Jeon, & Hyun, 2011). The studies on luxury research agreed that expensiveness is attached to luxury, especially to traditional luxury (Godey *et al.*, 2013), and most often the price is an indicator and key dimension of luxury (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Kapferer, Klippert, & Leproux, 2014). The challenge of describing luxury tourism from the perspective of price arises from the remarkable growth of the luxury sector, because in the contemporary world, luxury is based on its extension to the middle class with sometimes more affordable prices. According to Kapferer, Klippert, and Leproux (2014), therein lies the paradox of the luxury market as it needs to be expensive, yet it has to grow and be accessible at the same time. Moreover, in luxury, the price does not have to be explained rationally: it is the price of the intangibles such as the prestige of the brand (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016).

Furthermore, there are variations in people's beliefs as to whether something should be categorised as luxury based on price (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016), and price alone qualifies luxury when the brand is not known (Kapferer *et al.*, 2014). In addition, in the context of luxury tourism, price is not necessarily relevant for consumers in luxury hotels (Feng, Wang, & Ryan, 2018) and luxury tourists do not necessarily decide on purchasing based on price; instead, they seek the best quality and most suitable services (Yang & Mattila, 2014, 2017). Lee and Hwang (2011) noted that luxury restaurants could not be defined only by price. Furthermore, in the context of tourism and hospitality, the most expensive is not

necessarily the most luxurious. In a study of hotel suites by Heyes and Lashley (2017), a negative correlation was found between price and luxury and a positive relationship between price and exclusivity.

Additionally, it has been noted in the study by Harkison *et al.* (2018) that an expensive experience may even be the opposite of a true luxury experience. The price is a continuous variable, and there is no definite view on what the price should be in order for something to be luxurious and included in a luxury domain; furthermore, what is expensive for one person, might not be expensive for another (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016). Moreover, with the phenomenon of *masstige* and unconventional luxury considering price as an indicator of luxury tourism has its challenges.

#### *Luxury tourism as a form of status or other value*

Luxury tourism was defined in 55 studies from the perspective of its symbolic meaning. In these studies, luxury was described as prestige, which enhances the social status of consumers, and social recognition, by which luxury tourism aims to impress others and increase the social status of the tourist. Status has been attached to luxury ever since Veblen's 1899 theory of the leisure class, in which luxury is used to produce meanings and signal social distinction from others (Hemetsberger, von Wallpach, & Bauer, 2012). However, the concept in the contemporary world is more abstract than that described by traditional literature on consumer behaviour (Hansen & Wänke, 2011).

Beside the symbolic value of luxury, the studies also referred (e.g., Correia, Kozak, & Reis, 2014; Hwang & Hyun, 2016; Yang & Mattila, 2016) to hedonic value (n=18), emotional value (n=11), functional value (n=9), need for uniqueness (n= 9), experiential value (n=7), self-actualisation (n=7), relational value (n=3), financial value (n=3), self-satisfaction (n=2), individual value, need for escapism, novelty and safety. This fragmentation of value perceptions may be based on the difficulty of defining value in terms of luxury. Consumer behaviour scholars agree that the concept of luxury value consists of several underlying dimensions; however, there is no specific agreement on the number, and types of dimensions (Monkhouse, Barnes, & Stephan, 2012) and consumer's luxury value perceptions are inadequately understood (Shukla & Purani, 2012). Furthermore, with the challenge of describing luxury tourism from the perspective of value, it needs to be noted that value perceptions are affected by situational variables and individual characteristics (Hennings *et al.*, 2012). This perspective also refers to the rationale of whether we are defining luxury tourism based on outer-directed or inner-directed values. The roots of luxury consumption have tended to refer to outer-directed motivations, however with development of luxury consumption in society it has moved towards inner-directed motivations. Therefore, it has been suggested that both outer-directed (i.e., utilitarian and symbolic/expressive) and self-directed values that are experiential/hedonic, relational, and cost/sacrificing are now determining luxury consumption (Tynan *et al.*, 2010). However, even though luxury is a very subjective experience, the current academic contextualisation of luxury tourism is still heavily dominated by the outer-directed perspective.

#### *Star qualification as an attribute of luxury tourism*

The studies defined luxury via star qualification, such as diamond ratings or Michelin stars in 56 cases. Typically, the studies referred to Michelin star restaurants (n=10) or luxury hotels with 5 (n= 43) or 4 stars (n=18) or five-star deluxe (n=6) (e.g., Lu, Berchoux, Marek, & Chen, 2015; Yang & Lau, 2015). In many cases, the studies referred to both 5 and 4-star ratings, describing these hotels as full-service hotels. Three of the studies gave an example of *über* luxury using a 7-star level qualification as an image of a luxury product.

The international star qualification may define luxury from the perspective of technical and material features of a luxury tourism product, where the star rating influences guest expectations and presents an image of the level of hospitality they expect to receive (Ariffin & Maghzi, 2012). The challenge with this attribute is that international star qualification is not globally used, and even though a five-star classification corresponds to luxury, there are variations between the quality inside the category (Tomasevic, 2018). Consequently, in a study of Cetin and Walls (2016), for example, in a luxury hotel context, the price was an indicator of luxury rather than the star rating as it would have excluded boutique luxury hotels from the study. Furthermore, some studies also referred to the understanding that accommodation in luxury tourism might not necessarily have to be five-star standard anymore (Bakker, 2005) as according to Kiessling, Balekjian, and Oehmichen (2009, 5) “luxury is no longer defined by the number of stars a hotel has, but by its tailor-made services to the individual needs of the guest.” Using a star qualification objectifies luxury tourism giving a marketer’s perspective. However, it needs to be noted that contemporary consumers are heterogenic and for example, the ultra-rich consumer, who has all the material wealth, may not perceive the standard five-star hotel as a luxury (Wirtz *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, using a star qualification as an expression of luxury tourism has challenges as a key factor.

#### *Describing the luxury tourist in order to understand luxury tourism as a context*

A description of the luxury tourist featured in 53 of the studies; that is, who the consumer is and what kind of attributes these tourists have. A luxury tourist was described as experienced and experience-oriented, with high cultural capital (n=22). Furthermore, luxury tourists were described as seeking value in the form of high quality, exceptional services, and excellent physical surroundings (n=22). Such a consumer has high expectations since they know what they want (n=21). In 15 studies, the consumer was described as wealthy, affluent, and as having extensive purchasing power and material resources; only one study defined the consumer as having a middle- or high level of income. Nine of the studies described consumers as those seeking meaning from luxury tourism as a form of status or hedonic value. The challenge with descriptions of luxury tourists arises from the heterogeneity of the contemporary luxury consumer. With *masstige*, contemporary luxury consumers may have very different economic backgrounds (Kumar *et al.* 2020), which is also influenced by their cultural background (Godey *et al.*, 2013) and previous experiences of luxury. The heterogeneity of the consumer is invisible when contextualising luxury tourism, which may impact the overall ways in which luxury is discussed in academic literature. This is because what is considered wealthy is a relative concept in the current luxury market and the contemporary luxury consumer with *masstige* is not necessarily ultra-rich, thus the same services may be used by both ultra-rich and *masstige* consumers. Therefore, from this perspective, when contextualising luxury tourism it is necessary to note that luxury perceptions are subject-related, as this is not visible in the current contextualisation of luxury tourists by researchers.

#### *Describing the context as a perspective of brand*

Describing the luxury tourism context based on international well-known hospitality brands was an approach in 34 studies (e.g., Wiedmann, Labenz, Haase, & Hennigs, 2018; Yang & Mattila, 2014). Regarding hotels, the studies referred to Western brands such as the Four Seasons (n=9), the Ritz-Carlton (n=7), and the Sheraton, Hilton, Hyatt, and Starwood. In some studies, researchers referred to the hotel Burj-al-Arab (n=3) as an ultimate example of luxury tourism as a brand. In the cruise context, the examples of luxury brands were the Carnival Corporation, the Royal Caribbean International, and Star Cruise. Furthermore, in the context of restaurants, examples given of luxury brands were Morton’s, Ruth’s Chris, and Shula’s Steakhouses. For air travel, the Emirates airline (n=3) was the most frequently mentioned brand.

Luxury brands can be seen as a common denominator to understand consumption across different cultures (Dubois & Paternault, 1997). The challenge with this approach is that there is a difference between luxury brands as even though two brands can be luxurious at the same time, they are not seen as equally luxurious (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Furthermore, in luxury tourism studies, it is noted that large branded companies may not produce ultimate luxury at the same level as small companies; small size firms engage with customers on a more personal level, which may lead to more a meaningful experience (Iloranta, 2019). Therefore, a brand does not necessarily guarantee luxuriousness in the context of unconventional luxury. Furthermore, with *masstige*, the meaning of traditional luxury brands has been diluted, creating further challenges to contextualising luxury tourism based on brand.

#### *Comparison as an approach to the description of luxury*

Luxury has always been seen as being separate from the standard with its exclusivity and rarity, and social comparison has been acknowledged to be a part of luxury consumption. Therefore, the approach to defining or describing luxury tourism by comparing it to something seen as normal is natural. For example, Liu, Wu and Li (2019, 357) compared luxury travel experience from multiple perspectives as “compared to non-luxury travel, a luxury travel experience appears to be more exclusive, less affordable, and indicative of higher status, higher quality, and greater hedonic value; hence, it signals a stronger sense of superiority and uniqueness among luxury consumers’ peers.” From the findings, most of the time (n=13), luxury tourism was defined by comparing the level of service (e.g., Hwang and Hyun, 2013) and a personalised service was used as an indicator of comparison. Nine of the studies defined luxury tourism by comparing it to the price, such as referring to the average price as being higher than in standard cases (e.g., Bakker, 2005; Chen and Peng, 2014). The studies also made comparisons from the perspective of superior quality (n=6), extraordinary superiority (n=5), and the aesthetics of the physical surroundings (n=7).

In addition, describing the consumers (n=5) and consumer behaviour as a form of hedonic value (n=4) was also a basis of comparison (e.g., Lee and Hwang, 2011; Jin, Line and Merkebu, 2016). It has been argued that the psychological benefits would be the main factor that distinguishes luxury from non-luxury (Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000). However, in the context of tourism consumption, both luxury and non-luxury can provide psychological benefits and the only difference exists in the attributes that define the luxury (Liu *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, the difficulty with comparisons is that it has been recognised that aside from the multidimensionality of luxury concepts, there can be different levels of luxury tourism; ordinary luxury and ultimate luxury (Iloranta, 2019). A further complication is that consumers’ expectations are continuously on the rise, which affects the general understanding of the concept of luxury (Danziger, 2005). Ultimately, understanding what is seen as a luxury is purely subjective, and therefore the aspect of comparison alone produces certain difficulties. This means that luxury services should not be categorized but rather seen as a continuum ranging from ordinary services to everyday luxury, then to standard luxury and elite luxury; the characteristics of luxury services can then be seen as relative degrees, and subjective perceptions (Wirtz *et al.*, 2020).

#### *Class as a descriptive attribute*

In 15 studies, luxury tourism was described from the perspective of upper-class consumers (e.g., Han & Hyun, 2018; Hyun & Han, 2015). References to class were typically made in the studies conducted in a luxury cruise context (n=9). The remainder of the studies described class as a form of symbolic production of an elite status, a distinction, and privilege of the super-elite, and a wealthy class belonging to the same social class and sense of nobility. Historically, luxury has been something for the elite and the lifestyle of the upper-class (Veblen, 1899). However, in the contemporary world with the phenomenon of democratisation of luxury and *masstige*, luxury has become partly available to the

masses (Kumar *et al.*, 2020), and luxury is no longer only for elite (Chandon *et al.*, 2016), but rather as Hemetsberger *et al.* (2012) argue that the significant distinction in today's world is that luxury has become disconnected from social class.

### **Discussion of the content analysis findings**

The study findings gave an insightful snapshot of how the domain's knowledge generation when describing and contextualising the luxury tourism context is conducted in the researchers' approach to luxury tourism in their studies. The findings illustrate that in the current contextualisation of luxury tourism scholars still heavily base their concepts of luxury tourism on stars or material factors; this means that assumptions of what is considered a luxury is based on objectifying luxury with rather technical features or physical elements and hardware. This view remains robust, even though human elements are frequently regarded as more valuable in the luxury experience than material features (Ariffin *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, the content analysis supports the view of Wirtz *et al.* (2020), which argues that luxury service research is heavily based on luxury goods literature, where something is defined as a luxury based on the characteristics of a product. However, for services, because of their intangibility and experiential characteristics, this kind of pure objectification of luxury is not possible; consequently, services should also be analyzed from the perspective of the subjective perceptions of the consumer (Wirtz *et al.*, 2020).

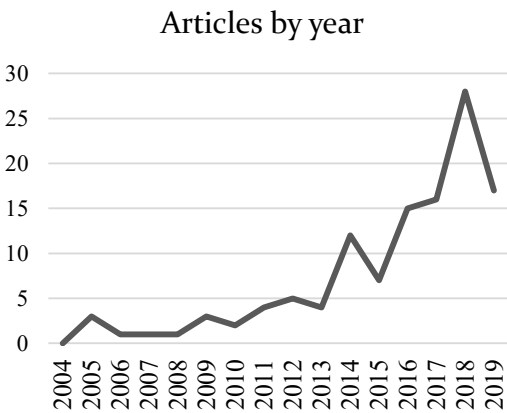
The study findings from the content analysis are in line with Gil-Lafuente, Merigó, and Viziente (2014), showing that it is difficult to define the concept merely based on a few factors or indicators. The findings also support the view of Lee and Hwang (2011) that luxury services are not easily defined based on one factor. Therefore, on average, the studies referred to four different key factors describing luxury tourism as a research context. The challenge with these approaches in luxury tourism arises from subjective, contextual, and relative factors attached to luxury as a concept (Kauppinen-Räsänen *et al.*, 2019). However, it needs to be noted that based on the findings of the content analysis, academic research needs to take the evolving concept of luxury into account and re-evaluate periodically the level of key factors or attributes describing the context. It is evident that what has been assumed to be luxury may no longer necessarily contribute to this evolving understanding, especially as different generations may see luxury tourism from a different perspective than previous generations (e.g., Heyes & Aluri, 2018). Therefore, in the future more research will be needed on the subjective perceptions of luxury tourism consumers. Furthermore, the findings indicate that more research is also needed on luxury tourism products and experiences based on other factors than conspicuous consumption; that is key factors derived from elements other than status, brand, or class. These factors are market-led, however, in the contemporary world consumers define what is luxury. Conspicuous consumption has heavily influenced luxury consumption theories, which is visible in the content analysis, however, as the concept of luxury and consuming of luxury has changed, academic research may also need to re-evaluate the starting point for contextualising luxury tourism.

### **Findings of the systematic literature review - an overview of the current luxury tourism research**

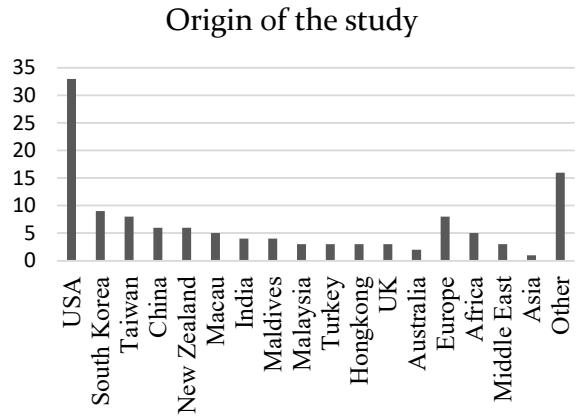
The number of articles published within the study context, luxury tourism, had increased over the chosen fifteen-year period (see Figure 3.). In luxury tourism, significant growth in the research popularity can be seen after 2010. Before 2010, there were nine studies conducted, but between 2010-2014, the number increased to 27. Following this, the popularity of research expanded steadily so that 83 of the total 119 journal studies were conducted from 2015 to 2019.



Most of the studies (n=95) were published in 39 different tourism, hospitality and service journals: the International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management (n=14) and the International Journal of Hospitality Management (n=14), being the most frequent, followed by the Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management (n=5) and Tourism Management (n=5).



**Figure 3.** Articles by year



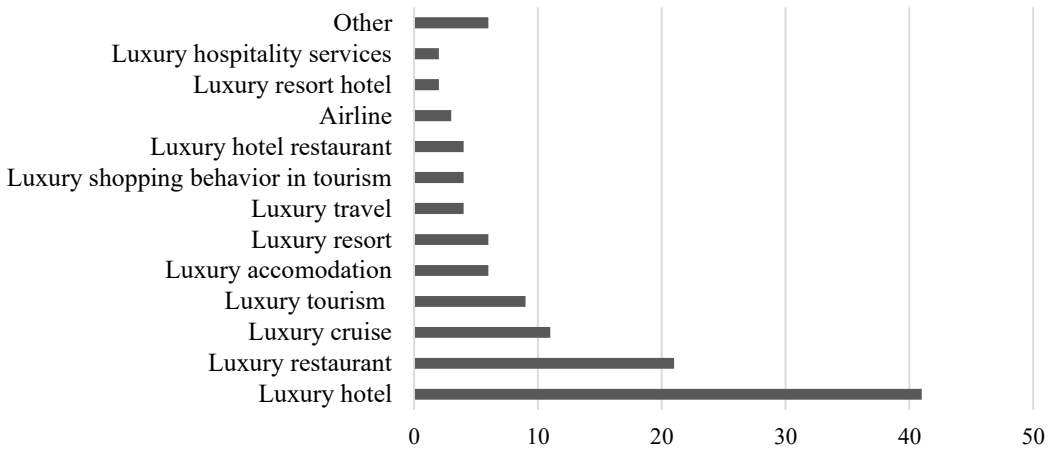
**Figure 4.** Origin of the study

Additionally, 15 of the studies were published in journals relating to business, marketing, and revenue and pricing, such as the Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management (n=5). A further nine of the studies were classified into other journals, such as journals of geographical or social studies. The studies were conducted (see Figure 4) in the United States (n=33), South Korea (n=9), Taiwan (n=8), China (n=6), New Zealand (n=6), and Macau (n=5). All the studies where there were less than two countries of origin mentioned were combined under the classification of the continent in which the studies were conducted (e.g. Europe). Furthermore, the classification of the term ‘other’ comprised of conceptual papers and studies conducted in an online environment.

The context of the studies (see Figure 5) varied broadly as 41 of the studies were conducted in luxury hotels, 20 in luxury restaurants, 11 on luxury cruises, and 9 in luxury tourism. The contexts of luxury accommodation and luxury resorts were mentioned both as a study context in six studies. In addition, the contexts were also described as luxury shopping behaviour in tourism (n=4), luxury hotel restaurant (n=4), luxury travel (n=4), airline (n=3), luxury hospitality services (n=2), luxury resort hotel (n=2) and category other (n=6), which included glamping, luxury wildlife tourism, space tourism, luxury chain hotel, luxury second home, and luxury service.

In terms of perspectives, most of the studies (n= 79) were from the consumers’ or customers’ perspectives. Six of the studies were from the service providers’ perspective, eight of the studies combined the service providers, customers or employees’ perspective and 15 were conducted from other perspectives, e.g., employee (n=4), company (n=3), industry (n=4) while other perspectives included were from sources such as sharing economy or a destination or were conceptual papers (n=14). The majority of the studies utilised quantitative (n=71) rather than qualitative (n=28), mixed-method (n=10), and conceptual (n=10) approaches.

### Contexts of the studies

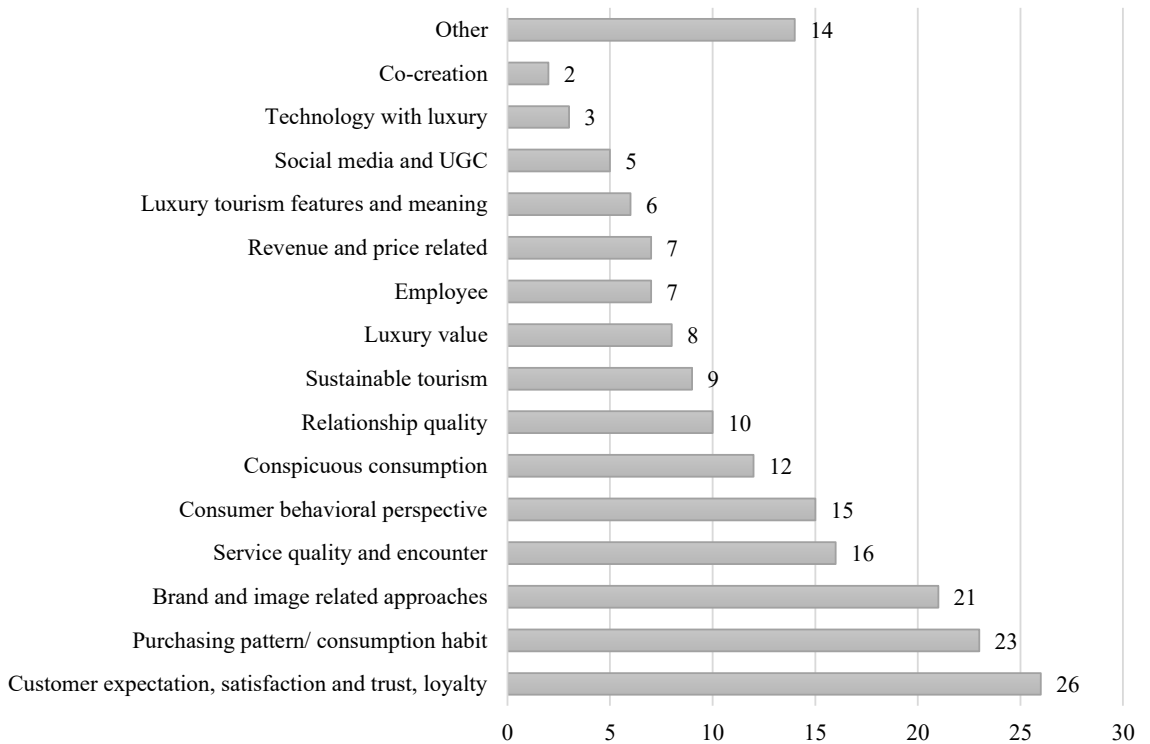


**Figure 5.** *Contexts of the studies*

The key approaches for the theoretical frameworks of the studies were frequently from multiple perspectives, meaning, for example, that the study approached the luxury tourism phenomenon from, for instance, the value and repurchase intention. Therefore, in many cases categorising key theoretical approaches for the studies was based a number of categories not just one. The most common key approach for the theoretical frameworks of the studies (see Figure 6.) was researching the phenomenon from the perspective of customer expectation, satisfaction, trust, and loyalty ( $n=26$ ). Consumer consumption related approaches, such as purchasing patterns, consumption habits, and repurchase intentions ( $n=23$ ), was the second-largest category. In addition, several studies concentrated on brand and image related perspectives ( $n= 21$ ) such as brand prestige, brand community, brand differentiation, brand attachment, brand loyalty, brand equity, and brand attitude, and brand love. Service quality and encounter ( $n=16$ ) were among the most studied themes. Consumer behavioural perspectives included studies with travel motivations and customer or consumer experiences ( $n=15$ ). Relationship marketing and quality studies were also among the most common approaches ( $n=10$ ). Additionally, those studies that concentrated on luxury tourism and sustainability themes ( $n=9$ ) were published mainly in geographical journals.

Different approaches to the value of luxury tourism ( $n=8$ ) were among the interests of the leading research themes. However, the perceived value discussion was fragmented. Employee related studies ( $n= 7$ ) concentrated on humanic factors, and the perspective was mainly concerned with communication with customers. The category classified as other consisted of a variety of studies, for example, sharing economy, gastronomy and conceptual papers, etc. Considering the different theoretical approaches, the findings of the sample studies were fragmented and are not, therefore, presented here.

## Key approaches in the theoretical frameworks of the studies



**Figure 6.** Key approaches in the theoretical frameworks of the studies

The findings of the systematic literature review can be summarised as follows. The current state of luxury research concentrates on countries and contexts that represent quite traditional luxury tourism products. However, the variety of what is considered luxury tourism is wide, and research in luxury tourism is broadening in academia. Furthermore, the amount of quantitative research is tending to dominate the research field, which indicates that assumptions about what is considered a luxury is market-led. However, in the contemporary discussion the consumers' perspective of luxury is essential, as luxury is a subjective and multidimensional concept.

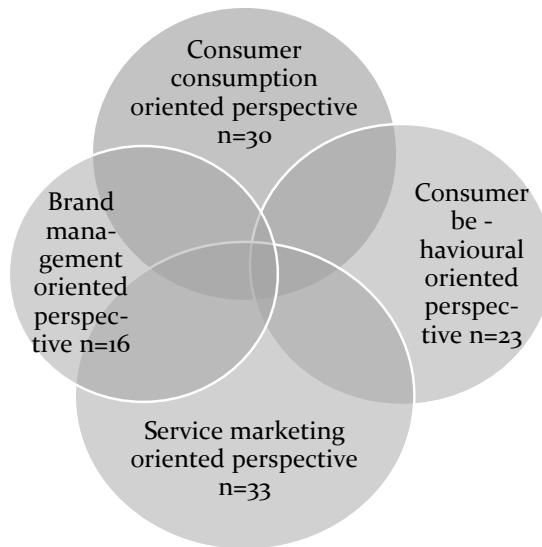
The findings are in line with Wirtz *et al.* (2020), who argue that a considerable amount of luxury service research is conducted in luxury contexts, but the luxury service itself is not studied, as the focus is rather placed on other factors. Therefore, more research on luxury services and experiences itself is needed. In addition, more research on the service provider's perspective would be beneficial as it could also provide perceptions about the heterogeneity of the luxury tourism consumer which is not currently very visible in the research. The findings support the view of Conejo *et al.* (2020) that more studies are needed about service provision and value formation to properly understand luxury service consumption. Furthermore, the systematic literature review findings indicate that luxury consumption theories, such as consumption habits and purchasing patterns and conspicuous consumption, are still in the main emphasis of the literature. Consequently, more research is needed about other factors as Wirtz *et al.* (2020, p. 675) argue "for luxury services conspicuous consumption may be of lower relevance compared

to luxury goods and are less often chosen for conspicuous consumption due to their lack of a tangible good that is owned and can be easily shown". The next section, with a synthesis of theoretical research streams, concentrates on describing, in more depth, different approaches and paradigms of the current state of luxury tourism research.

**Streams in literature in luxury tourism discussion**

Based on the theoretical approaches identified in the systematic literature review, this synthesis of the theoretical research streams combines the theoretical approaches of luxury tourism in order to make a comprehensive understanding of the luxury tourism research and its future possibilities. The aim is not to review the theoretical approaches, but instead, discuss the image of these different approaches in luxury tourism and, therefore, provide an overview (e.g., Li & Petrick, 2008; Ritchie, 1997; Saraniemi & Kylänen, 2011).

Luxury tourism research lies within the marketing discipline. Therefore, this synthesis approaches the different streams found within marketing literature in order to analyse the discussion on luxury tourism and omits those studies that were conducted in other disciplines. The number of articles which could be integrated into a marketing discussion was 102. Furthermore, it needs to be noted that these streams are not separate. Instead, in many cases, the approaches overlap each other as can be seen in Figure 7. The different streams are presented in the figure by the size of the circle which is related to the number of studies in the streams.



**Figure 7.** *The research streams found within luxury tourism research*

*Consumer consumption-oriented perspective*

The consumer consumption-oriented approach considers a luxury tourist as a passive consumer when he or she is the object of the actions taken by the service provider and the providers' goods and services. This approach is concerned with how a consumer reacts to a service with his/her consumption habits and patterns of behaviour. Consumer consumption-oriented research in luxury tourism considers repurchase intentions, patterns, and revisit intentions (e.g., Han, Hwang, & Lee, 2018; Han, Yu, Koo, & Kim, 2019; Hwang & Hyun, 2013).

The challenge with this perspective is that on the one hand the luxury tourist is seen as behaviourally consistent, whose actions are predictable and explainable and therefore, the perspective of the production process is mainly managerial. On the other hand, this approach recognises that luxury consumers are heterogeneous. However, in this case, the perspective is more from conspicuousness, meaning that the consumer's consumption is assumed to be based on the symbolic meanings of objects and their demonstrative status rather than interpersonal motivations and values. Namely, consumers, base their consumption behaviour on luxury tourism products mainly as an expression of wealth and to stand out from others (e.g., Popescu & Olteanu, 2014; Yang & Mattila, 2017). Furthermore, the consumer consumption-oriented perspective includes pricing and revenue management components, such as how consumers react to prices in luxury tourism. This paradigm, therefore, focuses on buying and purchasing luxury tourism, where the perspective of understanding consumer consumption is based on traditional luxury consumption theories such as those of Veblen, the bandwagon and snob effects. This perspective is the second largest approach in the current research on luxury tourism.

#### *Brand management-oriented perspective*

The perspective of brand management comes from the assumption that brands drive luxury tourism consumption. Defining luxury tourism via brand is understandable, as research on luxury incorporates branding literature, and luxury brands are perfect examples of branding (Keller, 2009). A brand is seen as an indicator of a certain quality and image that represents meaning for consumers' expectations. The research employing the brand management-oriented approach takes account of different sides of brand management such as brand prestige, brand attachment, brand attraction, brand storytelling, brand loyalty, brand equity, image congruence, etc. (e.g., Heo & Hyun, 2015; Hwang & Han, 2018; Jin *et al.*, 2016). This approach considers luxury tourism more as a product than an experience, where the consumer reacts to the brand as it is managed in a certain way. Thus, the perspective is based on traditional luxury tourism products, such as luxury hotels with specific tangible and intangible attributes, with the brand promising a certain level of quality to be expected by the consumer. Consumers are seen as emotional, and luxury service providers can generate positive customer responses by improving a brand with different initiatives and symbolic elements of the brand products. Therefore, this approach sees the brand as an attribute affecting consumer decision making and buying behaviour.

#### *Service marketing-oriented perspective*

The service marketing-oriented view approaches research on luxury tourism from the perspective of service quality, service encounter, and servicescape (e.g., Gupta, Dasgupta, & Chaudhuri, 2012; Lai & Hitchcock, 2017). Furthermore, the research stream includes customer retention and relationship marketing, or a focus on customer loyalty, trust, and satisfaction (e.g., Harkison, 2017; Meng & Elliott, 2008). In this orientation, the language used in studies changes from the consumer to the customer. In addition, this perspective takes into account the service recovery and role of the employees and employee communication and performance in interactions with customers (e.g., Hyun & Kim, 2014; Jeong & Hyun, 2019).

Service is always a part of luxury, whether the discussion concerns luxury products or luxury services (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). It is seen as a standard element; however, there is a variety of studies and respective approaches to describe it. On the one hand, it strictly refers to service quality with a rather technical perspective on how the service is delivered as a performance with high quality for the customers. On the other hand, even though the quality is recognised as a part of service, the service is seen more from the perspective of the experience and functionality of the service. This means that this view describes service more from the perspective of interaction such as having a personalised manner

and service from the heart, where the needs of the customer are met or even satisfied beyond a customer's expectations.

Nevertheless, the perspective as regards the service is that the role of the frontline employee in luxury tourism is considered essential. The service marketing-oriented view reflects the evolution of discussion inside service marketing with the approaches of service quality, customer relationship management, and service experience. As the discussion on luxury tourism is about services, it is understandable that the service marketing perspective is the most common approach in luxury tourism research.

#### *Consumer behavioural-oriented view*

This perspective approaches consumers' consumption as behavioural practices, where the travel motivation, value creation, experiential consumption, and its attributes, are the central themes. Luxury is increasingly defined through ideal values and experiences (Kiessling *et al.*, 2009) as the different needs of consumers are met (Hemetsberger *et al.*, 2012).

This stream does not see luxury tourism only as a means of status. Instead, it acknowledges that luxury tourism may be based on intrinsic value elements that respond to different kinds of needs of the consumer and may even support self-actualisation in the experience. However, as has already been expressed throughout this study and in the content analysis section, even though the consumption perspective here is value-driven, understanding the value dimensions regarding luxury is complex. Besides symbolic values, luxury value may include elements, for example, of hedonic value, functional value, relational value, experiential value, emotional value, and individual value.

From all these recognised different theoretical research streams, the consumer behavioural-oriented view is the one that most sees luxury tourism as an experience. However, as luxury experiences are abstract, grasping their attributes creates difficulties (Hemetsberger *et al.*, 2012). Consequently, because of the subjectivity and contextual aspects of luxury, its meaning to the consumer does not necessarily require there to be an offering or luxurious context; instead, the luxury experience can emerge from a lived experience or activity (Kauppinen-Räsänen, Gummerus, von Koskull, & Cristini, 2019). Therefore, this view on luxury tourism may require the greatest amount of research in the future.

#### **Discussion and conclusions**

This study contributes to luxury service, experiential luxury and luxury tourism literature by describing the current state of luxury tourism research and offering suggestions for future research. This is the first time to best knowledge of the authors that research on luxury tourism from this perspective has been conducted and it answers several calls for research on a more comprehensive understanding of luxury (e.g., Thomsen *et al.*, 2020), luxury services (e.g., Conejo *et al.*, 2020; Wirtz *et al.*, 2020), and luxury tourism. The findings of the study revolve around the questions of aspects of unconventional luxury, fragmented value perceptions, utilising qualitative research and different cultural contexts, which all may have an impact on a future understanding of luxury tourism in academic discussions.

The findings indicate that luxury tourism is a multidimensional concept, which should not be described via one key factor or attribute as used alone they may have several limitations. The attributes attached to describing luxury tourism in context are very similar to those traditionally attached to luxury goods, where quality and price create certain expectations about luxury; that is, an objectifying of luxury. As noted earlier, in current discussions, these attributes are more abstract, and luxury services should also be researched from the consumer's subjective perceptions (Wirtz *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, luxury consists of more than product features, quality, functionality, and price (Thomsen *et al.*, 2020) and

certainly experiences with unconventional luxury go beyond traditional luxury attributes (von Wallpach, Hemetsberger, Thomsen, & Belk, 2020). As the context for luxury is in the service and hospitality business, and for the consumer tourism is about experiences, further research could therefore focus especially on those attributes that are attached to unconventional luxury tourism experiences. These attributes include the meaningfulness and preciousness of luxury moments in experiences (e.g., Iloranta, 2019; von Wallpach *et al.*, 2019). Research on this area could also widen the understanding of the different value elements attached to luxury tourism as an experience as these were fragmented in the current discussion. With experiences, the value may be more inner-directed, and therefore features attached to the unconventional luxury experiences such as authenticity, novelty, and uniqueness under current discussion in luxury tourism research are still often imperceptible. Furthermore, the findings of this study support the view of Kapferer and Laurent (2016) that with traditional forms of luxury tourism, rather than identifying different dimensions of attributes that should be considered to define luxury, luxury research should focus on identifying where luxury begins in each dimension because this level varies across consumers and countries.

This view is also related to the findings of the systematic literature review. The findings indicate, that the current state of luxury tourism discussion is heavily based on research utilising quantitative methods. Additionally, most of the studies are conducted in the USA and Asia with a representation of luxury hotels and restaurants as a form of the luxury tourism product. Therefore, the findings that are considered as luxury tourism in the current literature are related to these contexts and sometimes to the more traditional perception of luxury; thus, research on new luxury experiences, such as unconventional luxury, have only a minimal role in the current discussion. However, as Kauppinen-Räsänen *et al.* (2019) note, traditional meanings may no longer correspond to the consumers' understanding. This leads to the question of whether luxury, in the contemporary world, is something that researchers can quantify or is luxury, especially luxury services, very personal and qualitative by nature, and should therefore be researched more using qualitative methods.

Moreover, as luxury is a cultural notion and luxury is valued and defined differently around the world (Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebles, 2007), the current discussion is lacking studies from other countries and continents, for example, Europe, Africa, and Southern America. The studies in these contexts or with a qualitative perspective may be relevant in the future as it could raise factors such as sustainability, safety, and privacy as a part of the value formation for the consumer, making it a more meaningful experience (Iloranta, 2019). Furthermore, in the domain of luxury tourism research, understanding aspects such as how consumers enrich their existence or actualise themselves via luxury tourism, are marginal at the moment. This may be related to the cultural and quantitative method based finding of this study and therefore needs further research in different cultural contexts with different methods.

Status as a value dominates the studies, but the other values attached to the concept are versatile, which may indicate that further research is needed on the value elements. Luxury nowadays serves self-interest more than status (Bauer *et al.*, 2011; Cristini *et al.*, 2017; Hemetsberger *et al.*, 2012; Silverstein & Fiske, 2008) and prestige may even produce negative connotations (Goor, Ordabayeva, Keinan, & Crener, 2020). Furthermore, the findings of the studies concerning perceived value with luxury tourism may have been different if the focus had been on the wealthy or those who are trading up by consuming luxury; this is because the higher the status a person has, the less likely that status as a value will affect their holiday choices (Correia *et al.*, 2014). In addition, the generational aspect of the concept may be different for millennials than it has been with previous generations (e.g., Heyes & Aluri, 2018; von Wallpach *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, the study suggests that the heterogeneity of the market should be noted more precisely in future research, and defining the consumer's background and the context of

the study may be essential in future research. As the findings of the studies in the systematic literature review were fragmented, the findings support the view of Kastanakis and Balabanis (2014, 2147), who argue that “luxury markets are more heterogeneous than the status-driven literature suggest.” The proper question is whether researchers using quantitative methods are assuming the attributes related to the fragmented consumers’ values, or would qualitative methods widen the field and actually present the real values and benefits behind experiential consumption in luxury tourism. The academic discussion on luxury tourism should focus in the future on consumers’ meaning-making as regards luxury. As Kauppinen-Räsänen *et al.* (2019) express it, instead of focusing on meanings attached to the offering, the focus should be on meanings generated by consumers.

The basis of the research is from a marketing discipline perspective, and thus provides a consumer consumption-oriented view, a brand management-oriented view, a service marketing-oriented view, and a consumer behavioural- oriented view. However, the luxury market and consumption patterns are in the process of transformation. The state of the current luxury tourism research, even though it is from the consumer’s perspective, is predominantly based on brands and conspicuous consumption, gives much consideration to consumers’ social identity, and takes a managerial perspective. The findings of this study therefore also support the conclusions of Hemetsberger *et al.* (2012) that the individual identity needs associated with luxury consumption are being neglected. Therefore, future research may need to concentrate on a consumer behavioural oriented view and the value formation of luxury tourism experiences, as, ultimately, in the context of tourism, value formation is essential for the consumer (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004) and the means by which a service provider can be differentiated in the market (Tussyadiah, 2014). The findings indicate that researching luxury service and experiences in luxury tourism itself will be needed in the future, as currently the focus has been more on other things and luxury service and experiences have offered only a context for research. Furthermore, as Wirtz *et al.* (2020) note, luxury service research is based on luxury goods literature as it is evident that the product perspective in literature dominates luxury service research.

Although the study has significant contributions, it has a limitation as several databases and search engines were used to find the literature describing the concept, and the number of articles and books excluded from each stage of the data collection were not tracked. Furthermore, with the content analysis, it was not recorded how intensely researchers referred to a specific key factor.

Nevertheless, the authors hope that the study will have an impact on encouraging new research and practices within luxury tourism. As Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie (2018) suggest, the future of luxury may have many different scenarios. Traditional luxury is not disappearing, but there is an additional new form of luxury, with concepts such as *masstige* that require new approaches to luxury research. Luxury tourism research has the opportunity to be a forerunner in the field of tourism and hospitality research and serve as a role model, leading the research into the means by which customer experiences can be incorporated into other service industries (Bakker, 2005). To summarise, as a contribution to this field of research, the study argues that research on luxury tourism is currently heavily based on status-driven assumptions of luxury consumption; this means that luxury tourism is seen to be facilitated and experienced in an environment where the material features of luxury and brand or stars set the level of luxury. Furthermore, the studies are conducted in a cultural context that supports the image of traditional luxury, which further supports the image of status-based consumption as the basis of luxury tourism. However, as was already noted, status is no longer necessary for all the consumers. The findings of the study suggest that both academics and practitioners must accept that consumers’ expectations regarding luxury change as they experience luxury and current consumer may have very different perceptions about luxury. Therefore, luxury tourism research and the industry must



continually redefine and re-evaluate luxury tourism products and experiences and the biases in the research.

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**Appendix 1. Sample of the study**

Article	Journal	Year	Origin of the study	Context
Bakker, M.	Travel & Tourism Analyst	2005	NM (not mentioned)	Luxury travel
Presbury, R., Fitzgerald, A., & Chapman, R.	Managing Service Quality	2005	Australia	Luxury hotel
Surlemont, B., Chantrain, D., Nlemvo, F., & Johnson, C.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2005	France, Belgium, UK, and Switzerland	Luxury restaurant
Billings, L.	Space Policy	2006	USA	Space tourism
Klidas, A., Van Den Berg, P. T., & Wilderom, C. P. M.	International Journal of Service Industry Management	2007	Europe	Luxury hotel
Meng, J. (Gloria), & Elliott, K. M.	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	2008	South Korea/USA	Luxury restaurant
Kiessling, G., Balekjian, C., & Oehmichen, A.	Journal of Retail and Leisure Property	2009	UK, France, Italy, Germany, Spain	Luxury hotel
Ryan, C., & Stewart, M.	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	2009	UAE	Luxury resort
Wu, C. H. J., & Liang, R. D.	International Journal of Hospitality Management	2009	Taiwan	Luxury hotel restaurant
Mohsin, A., & Lockyer, T.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2010	India	Luxury hotel
Park, K. S., Reisinger, Y., & Noh, E. H.	International Journal of Tourism Research	2010	USA	Luxury shopping behaviour in tourism
Kim, I., Jeon, S. M., & Hyun, S. S.	Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	2011	online	Luxury restaurant
Lee, J. H., & Hwang, J.	International Journal of Hospitality Management,	2011	USA	Luxury restaurant
Miguel Molina, M., Miguel Molina, M., & Rumiche Sosa, M.	Electronic Journal of Business Ethics and Organization Studies	2011	Maldives	Luxury resort
Walls, A., Okumus, F., Wang, Y., & Kwun, D. J. W.	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	2011	NM	Luxury hotel
Agrusa, J., Hussain, Z., & Lema, J.	Journal of Tourism Challenges and Trends	2012	Maldives	Luxury resort/ Luxury tourism destination
Ekiz, E., Khoo-Lattimore, C., & Memarzadeh, F.	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology	2012	Malaysia	Luxury hotel
Kang, J., & Hyun, S. S.	International Journal of Hospitality Management	2012	USA	Luxury restaurant
Thurlow, C., & Jaworski, A.	Social Semiotics	2012	USA	Luxury travel

<b>Article</b>	<b>Journal</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Origin of the study</b>	<b>Context</b>
Wernick, D. A., & Von Glinow, M. A.	Thunderbird International Business Review	2012	NM	Luxury hotel
Hwang, J., & Hyun, S. S.	International Journal of Hospitality Management	2013	USA	Luxury restaurant
Narteh, B., Agbemabiese, G. C., Kodua, P., & Braimah, M.	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	2013	Ghana	Luxury hotel
Tekken, V., Costa, L., & Kropp, J. P.	Journal of Coastal Conservation	2013	Morocco	Luxury resort
Verissimo, M. Loureiro S.	Tourism Management Studies	2013	NM	Luxury hotel
Ahmad, R.	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	2014	India	Luxury tourism
Chen, A., & Peng, N.	International Journal of Hospitality Management	2014	China	Luxury hotel
Correia, A., Kozak, M. Reis, H.	Advances in Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research	2014	Portugal	Luxury tourism
Gil-Lafuente, A. M., Merigó, J. M., & Vizuete, E.	Economic Research- Ekonomska Istrazivanja	2014	Taiwan and Macao	Luxury resort hotel
Hwang, J., & Han, H.	Tourism Management	2014	USA	Luxury cruise
Hyun, S. S., & Kang, J.	International Journal of Hospitality Management	2014	USA	Luxury restaurant
Hyun, S. S., & Kim, I.	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	2014	South Korea	Luxury restaurant
Khoo-Lattimore, C., & Ekiz, E. H.	Tourism and Hospitality Research	2014	Malaysia	Luxury hotel
Kozub, K. R., O'Neill, M. A., & Palmer, A. A.	Journal of Services Marketing	2014	USA	Luxury hotel
Kucukusta, D., Heung, V. C. S., & Hui, S.	Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	2014	Hong Kong	Luxury hotel
Popescu, O.	SEA: Practical Application of Science	2014	NM	Luxury tourism
Yang, W., & Mattila, A. S.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2014	USA	Luxury hospitality
Cervellon, M. C., & Galipienzo, D.	Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	2015	Australia	Luxury hotel
Chen, A., Peng, N., & Hung, K. P.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2015	Taiwan	Luxury restaurant
Hyun, S. S., & Han, H.	Journal of Travel Research	2015	USA	Luxury cruise
Lu, C., Berchoux, C., Marek, M. W., & Chen, B.	International Journal of Culture, Tourism, and Hospitality Research	2015	Taiwan	Luxury hotel



Article	Journal	Year	Origin of the study	Context
Peng, N., & Chen, A. H.	Marketing Intelligence and Planning	2015	Hong Kong	Luxury restaurant
Walters, T., & Carr, N.	Tourism and Hospitality Research	2015	New Zealand	Luxury second home
Yang, F. X., & Lau, M. C. (Virginia) M. C.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2015	Macau	Luxury hotel
Allan, M. M.	Journal of Marketing Management	2016	Ghana	Luxury hotel
Bahri-Ammari, N., Van Niekerk, M., Ben Khelil, H., & Chtioui, J.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2016	Tunisia	Luxury restaurant
Buckley, R., & Mossaz, A. C.	Tourism Management	2016	Switzerland	Luxury wildlife tourism
Cetin, G., & Walls, A.	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	2016	Turkey	Luxury hotel
Chen, A., Peng, N., & Hung, K. Peng.	International Journal of Hospitality Management	2016	Taiwan	Luxury restaurant
Chu, Y., Tang, L. (Rebecca), & Luo, Y.	Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism	2016	NM	Luxury hotel
Correia, A., Kozak, M., & Reis, H.	Journal of Travel Research	2016	Portugal	Luxury tourism
Hwang, J., & Hyun, S. S.	Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research	2016	USA	Luxury cruises
Jin, N. (Paul), Line, N. D., & Merkebu, J.	International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration	2016	USA	Luxury restaurant
Jin, N. (Paul), Line, N. D., & Merkebu, J.	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	2016	USA	Luxury restaurant
Lai, I. K. W., & Hitchcock, M.	Tourism Management	2016	Macau	Luxury hotel
Xie, L., Li, Y., Chen, S. H., & Huan, T. C.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2016	China	Luxury hotel
Yang, W., & Mattila, A. S.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2016	USA	Luxury restaurant as an example of luxury hospitality services
Yang, W., Zhang, L., & Mattila, A. S.	Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	2016	USA	Luxury hotel
Zaidan, E. A.	Journal of Vacation Marketing	2016	UAE	Luxury shopping in tourism
Akgün, A. E., Keskin, H., & Koçak Alan, A.	Service Industries Journal	2017	Turkey	Luxury restaurant
Chang, Y., & Ko, Y. J.	International Journal of Hospitality Management	2017	NM	Luxury service (Golf club)

<b>Article</b>	<b>Journal</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Origin of the study</b>	<b>Context</b>
Han, H., & Hyun, S. S.	International Journal of Hospitality Management	2017	South Korea	Luxury hotel restaurant
Harkison, T.	Research in Hospitality Management	2017	New Zealand	Luxury accommodation
Heyes, A., & Lashley, C.	Research in Hospitality Management	2017	UK	Luxury hotel
Kothari, U., & Arnall, A.	Environment and Planning	2017	Maldives	Luxury resort
Lai, I. K. W., & Hitchcock, M.	Tourism Management	2017	Macau	Luxury hotel
Lee, Y. K., Kim, S. H., Kim, M. S., & Kim, H. S.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2017	South Korea	Luxury hotel restaurant
Liu, M. T., Wong, I. K. A., Tseng, T. H., Chang, A. W. Y., & Phau, I.	Journal of Business Research	2017	Macau	Luxury hotel
Manthiou, A., Kang, J., & Hyun, S. S.	Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	2017	NM	Luxury cruise
Sarmah, B., Kamboj, S., & Rahman, Z.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2017	India	Luxury hotel
Shim, C., Kang, S., Kim, I., & Hyun, S. S.	Current Issues in Tourism	2017	USA	Luxury cruise
Spenceley, A., & Snyman, S.	Tourism and Hospitality Research	2017	Botswana	Luxury lodge
Thurlow, C., & Jaworski, A.	Discourse and Society	2017	NM	Luxury tourism
tom Dieck, M. C., Jung, T. H., Kim, W. G., & Moon, Y.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2017	UK	Luxury hotel
Yang, W., & Mattila, A. S.	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	2017	USA	Luxury hospitality services
Ariffin, A. A. M., Maghzi, A., Soon, J. L. M., & Alam, S. S.	E-Review of Tourism Research	2018	Malaysia	Luxury hotel
Armoni, N. Ernawati, N, Jendara I.	International Journal of Applied Sciences in Tourism and Events	2018	Asia	Luxury tourism
Chen, A., & Peng, N.	International Journal of Hospitality Management	2018	Taiwan	Luxury restaurant
Correia, A., Kozak, M., & Kim, S. (Sam).	Tourism Economics	2018	Hong Kong	Luxury shopping in tourism
Cowburn, B., Moritz, C., Birrell, C., Grimsditch, G., & Abdulla, A	Ocean and Coastal Management	2018	Maldives	Luxury resort
Han, H., & Hyun, S. S.	International Journal of Hospitality Management	2018	USA	Luxury cruise
Han, H., Hwang, J., & Lee, M. J.	Current Issues in Tourism	2018	USA	Luxury cruise
Han, H., Kim, W., Lee, S., & Kim, H. R.	Social Behavior and Personality	2018	South Korea	Luxury restaurant

<b>Article</b>	<b>Journal</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Origin of the study</b>	<b>Context</b>
Harkison, T.	International Journal of Hospitality Management	2018	New Zealand	Luxury accommodation
Harkison, T., Hemmington, N., & Hyde, K. F.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2018	New Zealand	Luxury accommodation
Harkison, T., Hemmington, N., & Hyde, K. F.	Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management	2018	New Zealand	Luxury accommodation
Heyes, A., & Aluri, A.	Research in Hospitality Management	2018	USA	Luxury accommodation
Hung, K.	Tourism Review International	2018	China	Luxury hotel
Hwang, J., & Han, H.	Tourism and Hospitality Research	2018	USA	Luxury cruise
Hwang, J., & Lyu, S. O.	Tourism Management Perspectives	2018	USA	Airline
Jin, N. (Paul), Line, N. D., & Yoon, D.	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	2018	USA	Luxury restaurant
Kang, J.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2018	USA	Luxury hotel
Kimes, S. E., & Ho, J.	Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management	2018	NM	Luxury hotel
Oancea, O.	Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management	2018	NM	Airline
Parameswaran, K.	Studia Humana	2018	NM	Airline
Pohland, L., & Kesgin, M.	Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management	2018	USA and Internationally	Luxury hotel
Richard, B., Murphy, J., & Altin, L.	Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management	2018	NM	Luxury tourism
Ryu, K., Lehto, X. Y., Gordon, S. E., & Fu, X.	International Journal of Hospitality Management	2018	USA	Luxury hotel
Sharma, S., & Mishra, P.	Review of Professional Management- A Journal of New Delhi Institute of Management	2018	India	Luxury chain hotel
Sourvinou, A., & Filimonau, V.	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	2018	UK	Luxury hotel
Wiedmann, K. P., Labenz, F., Haase, J., & Hennigs, N.	Journal of Brand Management	2018	online	Luxury hotel
Wu, B., & Yang, W.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2018	China	Luxury hotel
Zhang, E. Y., & Tse, T. S. M.	Journal of China Tourism Research	2018	China	Luxury travel
Correia, A., Kozak, M., & Kim, S. (Sam).	Journal of Travel Research	2019	Hong Kong	Luxury shopping in tourism

<b>Article</b>	<b>Journal</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Origin of the study</b>	<b>Context</b>
Gutberlet, M.	Tourist Studies	2019	Oman	Luxury cruise
Han, H., Moon, H., & Hyun, S. S	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2019	South Korea	Luxury resort hotel
Han, H., Yu, J., Koo, B., & Kim, W.	Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism	2019	South Korea	Luxury hotel restaurant
Harkison, T., Hemmington, N. and Hyde, K	Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes	2019	New Zealand	Luxury accommodation
Iloranta, R.	Tourism Management Perspectives	2019	Finland	Luxury tourism
Jang, S., & Moutinho, L.	International Journal of Hospitality Management	2019	Turkey	Luxury hotel
Jeong, J. Y., & Hyun, S. S.	Tourism Management Perspectives	2019	USA	Luxury cruise
Kiatkawsin, K., & Han, H.	International Journal of Hospitality Management	2019	South Korea	Luxury restaurant
Kim, B., Kim, S. (Sam), King, B., & Heo, C. Y.	Journal of Vacation Marketing	2019	USA	Luxury hotel
Lee, W. S., Lee, J. K., & Moon, J.	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	2019	South Korea	Glamping
Lee, Y., & Kim, I.	Service Business	2019	USA	Luxury cruises
Liu, H., Wu, L., & Li, X. (Robert).	Journal of Travel Research	2019	USA	Luxury travel
Novotná, M., & Kunc, J.	Tourism	2019	Czech Republic	Luxury tourism
Peng, N., & Chen, A.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2019	Taiwan	Luxury hotel
Peng, N., & Chen, A.	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	2019	Taiwan	Luxury hotel
Ryu, K., Lehto, X. Y., Gordon, S. E., & Fu, X.	Tourism Management	2019	USA	Luxury hotel

**Appendix 2. Description of unified key evaluation factors**

<b>Key factor</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Class</b>	Upper-class consumers, symbolic production of elite status, distinction and privilege of the elite, super-elite, wealthy class, and belonging to the same social class, sense of nobility
<b>Price</b>	Premium price, high price, expensive, numerical cost or rate
<b>Brand</b>	One hundred one different brands. Western brands such as Four Seasons, Ritz-Carlton, Sheraton, Hilton, Hyatt, and Starwood. Burj-al-Arab, Carnival Corporation, Royal Caribbean International and Star Cruise, Morton's, Ruth's Chris, and Shula's Steakhouse, Aberkrombie & Kent, Emirates, Air France Etc.
<b>Stars</b>	Star qualification, such as Forbes Five Star award AAA Five Diamond ratings or Michelin stars. Seven stars, five- or four-stars hotels or five-star deluxe.
<b>Tourism product</b>	A hotel, restaurant, resort, etc. with certain material features, physical surroundings, where aesthetics and atmosphere and décor of the facilities are the main qualities describing luxury tourism. Referred to offer excellent quality, exclusivity, and full or customized high-quality service and food with features such as privacy and security, amenities, and location.
<b>Tourism experience</b>	The consumer gets different emotional and experiential benefits, such as safety, novelty, escaping daily life, feeling of privacy by being pampered and comfort, and convenience as getting high-quality performance experience (dining, staying) using or consuming the product. A memorable experience, unique experience, holistic experience, exclusive experience, custom-designed experience, personalized experience, luxurious experience, legendary experience, conspicuous consumption experience, prestigious experience, hedonic experience, emotional experience, aesthetic experience.
<b>Value as a form of status</b>	Prestige to enhance the social status, prestigious status, need for status, high status, a symbol of prestige, status-seeking, signal prestige, idealized self-image, self-extension, expressive value, distinguish from others, signalling of the self, enhance social self-concept, impress others, social recognition, snobbism, social approval, symbolic production, symbolic value, symbolic benefit, symbolic meaning, distinction, superiority, conspicuousness, conspicuous consumption, symbolic consumption
<b>Other value</b>	Self-actualization, escapism, novelty, financial value, functional value, need for uniqueness, individual value, hedonic value, emotional value, experiential value, relational value.
<b>Comparison to “normal”, how luxury tourism differs from something, which is considered as normal</b>	Extraordinary, level of personalised/special service, physical surroundings, more expensive, superior value with quality, hedonic value, consumer
<b>Consumer</b>	Seek high-quality and services, exclusivity. Wealthy and have material resources, are affluent, high purchasing power, middle or high level of income. Experience oriented, high with cultural capital, high expectations, know what they want, seek meaning, status or hedonic value.

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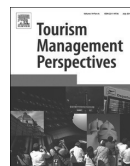
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# Tourism Management Perspectives

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## Luxury tourism service provision - Lessons from the industry

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores service providers' perceptions of luxury tourism service provision and increases the understanding of luxury tourism services. The research was conducted in Finland, which does not have a strong luxury culture and does not represent a traditional luxury tourism destination. Rather, it is an unexplored and promising destination for tourists who seek unique and untraditional luxury experiences. To examine luxury, eleven narrative interviews were analyzed. The study suggests that Finnish luxury is a new form of luxury, and to understand the core of a luxury tourism offering service providers need to have had their own experiences of luxury, know the context they are operating in and what the customers' expectations of luxury are. Additionally, the level of privacy of the experience affects the service. The goal of service providers in the Finnish context is to offer the customer favorable prerequisites for experiencing a hedonic or eudaimonic well-being experience.

### 1. Introduction

The consumption of luxury has changed from the consumption of traditional status- and product-based luxury, to a new type of luxury which is experiential and emphasizes enrichment and the quality of life (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2011). Although hedonic and experiential consumption are central concepts in the hospitality and tourism literature (Titz, 2008), only a few studies have examined different aspects of luxury in these contexts. Therefore, it has been argued that the academic discussion has neglected research on luxury services (Yang & Mattila, 2014, 2016, 2017), and experiential luxury in the context of hospitality and tourism has called for further research (e.g., Park & Reisinger, 2009; Swarbrooke, 2018). This study highlights luxury tourism and broadens our understanding of the features of luxury services. Furthermore, the study explores the context-specific concept of luxury, as there is no consensus on the topic.

In the contemporary world, it has been acknowledged that luxury experiences are superior to luxury products (Tynan, McKechnie, & Chhuon, 2010). The rise of consumption overall toward the consumption of experiences derives from the argument that compared to material possessions, experiences are likely to be more closely related to the self (Carter & Gilovich, 2012), and are not replicable from person to person (Carter & Gilovich, 2010). Furthermore, experiences improve well-being (Guevarra & Howell, 2015) and create longer-lasting memories and hedonic values (Nicolao, Irwin, & Goodman, 2009). The consumers' search for meaningfulness has transformed luxury by "shifting from having-to-being and from owning-to-experiencing"

(Cristini, Kauppinen-Räsänen, Barthod-Prothade, & Woodside, 2017, 101).

Research on experiential luxury is mainly from the consumers' perspective, and only a few studies have taken into account service providers' perceptions by combining both perspectives in the same study (e.g., Cetin & Walls, 2016; Harkison, 2016). Therefore, this study takes a novel approach to research on luxury tourism by presenting only the service providers' perspective. The topic is significant from the managerial perspective because the luxury market is an essential segment in the travel and tourism industry (Park, Reisinger, & Noh, 2010) as the money spent by these tourists is worth 25% of the money of all international journeys, and per day luxury tourists spend eight times more than regular tourists (ILTM, 2011).

The change of luxury from its traditional, conspicuous form of consumption toward more inconspicuous forms has also called for further research (e.g., Eckhardt, Belk, & Wilson, 2015; Makkar & Yap, 2018). Therefore, the study is conducted in Finland, which is not famous for a traditional luxury culture and does not represent a typical destination for luxury tourism. However, culture is seen as one of the most significant explanatory factors in the consumption of luxury (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012), as luxury is defined and valued differently around the world (Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2007). The context of the study, Finland, has had a short independent history as a very equal and democratic country. Laurent, Dubois, and Czellar (2005) note that in those countries which are democratic and equal, the attitude and conception of luxury is distant. Finns do not usually perceive luxury as part of their daily lives (Nyrhinen, Wilska, & Leppälä, 2011; Talvio,

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2011) as luxury is considered vain (Nyrhinen & Wilska, 2012) and the Finnish mentality supports the invisibility of luxury brands (Kauppinen-Räsänen, Björk, Lönnström, & Jauffret, 2018). For these reasons, Finland offers an alternative and unique luxury tourism experience to tourists. Therefore, there has been an increasing interest in luxury tourism in Finland by the National Tourist Board.

Given this background, luxury tourism may be based on different factors and goes beyond traditional conceptualizations of luxury. As consumer trends affect services (Baron, Warnaby, & Hunter-Jones, 2014), it is essential for academics and marketers to understand this complex and paradoxical shift in consumer behavior concerning luxury in order to develop effective strategies that revise the luxury experience for contemporary luxury consumers. This study contributes to the luxury tourism and hospitality literature by showing how service providers can create the prerequisites for facilitating a luxury tourism service experience. Building on narrative interviews, this study explores experiential luxury. Moreover, as previous studies on experiential luxury have been conducted in countries with a cultural background that represent quite traditional forms of luxury (e.g., the USA and Asia), the existing literature on new luxury is based a narrow background. This study, therefore, aims to enrich our understanding of luxury in a rather unconventional context and argues that a contemporary luxury tourism experience can be based on other things than previously assumed.

Developing and marketing Finnish luxury tourism requires an understanding of how to define “Finnish luxury tourism”, as well as an understanding of the prerequisites for the luxury service experience. There is also the theoretical question of how new luxury, e.g., experiential luxury and culture are intertwined. Therefore, the first objective of this study is to investigate how service providers understand and define the concept of Finnish luxury. The second objective is to determine the prerequisites for providing a Finnish luxury tourism experience. This study aims to answer these questions by interviewing Finnish tourism and hospitality service providers who are involved in luxury tourism service provision and are planning to develop it.

This article first explores the concepts of a luxury experience and experiential luxury as these concepts are a little obscure. The article then introduces studies on luxury tourism, explaining the needs of the contemporary luxury traveler and requirements from a service provider. Then it presents the research methodology employed and the findings of the study, which are discussed. Finally, the paper draws conclusions from the study, considers both theoretical and managerial implications and the limitations of the study, offering suggestions for further research.

## 2. From luxury experiences to experiential luxury and luxury tourism

With the rise of luxury experiences, luxury has become more subjective (Tynan et al., 2010) and inconspicuous (Kapferer, Klippert, & Leproux, 2014), which means that from the consumer's perspective, luxury no longer includes simply extravagant products or experiences in enclaved, luxurious spaces and contexts (Bauer, von Wallpach, & Hemetsberger, 2011). Instead, experiences of luxury can include experiences of time, space, authenticity, community, individuality, and well-being (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2018). Therefore, luxury has changed from pure materialism and has moved to include experiences and aspirations (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2011) and it serves self-interests more than status (Bauer et al., 2011).

Additionally, luxury can be integrated into consumers' everyday lives, where any material thing or experience might be perceived as luxurious if consumers attach a luxurious meaning to it (Bauer et al., 2011). Luxury is “ultimately associated with the joy of living, referring to pleasurable feelings such as warmth, joy, amusement, and felicity” (Hemetsberger, von Wallpach, & Bauer, 2012, 486). Therefore, luxury experiences are an opportunity to live out different selves, which is

reflected by symbolic consumption and indulgence in special moments, and through activities that can also be moments of harmony, self-enhancement, and self-ascendance (Hemetsberger et al., 2012). Behind a luxury experience there can be various needs and meanings derived not only from hedonic experiences, where the focus is on happiness and pleasure (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), but also including eudaimonic well-being (Hemetsberger et al., 2012), where the focus is on a persons' meaning and self-realization and affords personal growth and development (Waterman, 1993).

This search for happiness and meaningfulness enables people to transform their identity and sense of self through luxurious experiences, making memories, and learning new things (Hemetsberger et al., 2012). It creates a continuous desire to indulge the self with unique, emotional, and memorable experiences (Kapferer, 2015) and to seek novelty and change (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2011). According to Kim (2018, 280), “consumers can engage in luxury experiential consumption to satisfy the desire for exclusivity, in addition to the desire to live well and to engage in a wide range of valuable moments.” From the industry perspective, this means the growth of experiential luxury services, which is forecasted by the year 2022 to account for nearly two-thirds of the total €1135 billion luxury market (D'Arpizio, Levato, Zito, Kamel, & de Montgolfier, 2016).

Experiential luxuries include things such as luxury travel, fine dining, and pampering services (Kim, 2018), which are common in tourism experiences. The base of the ever-increasing luxury market is in luxury travel, and it is strongly driven by touristic spending (Bain & Company, 2014). Even though luxury travel products, such as five-star resorts and cruises, attract large numbers of tourists, luxury tourism is an under-researched segment (Park et al., 2010). Additionally, it is recognized that luxury is firmly attached to tourism, as traveling itself is seen as a luxury product (Bhati, Hoong, Fong, & Kaur, 2014) and tourism is allied with luxury (Correia, Kozak, & Reis, 2014).

Most of the meanings attached to luxury tourism are related to social status, which means the higher the person's status, the less likely the status as a value will affect their holiday choices (Correia et al., 2014). In a study by Correia et al. (2014), celebrities defined luxury tourism as being with their families in quiet, private resorts where hedonic values prevailed. However, ordinary people perceived it as a different, exquisite, and thrilling experience. Even though the study by Correia et al. (2014) is not generalizable, it provides a perspective on how consumers see luxury tourism in the contemporary, democratized luxury market.

There are no general definitions of luxury tourism or a luxury traveler (Bakker, 2005). Luxury tourism is often defined by a variety of products and hospitality services ranging from unusual scenery, cuisine, and breathtaking decor to an integrated travel experience (Tarlow, 2012) possibly characterized by privacy, space, and experiences included with services in a foreign culture (Fox, 2011). It is traditionally associated with resorts equipped with high-quality interiors and service structures (e.g., Brenner & Aguilar, 2002). However, Uriely (2005) notes that the luxury traveler segment is heterogenic, and luxury tourism should be based on tailor-made services rather than ready-made packages represented by resorts. Furthermore, accommodation in luxury tourism might not necessarily have to be five-star standard anymore; rather, the remoteness of the location and personalization of the trip may make it a luxury holiday (Bakker, 2005). The essence of a luxury holiday is about realizing a passion (Bakker, 2005) and escaping everyday life (Correia et al., 2014).

Contemporary luxury travelers' prefer real, unique, authentic experiences in unspoiled destinations, which stimulate them physically and intellectually, adding novelty to their lives (Yeoman, 2008). As luxury in tourism approaches a more inconspicuous form of consumption, authenticity is a desired value, signifying more profound, more meaningful experiences (Yeoman, 2008). Therefore, luxury in tourism means enrichment, personal development, and self-actualization (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2011). Trip-related factors, such as the

purpose of the trip, the travel party, and the experience continuum influence the consumer experience of luxury services (Walls, Okumus, Wang, & Kwun, 2011).

From the service providers' perspective, to successfully offer the best possible prerequisites for a customer experience, service providers must understand customers' needs and expectations (Haeckel, Carbone, & Berry, 2003). Companies can only create the circumstances for the customer experience, as the experience is felt within the individual and the outcome depends on how that individual, in a specific mood and state of mind, reacts to the interaction in a staged event (Mossberg, 2007). With experiential luxury, this means that the luxury marketer's ultimate challenge is to maximize the consumers' luxury experience, possibly by designing products with features and attributes that create expectations of a luxury experience (Danziger, 2005). These features and attributes can be described as clues which create expectations of the service (Berry, Wall, & Carbone, 2006). The clues can be categorized as functional, mechanic, and humanic clues, and they play specific roles in creating the customer's service experience as they influence both rational and emotional perceptions of the service quality (Berry et al., 2006). A sense of luxury in luxury tourism comes from the cost of the experience and time, which means a hassle-free and convenient experience which is unique and provides prestige or social status (Bakker, 2005). Furthermore, quality and specialness not available to the masses are valued (Danziger, 2005).

Previous studies have described luxury-evoking signs or clues mainly from the consumers' perspective. For example, in luxury restaurants a feeling of luxury arose from the price, food quality, service, physical environment, and the emotions it evoked (Lee & Hwang, 2011). In a luxury hotel context, the physical environment and human interaction should be congruent in order to evoke the expectation of luxury (Walls et al., 2011). A study by Harkison, Hemmington, and Hyde (2018a) on the luxury accommodation experience combined both service providers' and consumers' perceptions, which according to them were created through the ethos of the properties, comparisons between the properties, setting the stage, the actors' performance, guidance, and co-creation.

The aim with a luxury experience is to give to the customer something out of the ordinary, which will envelop and engage with the senses to support a unique experience (Harkison, Hemmington, & Hyde, 2018b). However, it needs to be noted that service providers in the luxury industry must continually improve, redefine and enrich the luxury value because what was once luxurious and extraordinary becomes quickly ordinary and the feeling of specialness is lost (Danziger, 2005). That is, customers' expectations of luxury change as they experience luxury, which creates a challenge for service providers' as they need to continuously develop their services for their customers by providing what they are looking for and expecting from luxury. As the concept of luxury is constantly evolving, this study explores perceptions of luxury in the luxury tourism service experience and its' prerequisites. The study extends the perception of luxury from the perspective of consumers to that of service providers. In doing so, it brings new value to the academic discussion of luxury.

### 3. Method

The approach of the study is qualitative and narrative interviews were chosen as the data collection method because this allows a phenomenon to be explored intensively and widely from the participants' viewpoint (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Narratives also provide a natural way of considering luxury products (Ardelet, Slavich, & de Kerviler, 2015) as luxury conveys stories more than mere facts, bringing certain passions, pleasures, and emotions into the consumers' lives (Wittig, Sommerrock, Beil, & Albers, 2014). In a narrative interview, participants are encouraged to talk in their own words and express their viewpoints. Due to the subjective and emotional dimensions of luxury, narratives may, therefore, be better suited to describing experiences

than analytic processing (Ardelet et al., 2015).

The research approach of this study is interpretive, holistic, and contextual, in which the world is seen as socially constructed and subjective. Perceptions and experiences may be different for each person and may change over time (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). For the researcher, knowledge, and understanding of the context are crucial because the meanings and the social constructs are context-based (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

To begin the interviewee selection process, a list of eight luxury tourism companies was obtained, provided by the Finnish National Tourism Board. To exclude the possibility of subjectivity regarding any one source and to ensure the selection process was based on the companies' own offering and included international luxury travel, Internet searches were conducted with the words luxury holiday, luxury travel, luxury experience and luxury tourism in Finland. The sample was further confirmed by selecting companies which appeared on a minimum of three trustworthy webpages referring to luxury tourism experience in Finland. The National Tourist Board list and Internet searches provided a final list of seventeen companies operating in the tourism and hospitality business. Initial contact was made by e-mail. If a company did not reply to an interview request, two subsequent reminders were sent. Two companies declined the interviews citing seasonal reasons and busy schedules. Four companies did not respond to the invitations. Thus, the data was collected in narrative interviews from eleven Finnish luxury service providers operating in the tourism and hospitality sector. These are presented in Table 1.

The companies were of different sizes, their staff numbers varying from 2 to 150 full-time employees, with additional part-time employees during seasonal peaks. The companies had operated from 3 to 130 years. Three of the companies were part of a larger hotel group; the rest were privately-owned companies. Four of the interviews were conducted in the metropolitan area in Southern Finland, and five in Lapland, which are Finland's main tourist destinations. Two of the companies operated in other regions.

All the interviewees worked at a managerial level or were the owners or founders of the company. Five of the interviewees were female and six were male. The ages of the interviewees varied from 31 to 56 years old. The interviewees had been working in the hospitality and tourism industry from 5 to 38 years. To maintain the anonymity of the companies and interviewees, the locations of the companies and demographics of the interviewees are not presented in Table 1.

The interviews were conducted in Finnish between February and June 2018. The interviews lasted from 50 to 90 min and were recorded and transcribed. The data collection was carried out at the respondents' venues, enabling the researcher to become familiar with the locations, the service-scape, and the companies themselves. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher explained the research ethics and the aims of the study but did not make any presumptions or define the topic. After briefly covering some background information concerning the company's operations, the interviews began with the question of how

**Table 1**

Informants, their position in the organization/company and luxury service sector of operation.

Interviewee	Position	Luxury service sector
1	Chief operating officer	Private travel company
2	Chief executive officer	Hotel
3	General manager	Hotel
4	International sales manager	Hotel
5	Resort manager	Private villa
6	Restaurant and front office manager	Hotel
7	Chief executive officer	Private travel company
8	Chief executive officer	Private travel company
9	Marketing manager	Hotel
10	Chief executive officer	Hotel
11	Chief executive officer	Private villa

the interviewees defined luxury and what elements of it existed in their company.

As a narrative interview is often pre-planned, yet conversational, it can include topics from the immediate context which may produce unanticipated insights (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Therefore, following the narrative method, the service providers were encouraged to talk freely and uninterrupted. When necessary, more detailed questions were posed to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon. This elicited further conversation to develop a rich description of service providers' experiences. The guiding list for the interview questions is presented in Appendix A.

A qualitative content analysis was chosen as an analysis method as it suits multifaceted and fragmented research phenomena, where the aim is to attain a concise and broad description (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The outcome of the analysis are a set of classified categories which share the same meaning describing the phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In forming the categories, abductive logic was applied. The categorization was based on pre-understanding the previous literature with luxury tourism experiences forming categories of features referring to the concept of luxury in this context. The analysis was crosschecked with two other researchers who were familiar with the topic and the context to validate similarities in the findings.

#### 4. Findings

This section presents the findings from the interviews, answering the research questions concerning the service providers' understanding and definitions of Finnish luxury tourism and the prerequisites for a luxury service experience. First, the section explores the factors affecting how the service providers understood luxury in order to facilitate it. Then it presents the service providers' perceptions of Finnish luxury. Finally, the features of the service experiences in luxury tourism, according to the interviewees, are presented. The findings have been clarified by including the most representative quotations from the interviews to illustrate the phenomenon.

##### 4.1. Factors affecting the service providers' own understanding of luxury

All the interviewees expressed the factors affecting their understanding of luxury service provision from three perspectives: their own experience of luxury, the context they operating in, and the customers' expectations. These factors formed the core understanding of what luxury was for the interviewees, providing a framework of how they see the opportunities of the service provider to facilitate the service. The premise was that the service provider needs to understand all sides of the core in order to facilitate a luxury experience for consumers since all core elements overlap and are in continuous interplay. These factors are presented in Fig. 1.

The service providers' own experiences of luxury were related to

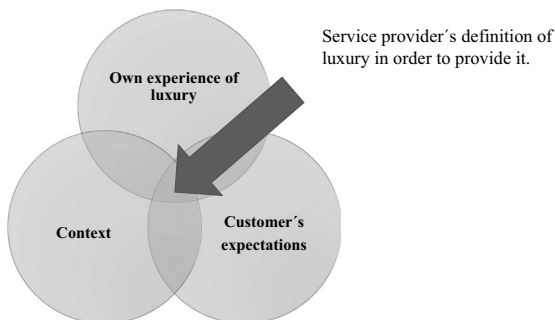


Fig. 1. Factors affecting service providers' perceptions of luxury.

their experiences abroad as customers or while working in an international service organization. These experiences and service encounters have been attached to the traditional version of luxury and were seen as a vital part of how they facilitated a luxury service in the contemporary market. This made the interviewees' own definitions of luxury broader. The interviewees' own experience of luxury did not correspond to their personal images of luxury.

"...You need to experience these things; you can't just read everything from books and then provide it.... I have been around the world and seen the kind of luxury that you really cannot even imagine, and they are doing amazing stuff." (Interviewee 2)

According to the interviewees, the traditional version of luxury does not suit Finnish culture and would not provide an authentic experience. Therefore, it was seen as essential to rely on the strengths that come from the culture and context.

"We have been a poor nation, and that has affected our understanding of luxury. It is in our identity. Finnish luxury is not going to be like luxury in Dubai, on that scale, like gold, and who has the biggest limousines. We can't do that here." (Interviewee 3)

Society and societal values affect the provision of luxury. Finnish norms and legislation limit business operations; however, they also provide a basis for operating in the industry. This supports a feeling of safety as a feature of the luxury experience. The interviewees stated that operating is easy as everything functions well in Finland because of the proper infrastructure and legislation. However, it sometimes required the service provider to explain why things are done in a certain way to the customer. Finns are seen as a modest nation, and Finland is regarded as an affluent society; a welfare state where decision-making is based on rational choices, aimed at advancing the long-term development of society.

"I believe the Nordic welfare society affects how we facilitate luxury. We don't build formula one courses just the sake of it. Society functions, we have norms, for example, for sustainability or how companies are organized, and people respect them, and from there also comes safety." (Interviewee 7)

The interviewees expressed that in the Finnish context, sustainability in all its forms is one of the basic values attached to the meaning of luxury. Authenticity and sustainability were components that the service providers were not willing to change in their product, as they were seen as vital to new luxury experiences. The feeling of safety was seen as arising from the context.

The interviewees stated that the customers' expectations of luxury take shape partly from the customers' personal reference frame of luxury and partly from their image of a place. The service providers attempted to understand their personal, subjective framework of luxury from the very first moments with the customer.

"If you have lived in India, where you have numerous servants, the expectation will be very different compared to those who have never seen a person standing next to a door just welcoming them as they arrive. And they are both using the same service." (Interviewee 3)

As the customer might expect a traditional version of luxury, the interviewees stated that a continuous balancing of expectations and authenticity stemming from the Finnish context was required. However, many of the interviewees noted that meeting the expectations of customers from very different cultures was the most demanding yet memorable aspect of providing a luxury service.

"...These moments in business when you get to do things that are so extravagant compared to the Finnish scale. Someone may have a list of 150 things he would like to have in his room. We are not used to that, as in Finland no-one has such lists or demands..." (Interviewee 9)

To summarize, the factors affecting the service providers' understanding of luxury form an intersection between their own experiences with luxury, the context they are operating in, and the customers' expectations. These factors are in continuous interplay and require balancing with every customer. The context affects the authenticity of the experience, and in the Finnish context, features such as sustainability and safety are seen as essential attributes of service provision.

#### 4.2. A definition of a Finnish luxury experience

All the interviewees shared the opinion that Finnish luxury comes from the destination's own strengths, making it unique, authentic and valuable. The interviewees said that while Finnish luxury might be considered simple, it is meaningful, special and deeply in the moment. The core of the experience comes from nature, purity and encounters with people. Nature provides tranquility. Purity stems from nature and local food. Encounters with people arise from their presence in the situation. According to the interviewees, luxury in Finland is characterized by small but versatile moments within a holistic experience built around nature and well-being. This simplicity, while commonplace for locals, is experiential and authentic for the traveler.

“What luxury we have and what we are offering to our guests is nature, purity in all its essence, people and encounters, and something that no longer exists elsewhere. It is something unique in a place or moment that gives a good feeling, value, and emotions that support your personal image, making you feel special. Facilitating this as a product can be challenging, because it is self-evident to us and not automatically perceived as a luxury, and we are translating that to the consumers so that they will understand it.” (Interviewee 1)

According to the interviewees, a luxury experience requires a variety of features that support each other to create a feeling of luxury. All the interviewees noted that the material features serve as a base. Moreover, the experience is completed by encounters with people and how the service is delivered during the experience. Storytelling was also seen as a vital part. Ultimately, hints of luxury arise from details and nuances in material products, human interaction with service functionality and immaterial aspects, making it a holistic and multi-sensorial experience. These are subtle touches and gestures which add quality to the experience with aesthetics combined with a feeling of hospitality.

“The accommodation is not the whole experience; it is what happens outside and in encounters with people. If you look around, you see that everything is well thought out; every detail has a meaning and is placed aesthetically in a certain place. From there come the stories. These things need to be right. I also require our personnel to consider this when they interact with customers. In the whole service chain, at every touchpoint of the process, high-quality needs to be built in. It forms the safety, and it forms the feeling of being taken care of and hospitality. Luxury is eventually, little by little, composed of these elements.” (Interviewee 10)

To summarize, a definition of a luxury experience in the Finnish context arises from those aspects that are a natural but valuable part of Finnish culture. Material factors serve as a basis. However, the value comes from adding personal encounters, functional features of customer service and storytelling to the experience, which make it a holistic experience. Various small details in features combined with quality and aesthetics are essential in creating expectations of a luxury experience. A Finnish luxury experience might be simple, but at the same time, it is meaningful, authentic and unique. It aims to add well-being and joy to a person's life, which makes people feel themselves to be special.

#### 4.3. Perceptions of customer service experience and its features

Interviewees operating in areas outside the metropolitan area of Finland expressed that the unique nature and surroundings require guidance and service.

“They come to us because we have the service. We don't put them somewhere in a forest far away and just tell them to survive. Instead, we do things together with them.” (Interviewee 7)

All the interviewees described the actual customer service encounter as warm, in the moment and from the heart. They stated that a good experience requires preparation and situational awareness with empathy, intuition and creativity.

“It needs natural situational awareness with the customer. People need warmth and presence in today's world. The hideous service moments happen when everything is mechanically presented to the customer.” (Interviewee 10)

This was further described as putting yourself in the customers' situation and considering what they felt. The service must be flexible, easy, personal and must give customers the feeling that they are taken care of in every way. Ultimately, the experience is co-created with the customer.

All the interviewees regarded their business as a luxury service company. However, two different approaches in terms of customer service can be distinguished; ordinary luxury and ultimate luxury. These approaches were recognized when the interviewees described their own services and compared their customer service to that of other providers whom they saw as operating on the same or a different level.

“This might sound rude, but I don't mean it that way. They [the other company] think that they are a luxury company and on some level, they are. However, I think they don't operate in the way of ultimate luxury.” (Interviewee 5)

In the ultimate luxury approach, the service and experience are tailor-made for a certain customer, and the experience is totally private. The service personnel remain the same throughout the whole journey with the customer.

“Every customer has their own guide to ensure that everything goes well, and the customer doesn't need to wonder who will pick them up today or how the kids will react to a different person... it is a complete, holistic, and smooth experience.” (Interviewee 1)

Moreover, consumers using the services are different. In ordinary luxury, the customers are a mix of “money is not an issue” customers and regular customers, whereas in ultimate luxury the customers are only wealthy customers for whom money is not an issue. Different consuming habits pose a challenge for the service provider, as the needs and expectations regarding luxury and service may vary greatly depending on the customers' frame of reference for luxury. All the interviewees noted that knowing the customer was valuable. However, in an ultimate luxury service, where the service personnel is the same throughout the whole experience, a greater understanding of the customers' needs and wishes were seen as essential.

“As we are not offering any bulk products, it is essential to know the customer. We ask before their arrival what kind of vacations they are used to and what they wish for on this holiday. And we continuously balance their wishes and expectations with what we have here.” (Interviewee 1)

According to interviewees, in an ultimate luxury service, the relationship is taken to another level where it is more akin to a host and guest or even a friend-like relationship.

“I think that I become friends with them, and then they open up more and talk about their dreams and wishes and ask about

everything. Then it is easier to respond to those needs and dreams that they don't even tell you about...They don't feel that they are in a customer-service provider relationship, it is something totally different." (Interviewee 5)

In this friend-like relationship, the ultimate luxury service providers recognize a certain trust, and they continuously guide the customers through their experiences, making everything easy and flexible for the customer.

"Our customers don't want to worry about a thing. They don't have to think about what is included in the price and what is not, so ease and unconcern are the aspects they are searching for." (Interviewee 1)

To summarize, the perception of the customer service experience in luxury service provision includes flexibility, ease and comfort. These are the key elements in customer service. However, the service needs to come from the heart of the service personnel and it should be present in the moment, so that customer gets a feeling of hospitality and being taken care of. The experience is co-created with the customer. The level of privacy affects the service relationship and experience making it an ordinary luxury or an ultimate luxury.

## 5. Discussion

This study aims to build an understanding of how service providers understand the concept of luxury and what the prerequisites are for a luxury service in Finland. The study broadens the definition and explores the features of luxury.

The interviewees perceived luxury as a dynamic and evolving concept, where traditional and new forms of luxury exist side by side, making it a multidimensional concept. The definition of luxury is broader in the contemporary world, and while some features are different, certain features such as high quality are present in both versions of luxury. The literature often separates versions into different classifications with their specific features (e.g., Danziger, 2005; Laurent et al., 2005) and focuses on differentiating the concepts. However, the findings of this study are in line with Godey et al. (2013) who represent traditional luxury as a form of conspicuous luxury or status, and new luxury as an emotional, hedonistic form of luxury, with features such as quality, elegance, exceptionality and aesthetics present in both versions of luxury. Hence, this study also answers to the call by Godey et al. (2013) for further research offering a more detailed understanding of the interpretation of the features that are present in both versions of luxury.

Seeing luxury as a multidimensional concept has affected the service providers' understanding. Danziger (2005) notes that the consumers' experience of luxury and the feeling it gives them is what luxury is all about. The perceptions of individuals create their experiences of the world, giving them conceptual knowledge based upon and derived from this awareness, allowing people to act within their environment (Efron, 1969). Therefore, the service providers' own experiences with luxury might be essential in understanding it fully. Luxury is a culture you must know thoroughly to practice properly (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

As luxury is allied with cultural and societal values (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012), the traditional kind of luxury with material features such as gold and marble would not suit the Finnish context. Instead, Finnish luxury comes from values that are unique and natural to Finns, such as their relationship with nature, providing prerequisites for authenticity. Therefore, the base for Finnish luxury is a combination of elements that may seem simple from the perspective of traditional luxury. It is, however, in line with the understanding that luxury is contextual and tied to unique know-how, heritage and culture (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Additionally, societal values provide a basis for such aspects as safety and sustainability. Even though sustainability and luxury are sometimes seen as contradictory ideas (Swarbrooke, 2018),

Kapferer (2015) sees it as a way to create a more meaningful luxury experience. This study is consistent with the view that merely having more staff and traditional material features of luxury do not create a luxury experience; instead, they create an expensive experience that may even be the opposite of a truly luxury experience (Harkison et al., 2018b).

Providing the prerequisites for a luxury experience requires knowing the customer and having a deep understanding of the customers' personal frame of reference of luxury, as this varies greatly depending on the customer. The prerequisites for excellent service delivery lie in understanding the customer's expectations (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1991). However, as new luxury is based on different factors compared to traditional luxury and there is no clear definition of its characteristic features, responding to the customers' expectations was considered to be more challenging, requiring a continuous analysis of the service provision and balancing it with the customers' wishes and the context.

In order to facilitate a Finnish luxury experience, the service providers' understanding of luxury is in a continuous state of interplay. The Finnish context and culture seem to affect not only the authenticity of the experience but also the meaningfulness. The service providers' own experience, and on the other hand, the customers' expectations of luxury provide an understanding of the elements required for luxury, such as aesthetics and quality. Together these form prerequisites for the customer to feel special and enjoy a unique experience. This threefold understanding affects how a luxury experience is facilitated, which in the Finnish context aims to support the creation of hedonic or eudaimonic well-being.

The interviewees noted that creating the prerequisites for service provision in a luxury tourism experience requires considering various details and that material factors serve as a base. The findings are in line with Walls et al. (2011), who suggests that in the luxury hospitality context, a wide variety of factors must be taken into account. While material features are regarded as significant in the overall touristic experience, the physical environment alone does not produce a truly luxury experience, rather human interaction and co-creation are as substantial factors (e.g., Harkison, 2018). Furthermore, a luxury service experience requires functional clues, where the ease and flexibility of the service become the focus. Even though service quality was seen as important by the interviewees, this study extends Pütz-Willems (2007) view that a contemporary luxury service should be seen as less formal, free from a rigid atmosphere and more as a professional service with a friendly touch. In this study, customer service was described as friendly, with joy in the service, and with such expressions as "from the heart" or "being in a moment." Furthermore, the service provider wanted to step into the customer's shoes to see things from their perspective, aiming to meet the needs of the customer and possibly exceed those expectations, which is consistent with the study by Lee and Hwang (2011).

Based on the findings, all these factors work as clues and are essential to create expectation of the luxury tourism service experience. Furthermore, in this study, the service providers emphasized the significance of storytelling as a part of their service provision as it helped to combine material features and human interaction making a holistic and more meaningful experience. Research into experiential luxury has not yet acknowledged the role of stories (e.g., Cetin & Walls, 2016; Harkison, 2016), although behind almost every luxury brand there is a great story as they usually have a strong brand heritage (Wittig et al., 2014). Storytelling supports the idea of a service-scape which allows the consumer to step away from everyday reality, which is seen as mandatory in hedonic service consumption, enabling the service provider to facilitate an extraordinary experience and to make it holistic (Mossberg, 2008).

In contrast to previous research in which the presence of other customers is seen as a particularly salient feature in a luxury environment, this research demonstrated the aspect of privacy, which was seen in this study as a criterion for ultimate luxury. Privacy in a luxury

experience affects the service structure, the process and the whole atmosphere of the experience. Exclusivity has been an existing attribute in luxury. However, the findings of this study support Cristini et al. (2017), who see that ultimate luxury consists of three features: exclusivity, creativity, and excellence. Our research findings suggest that luxury, aside from its multidimensionality, can be seen to exist on different levels of luxury tourism; ordinary luxury and ultimate luxury. As the data showed, the interviewees said that customers who purchased ultimate luxury services are those for whom money is not an issue. This is in line with Thurlow and Jaworski (2014), who recognize that the true elite use privately owned and tightly managed services which are beyond the reach of the normal consumer.

The study findings imply that ultimate luxury services are practicable in smaller, privately owned companies, while larger companies are more suited to providing ordinary luxury services. This is due to the differences in the service structure; large companies are not able to control the entire holistic customer experience on the level that small companies can. Even though both offer tailor-made products, with ultimate luxury, the level of service is more personal and every product is composed from the beginning according to the customer's wishes. However, ordinary luxury is based on ready-made service product packages, which can be combined to achieve a more tailor-made package. This study is in line with the findings that luxury lodges offer guests a more varied selection of different types of experiences than luxury hotels (Harkison et al., 2018a) and also that small size firms engage with customers on a more personal level (Yachin, 2018).

Ultimate luxury is a form of hospitality, which is more than merely high-quality service. Hospitality is essentially a relationship based on hosts and guests, where the feeling of hospitality comes from the host's generosity, desire to please and a genuine regard for the guest as an individual (Lashley & Morrison, 2000). In ultimate luxury, service providers expressed that they were willing to control the entire experience holistically and that the relationship was more than just a service provider-customer relationship as they responded to the guests' personal needs. Importantly, they also noted that the customer should not have to think about which aspect of the service was part of the product and which was not. The service provider aims to focus on the guests' experience and attempts to stimulate all five senses with personal and memorable experiences, which according to Hemmington (2007) will add value to their customers' lives. The more unique and memorable the experience, the greater its value (Pütz-Willems, 2007).

Along these lines, the research findings suggest that with the concept of luxury, the service provider learns from the industry and the expectations of the customers. The provider then adapts to the context in order to facilitate a luxury experience. A model of the factors that describe the service providers' perceptions is shown in Fig. 2. In Finland, the provision of luxury tourism services is influenced by various Finnish cultural and societal values that form an authentic and unique experience. It may seem simple and unconventional if it is compared to the traditional understanding of luxury. The service providers aim to add meaningfulness to the product through features such as authenticity, storytelling and sustainability. Meaningfulness answers especially to the needs of consumers in mature luxury markets (Wittig et al., 2014). A luxury experience is co-created. From the service providers' perspective, the prerequisites of the service consist of multiple details required to achieve a multisensorial and holistic experience. Material features of luxury serve as a basis for the experience. However, the value derives from humanic clues such as interaction and encounters with people as well as immaterial features such as storytelling. The functionality of services such as their ease and comfort create the expectation of receiving a luxury service and aim to give a customer a feeling of hospitality and being taken care of. The ultimate luxury experience is formed in privacy, which is a feature that is more practicable in small tourism companies. The majority of Finnish service providers aim to provide hedonic or even eudaimonic well-being experiences, where the customer is made to feel special.

## 6. Conclusions

### 6.1. Theoretical implications

Luxury has undergone a transformation and is moving toward experiential consumption. Although there has been research on luxury contexts, there has been a lack of research of luxury services and into how the prerequisites for new forms of luxury, e.g., experiential luxury, are created, especially from the perspective of the service provider. Therefore, this study contributes to experiential luxury and luxury tourism research by presenting features of a luxury experience and service provision in the Finnish context. Additionally, the study further extends the perspective on luxury, as mostly all the current experiential luxury research has been conducted in the context that usually supports traditional luxury with all of its typical material features. Therefore, the findings of this study broaden the definition of new luxury, as Finnish luxury is unconventional and simple as it is inconspicuous. Additionally, it is based on factors that may be hard to produce and understand as a luxury, such as the purity or tranquility of nature, if the lens used to concentrate on luxury is a traditional one. This study shows that a luxury experience is more than the material features traditionally attached to the idea of luxury, as they might be the opposite of traditional luxury to a certain degree. This study further extends the understanding of luxury by showing that some features of luxury are present in both traditional and new forms of luxury.

The findings of this study provide details of the service features behind the provision of luxury tourism services. The prerequisites facilitated by the service provider aim to give the customer an authentic, unique, extraordinary and holistic experience. This study also extends the view of a luxury experience with the features of sustainability and storytelling, which are rather common features in the tourism literature but have not been widely acknowledged in the luxury literature. With these features, the service provider aims to enrich the consumer's experience so it becomes more meaningful. Therefore, in the Finnish context, the service provider aims to provide a customer with the prerequisites for a hedonic or even eudaimonic well-being experience, which aims to make the customer feel special.

The most valuable finding of this study concerns the different levels of luxury service provision, as the feature of privacy and its implications for the service provider have not been previously researched. The aspect of privacy is essential for the facilitation of ultimate luxury. The findings also add to the body of knowledge in the hospitality literature as Telfer (2000) has questioned whether true hospitality can be provided in a commercial context, considering that the tension between generosity, which is one of the features of hospitality, and the economics of business, i.e., the financial control over the product, are constantly reminding the guest of the economic relationship. From this point of view, the ultimate type of luxury described in this study can be the closest form of genuine hospitality in a commercial context.

### 6.2. Managerial implications

This study extends the view that besides traditional, conspicuous forms of luxury, operations in the luxury industry may be based on hedonic luxury or even eudaimonic well-being experiences. A luxury experience in tourism is highly personal, and service providers should understand the customers' needs and expectations, which may be based on a variety of emotional and complex factors. From the managerial perspective, this requires continuous learning from the customers and the whole industry. Furthermore, understanding the context they are operating in and the implications of sustainability and storytelling are essential if the aim is to add authenticity and meaningfulness to the experience.

From the managerial perspective, the study suggests that service companies should consider the level of privacy to create one of the prerequisites for ultimate luxury. For example, companies that are now

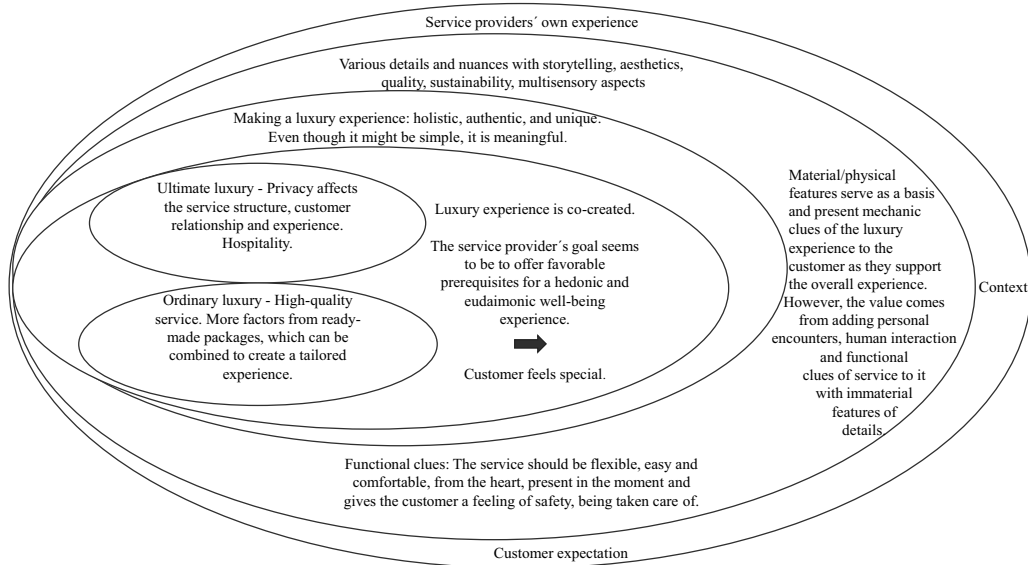


Fig. 2. Construction of the service providers' perceptions.

providing ordinary luxury services could think of new ways to add the privacy aspect to their product selection as it would add value to the consumers' experienced level of luxury.

As a practical result of this study, service providers working in the hospitality sector can learn about the specific features of a luxury service product. Furthermore, by implementing the findings, they will be able to improve their products, leading toward true luxury tourism products. Even if the aim of the service provider is not to operate in the luxury industry, they can probably enhance the quality of their product by implementing some of these findings. Moreover, it would be beneficial to consider whether the findings of the study are applicable to other service sectors besides tourism and hospitality to increase the feeling of meaningfulness. The managerial implications of this study have already been used in Finland to provide recommendations to government tourism advisors to improve the luxury tourism segment and to find new ways to market Finland as a luxury tourism destination.

6.3. Limitations of the study and suggestion for future research

There are several limitations to this research, as it provides a small example of luxury tourism in one country. The study is limited to Finland, which is not traditionally renowned as a specific luxury culture and because luxury is a cultural notion, the results are not generalizable worldwide. Additionally, the number of luxury service provider companies in Finland is not very large. However, recently Finland has gained attention as a luxury tourism destination and therefore a better understanding of this unconventional context could help to increase the

Appendix A. Interview guide

Background information of the company and participant

Factors affecting the service providers' own understanding of luxury

How do you define luxury?

What elements of luxury exist in your company?

How do you understand luxury, and what is luxury?

A definition of a Finnish luxury experience

understanding of the phenomenon and possibly help theorize it better in the future.

Furthermore, the positions of the interviewed managers and the companies sizes varied in the study. Some might see this as a limitation; however, it is noted that each company should have a shared cognitive belief system with key actors to guide the managers' attention and to develop the company's operating strategies (Strandvik, Holmlund, & Grönroos, 2014). That is, in this case, how these service providers working at a managerial level define luxury in a Finnish context and what they see as prerequisites for facilitating a luxury tourism service experience. More research on the similarities and differences in this field would be needed to highlight the features of the luxury tourism experience and its service. Furthermore, further research could comprise comparative studies conducted between countries. Finally, further studies on ultimate luxury may add value to the luxury literature.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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Could you describe what you understand by the term "Finnish luxury"?  
 Could you describe what you understand by the term "luxury experience"?  
 Could you describe how you facilitate prerequisites for a luxury experience?

#### Perceptions of customer service experience and its features

Could you describe what you understand by the term "luxury service"?  
 Could you describe what it requires from the service provider?  
 Could you describe where the customer gets a feeling that this is luxury?  
 Could you describe what your customers' value and seek from Finnish luxury?

Probes for each question: Can you give me an example? What do you mean by that? Could you explain and describe that a little more?

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## Service providers' perspective on the luxury tourist experience as a product

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# Service providers' perspective on the luxury tourist experience as a product

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores service providers' perceptions of the luxury tourist experience as a product and its challenges in Finland. To examine the essence of this product, eleven narrative interviews with service providers were analyzed. The findings indicate that service providers facilitate prerequisites for a luxury experience based on the customer's needs and motivations which may add meaningfulness. The aim is to make the customer feel special by recognizing the different value expectations of the customer. The Finnish luxury tourist experience aims to provide hedonic or eudaimonic wellbeing experiences, in which activities in nature and encounters with people create intrinsic customer value, and the customer's active participation leads to experiential value. Furthermore, as the context of the experience is a non-commercial one where commercial aspects of the luxury product are combined with the experience, the possibility to gain prudential value may be present. The study suggests that the contemporary luxury tourist experience product can be based on different experiential value elements than those experiences enjoyed in traditional luxury destinations. Furthermore, the study supports the view that luxury services should be seen as a continuum.

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## Introduction

The concept of luxury is fluid and dynamic (Cristini et al., 2017), and it has changed in the last decades due to developments in society, technology, and the rise of the experience economy (Thomsen et al., 2020). The traditional perspective of luxury refers to scarce products attached to the privileged elite, relating luxury with conspicuous consumption and gaining status (Nueno & Quelch, 1998). The new form of luxury, unconventional luxury, approaches the concept as experiential, agentic, and epistemologically scarce, where the focus is on how luxury is experienced (Thomsen et al., 2020). Due to the changing concept of luxury, it has been argued that luxury has transformed consumers' search for meaningfulness by shifting from "having-to-being and from owning-to-experiencing"

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(Cristini et al., 2017, p. 101). Simultaneously, luxury has been argued to be based more on self-interest than status (Bauer et al., 2011).

With the rise of experiential consumption and the search for meaningfulness, luxury spending as regards services has boomed (Chang et al., 2016), creating prerequisites for experiential services such as luxury tourism, which is usually associated with wealthy tourists, who have substantial material resources (Popescu & Olteanu, 2014). However, the expectations of the contemporary, heterogenic, luxury tourism consumer (Heyes & Aluri, 2018; Thomsen et al., 2020; Uriely, 2005) may be based on attributes other than the expensive material factors traditionally attached to luxury at the present (Bauer et al., 2011; Harkison et al., 2018b). Consequently, the concept of luxury tourism has widened from traditional luxury tourism products such as five-star hotels to a broad variety of luxury experiences that offers the consumer uniqueness and authenticity (Kiessling et al., 2009; Veríssimo & Loureiro, 2013).

Because of the multifaceted concept of luxury, and to accommodate this shift in consumer tastes, academics and practitioners need to understand experiential luxuries, which have been neglected in academic research (Yang & Mattila, 2016, 2017); luxury research has been overlooked in service literature, and service literature is lacking in luxury literature (Wirtz et al., 2020). Scholars have not yet adequately addressed the features of luxury service (Wirtz et al., 2020), and there is a demand for further study in the area of experiential luxury in the context of hospitality and tourism (Correia et al., 2016; Park & Reisinger, 2009). According to Wirtz et al. (2020), most studies that have been conducted in the luxury context have not researched luxury services as such; a gap that this study aims to fill.

The study was conducted in Finland. Even though in the Nordic context tourism experiences (Björk et al., 2021) and hospitality research (Gjerald et al., 2021) have traditionally strong roots (Lundberg & Furunes, 2021), luxury tourism experiences are lacking from the Nordic discussions. Furthermore, previous studies on luxury services and luxury tourism have been conducted mainly in a context that offers traditional luxury tourist products (see e.g. Hwang & Han, 2014; Lu et al., 2015; Yang & Mattila, 2017) based on conspicuous consumption; therefore, the existing literature is based on a limited background. However, as luxury consumption has moved towards an inconspicuous form, which can also be argued to require more research (e.g. Eckhardt et al., 2015; Makkar & Yap, 2018), this study responds to the call by researching the products of the luxury tourism experience in a Finnish context. It can be argued that Finland represents a destination of inconspicuous and unconventional luxury that responds to consumers' quest for unique and authentic luxury tourist experiences (Iloranta, 2019). Furthermore, the study responds to Thomsen et al. (2020) call for more research on unconventional luxury by filling two gaps. Firstly, it responds to the need for a more comprehensive understanding of how products, services, and servicescapes can be designed to allow consumers to experience luxury moments that can contribute to temporary moments and transformations, leading to longer-lasting value. Secondly, it responds to the call by presenting how a different agency is embedded in and triggered by different contexts by giving an example of the products contributing to the Finnish luxury tourist experience. Additionally, this study takes a novel approach and responds to the lack of a service provider's perspective in tourism research, as noted by Jensen and Prebensen (2015).

Given this background, this study aims to enrich our understanding of luxury by arguing that the contemporary luxury tourist product aims for a different experience value than is traditionally assumed. The study contributes to tourism research by examining luxury tourism experiences. Furthermore, the study contributes to the discussion on luxury by researching experiential luxury services (e.g. Wirtz et al., 2020) in the context of unconventional (e.g. Thomsen et al., 2020) and inconspicuous (e.g. Eckhardt et al., 2015) luxury. The study's objective is to investigate what the Finnish luxury tourist experience offers today, and the challenges service providers may encounter in offering it. To accomplish this task, this study responds to these questions by interviewing Finnish tourism service providers who are involved in luxury tourism service provision and planning its development.

### **Concepts of tourist experience and luxury tourist experience**

The tourist experience concept has received remarkable attention among tourism researchers in the last two decades, and entire journal issues have been dedicated to the topic. Although there is no single definition of the tourist experience, researchers appear to agree about some of its characteristics: it is subjective (Ryan, 2010), influenced by the traveler's past experiences (Larsen, 2007), and may consist of both memorable peak experiences and/or ordinary everyday experiences (Quan & Wang, 2004). Tourist experience can be seen as a whole, consisting of expectations before and during the trip and memories after it (Larsen, 2007; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Hence, service providers are unable to provide the experiences but only their prerequisites (Komppula, 2006). However, to some extent, service providers can design, process, and facilitate tourist experiences (Jensen & Prebensen, 2015) by involving tourists, personnel, and partners in the innovation processes (Jernsand et al., 2015).

The research on luxury tourist experiences is still scarce. Many of the studies conducted in the luxury context refer to tourist products with a high price, high-quality service, and material elements that create the environment for luxury (e.g. Chen & Peng, 2014; Lu et al., 2015). However, it is argued that the material elements do not define luxury anymore, rather for the consumer it is the perceived value and the experience (Kießling et al., 2009). Wirtz et al. (2020) argue that determining something as luxury based on physical experience elements is not possible for services, which should also be approached via subjective perceptions, determined by the customer's situational interpretation of the experience, processes, and tangible cues.

Luxury tourism experiences are seen as hedonically based consumption experiences (Lee & Hwang, 2011), where consumers seek emotional and aesthetic content to gain pleasure (Bahri-Ammari et al., 2016). It offers possibilities for being in the moment and opulence, supported by a superb location and setting in properties, delivering tailored attention and hospitality, where service providers' performance and co-creation are valuable parts of the product (Harkison et al., 2018a). The luxury service experience provides a high level of personalized comfort and convenience (Chen & Peng, 2014). Furthermore, the luxury tourist product is equated with details that add a sense of high quality to the experience, accompanied by valued senses of total escape, novelty, and exoticism with safety (Manthiou et al., 2017). The service providers' ultimate aim is to create prerequisites for a memorable experience (Ariffin et al., 2018).

In the latest studies, luxury is connected to extraordinary moments in which consumers lose their sense of time and place (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019). Wirtz et al. (2020, p. 682) define luxury service as “extraordinary hedonic experiences that are exclusive whereby exclusivity can be monetary, social and hedonic in nature, and luxuriousness is jointly determined by objective service features and subjective customer perceptions. Together, these characteristics place service on a continuum ranging from everyday luxury to elite luxury”.

### **Framework for the luxury tourist experience product**

In this study, the concept of the tourist product represents the service provider’s perspective of the experiential tourism service, referring to the service provider’s offerings targeted at the customer, having a certain price, and including a set of tangible and intangible elements. The tourist product is illustrated within the framework proposed by Komppula (2006). Based on ideas presented by Edvardsson and Olsson (1996), the framework comprises three basic components: the service concept, the service process, and the service system. The service providers provide opportunities for experiences generated through partially unique customer processes, and the central goal of the service development is to develop the best and right prerequisites for well-functioning customer processes and attractive customer outcomes (Komppula, 2006).

The core of the tourist product, the service concept, expresses the kind of value the customer expects to experience and is based on their needs and motives (Komppula, 2006). It describes the customers’ value expectations of the service offering, reflecting their desired value. The service concept refers to the desires, goals, and purposes of the customer needs (Woodruff, 1997), and how customers expect the alternative products to satisfy them (Konu et al., 2010). Even though there is no agreement among scholars regarding the value dimensions of luxury, and although a broad set of value dimensions are recognized, recent studies have discussed the consumers growing desire for pleasure and emotional value (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2016; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019) over solely symbolic, functional, financial or utilitarian benefits. Furthermore, studies have suggested that the perceived value may be related more to intrinsic goals with luxury; that is, consumers may search for deeper meaning and meaningfulness in luxury consumption (Cristini et al., 2017; Hemetsberger et al., 2012). The meaning of luxury is subjective, relative, and contextual, and it is embodied in experiential activities pursued by the consumer (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019).

The service process includes and describes the customer process, which creates customer experiences during the trip (Komppula, 2006). For the customer, the service process is expressed in the form of a service offering presented to the customer as a detailed description of each service module (e.g. accommodation, meals, activities) and/or an itinerary in the promotion materials. For the service provider, the service process is a description of the formal product, meaning the determination and definition of the chain of activities in the customer and production processes, which is, for example, illustrated in the form of a service blueprint (Komppula, 2006).

The service system includes the resources available to the service process to realize the service concept (Komppula, 2006). Applying the vocabulary of Walls et al. (2011), the service system includes physical experience elements and human interaction



elements. Physical experience elements refer to the atmosphere of the facilities (cleanliness, comfort, décor, and style), dimensions stimulating various senses (lighting, color scheme, soundscape, and smells), space/functionality, and symbols, signs, and artifacts (Walls et al., 2011). Human interaction elements, comprising both personnel (e.g. Mossberg, 2007) and other customers (Mossberg, 2007; Walls et al., 2011), may support or destroy the experience (Komppula et al., 2016). These factors have a major effect on customers' feelings (Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009). Several researchers have pointed to the meaning and importance of guides and tour leaders in the creation of positive and memorable tourist experiences (e.g. Arnould & Price, 1993; Hansen & Mossberg, 2017). Both parts of the service system are significant in the consumer experience and satisfaction in the luxury service context (e.g. Walls et al., 2011; Wu & Liang, 2009).

## Method

This paper uses qualitative data drawn from narrative interviews with Finnish luxury tourism service providers. In the narrative interview, the participants are urged to express their own experiences of the phenomenon in their own words, which allows the phenomenon to be explored extensively from the interviewee's perspective (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This may provide unexpected insights for the researcher about the topics (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). As luxury is a subjective concept with emotional dimensions, narratives are seen as well-suited for describing such experiences (Ardelet et al., 2015).

The study's research approach is interpretive, holistic, and contextual. That is, the world is seen as socially constructed and subjective, where perceptions and experiences may change and differ for each person (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Knowledge and understanding of the context are vital for the researcher because meanings and social constructs are context-based (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

The sample selection began by using a list of eight luxury tourism companies recognized by the National Tourism Board (Business Finland, 2018), according to which these companies fulfilled the level required in order to be accepted to be promoted on the web page of the tourism board. To ensure that all relevant Finnish companies offering international luxury travel services would be included in the sample, additional informants were searched for on the Internet, using the words "luxury experience," "luxury tourism," "luxury holiday," and "luxury travel" in Finland. The sample was further confirmed by selecting those companies that emerged on well-known international luxury tour operators' webpages (e.g. Abercrombie & Kent) alluding to luxury tourist experiences in Finland. Furthermore, the selection criteria included the fact that the potential companies had to offer accommodation and additional services as part of their product. Finally, the list of potential luxury tourism service providers consisted of seventeen companies, which were contacted by email. If the company did not reply to the invitation, two reminder emails were sent. Two companies declined the interview request, referring to busy schedules, and four of the companies did not respond to the interview request. Table 1 presents the final list of eleven interviewed Finnish luxury tourism service providers. To maintain their anonymity, no detailed information about the interviewees is presented.

**Table 1.** Informants, their position in the organization / company and luxury service sector of operation.

Interviewee	Position	Luxury service sector
1	Chief operating officer	Private travel company (Destination Management Company)
2	Chief executive officer	Hotel
3	General manager	Hotel
4	International sales manager	Hotel
5	Resort manager	Private villa
6	Restaurant and front office manager	Hotel
7	Chief executive officer	Private travel company (Destination Management Company)
8	Chief executive officer	Private travel company (Destination Management Company)
9	Marketing manager	Hotel
10	Chief executive officer	Hotel
11	Chief executive officer	Private villa

The interviewed companies had been operating for between 3 and 130 years, covering urban and rural areas. Four were based in the metropolitan area, five in Lapland, one in Eastern Finland, and one in Western Finland. The number of staff working in the companies ranged from two to 150 full-time employees. They also used part-time employees during high seasons. Eight of the companies were privately owned independent companies, and three belonged to a larger hotel group.

Furthermore, the privately owned companies considered themselves to be small enterprises. Those, who defined themselves as a private travel company, served ultra-rich consumers and provided the customer with all the services during their trip, and the same employees worked with the customer from the moment they arrived at a destination to the point when they left. All the interviewees were the owners or founders of the company or worked at a managerial level. Six of the participants were male, and five were female, ranging in age from 31 to 56. The interviewees' work experience in the hospitality and tourism industry ranged from 5 to 38 years.

Data collection was carried out at the participants' venues, which enabled the researchers to familiarize themselves better with the locations, servicescape, and companies. The interviews were conducted in Finnish between February and June 2018 and lasted between 50 and 90 min. Before the interview, details of the research ethics, such as anonymity and voluntariness, and the interview aims were presented. Having briefly covered the background information about the company's operations, the interviews began with a question about how the interviewees defined luxury and how these elements were visible in their product. Although narrative interviews are often pre-planned, the interviewees were encouraged to speak freely and without interruption. When necessary, more detailed questions (see Appendix 1) were asked to enhance the researcher's understanding. All interviews were recorded, and the final transcriptions consisted of 162 pages of verbatim text.

Qualitative content analysis was chosen as a method for analysis, as the aim was to achieve a concise and extensive description, with categories sharing the same meaning that describes the phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Abductive logic based on the previous literature on the tourist product was applied in the categorization, after which each category was analyzed more deeply to identify patterns or differences within the topic. The content analysis formed 14 main categories, which consisted of 85 subcategories. Furthermore, within two of the subcategories one more extra layer was created to make the

themes more concise. In all the subcategories, there were 1497 different codes. Appendix 2 summarizes the content analysis categorization. To validate similarities in the findings, the analysis was cross-checked by two researchers familiar with the topic and context.

## Findings

### *The Finnish luxury tourist experience product*

According to the interviewees, the Finnish luxury tourist product aims to add wellbeing and joy to customers' lives by offering an experience that makes them feel special. The service concept adds value to the customer by providing authenticity and a sense of luxury, a pleasurable feeling, and/or meaningfulness through uniquely hedonic and/or eudaimonic wellbeing experiences. This positive experience targets active participation and learning through experience.

There was a Brazilian couple who traveled to Finland because they wanted to know why we were the happiest nation in the world. They wanted to understand how it was possible because we didn't have servants at home. We brought experiences from Finnish culture to them, did things together, added high-quality service, and tied it all together with storytelling. Maybe they took something home with them. It's about wellbeing experiences, combined with privacy, personalization, and tranquility with nature and its purity. It's about doing, learning, being, and experiencing. They enjoyed and related to nature. The experiences were simple things from Finnish culture – they just needed to be highlighted. Interviewee 7.

During their years of operation, the interviewed companies have developed a selection of activities, accommodation, meal experiences, and processes that form the luxury product's service process. Figure 1 presents an example of the basic luxury tourist product, which is already at a high level with customer service and physical experience elements. From this base level, each offer is tailor-made according to the customer's personal needs, motives, and wishes. This is a description of the product in the pre-trip phase when the

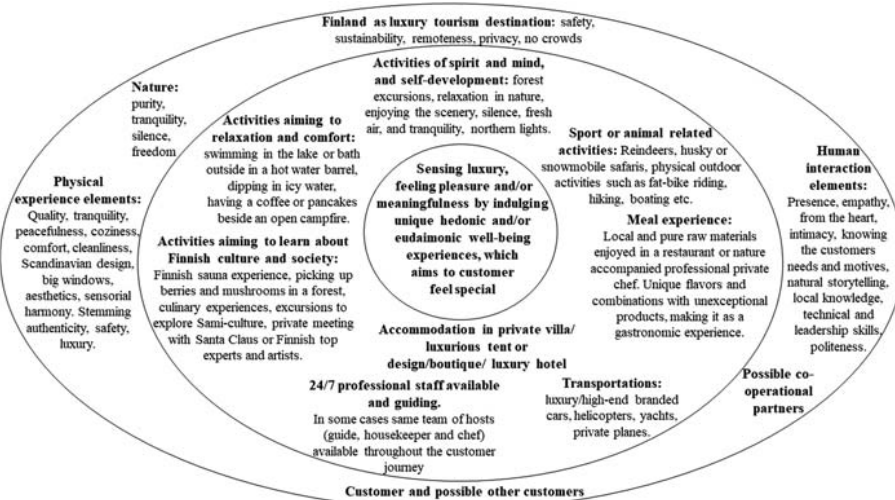


Figure 1. Example of a product created for a typical luxury tourist experience.

company's offer is negotiated with the customer and the service provider gains valuable customer insight. According to the interviewees, luxury tourists are heterogenic, and they have high and varying expectations, depending on whether they are ultra-rich customers who use private travel services or ordinary wealthy consumers who do not require ultimate privacy. Some of the companies had both types of customers, which created continuous need for balance when dealing with very different customer expectations.

The interviewees emphasized that they aim for a seamless and holistic approach to the customer experience, a service process that attends to detail and takes care of the customer at every touchpoint. Responsiveness and flexibility are the key aspects of customer service throughout the customer journey, requiring the full trust and support of the entire service team working with the customer. Flexibility and different product options are needed if the customers suddenly decides to change their mind or if the weather conditions change.

It's a holistic experience from the moment they step off the plane until they leave. Sometimes, we even start storytelling before the trip. Everything needs to go smoothly. So, it also requires flexibility, because we're dealing with people's experiences and nature. Our guides have a huge impact on this, because they're with the customer almost 24/7. Interviewee 8.

Some interviewees referred to Finland as one of Europe's last wildernesses. The experiences Finnish nature offers were related to snow, ice, darkness, or light, and simply enjoying the colors of nature, the smell of the forest, the cool fresh air, and the landscape. The interviewees described Finland's offering of possibilities of high-quality experiences connected to nature without crowds because remoteness enables privacy. According to the interviewees, a destination image allied with safety and sustainability is valuable for the luxury tourist experience product.

This sounds funny as our customers fly in private jets. For example, we teach them why we save water in Arctic regions. When you explain the sustainability factors, and why and how we do things, they usually value it a lot ... Here, you can experience the silence of the forest. That may be frightening for some people, but it's a safe experience with us. You can hike wherever you want, pick fresh berries, drink straight from the brook or lake, and breathe air that is pure and good for you. You have an opportunity to slow down and connect with yourself, be forgotten in the moment. Interviewee 1.

In the service system, according to the interviewees, the physical experience elements aim to signal functionality, quality, and aesthetics, supported by a sense of safety. Rather than being sumptuous, the atmosphere of the facilities evokes coziness, warmth, and comfort, reflecting high quality and Scandinavian design: simple and natural materials, fireplaces, large windows, and glass-covered ceilings. The physical elements acknowledge all the senses, making it possible to enjoy the landscape and supporting the sense of closeness and connectivity with nature. According to the interviewees, particularly those customers for whom privacy is the core in luxury tourism, what happens outside the accommodation, and the interaction with personnel brings the value, not the physical experience elements.

We're a forest nation with a strong relationship with nature. Gold and marble isn't part of our culture and wouldn't be authentic. It is not only the accommodation; rather it is what happens outside. These days, people want warmth, a smile, great nature, and a good food experience – intimate experiences that get you closer to human beings, culture, nature, and the sense of their presence. Interviewee 10.

Human interaction and engagement with the customer – the personnel’s emotional intelligence and especially their empathy – were regarded in the interviews as the most significant element in luxury tourism product for all luxury tourists. This quality was further described as presence and situational sensitivity, meaning that the personnel was available when needed and had time for the customer. Personnel must create an atmosphere of controlled comfort, enjoyment, and customer relaxation, coupled with quality assurance. The interaction between the service provider and the customer should be warm, real, and authentic. The interviewees described this attitude as “from the bottom of one’s heart,” or an intimate and personal atmosphere. Observing proprieties and intercultural insight were seen as essential requirements. Storytelling must sound natural and authentic, as well as appropriately polite and friendly.

These material things, the details and aesthetics, need to be there, and they need to be right. In the end, however, the recognition of our customers concerns people and how they meet and connect with them with warmth and presence, which may lead to the relationship reminding more like a friendship. Interviewee 1.

From the service providers’ perspective, all this requires continuous training for personnel to provide them with mental models for designing the experience. Personnel working on the frontline play a valuable role in creating the prerequisites for a luxury tourist experience. The correct service attitude, meaning an understanding of what constitutes luxury service, was therefore crucial. The right attitude was described as a commitment to the same aim, with elements of physical and human interaction that aim to go the extra mile for the customer’s sake. It was also seen as flexibility, which is sometimes not tied to personnel’s usual duties or working hours as they may stay available for the customer from arrival to departure, 24 h a day. Local knowledge, such as the history of places/locations, Finnish social and cultural knowledge, language skills, and woodcraft, was also essential to add richness to the experience. For celebrity customers, strict confidentiality was also a requirement.

I respect my employees a lot. They know our product and concept well, and they know what’s essential with luxury. And we’ve discussed difficult situations with the customer and given examples of how to deal with them. So they have the ability and permission to adjust the service according to the customer’s wishes. Furthermore, our customers are here to enjoy their holiday in privacy with their families, they are not here to sign autographs. Therefore, we require strict confidentiality. Interviewee 8.

### ***Challenges with the luxury tourist experience product***

Interviewees noted that as Finland is a modest and egalitarian nation, the Finnish service system is usually based on self-service, due to which Finnish personnel may therefore lack an image of what luxury level customer service may require and what the customers may expect. Furthermore, because luxury perception is subjective, service providers said it was essential to build a collective mindset of what luxury means in each company.

Realizing that such customers are in a totally different financial situation to ours and discussing what is seen as luxury are essential with this kind of service product. Interviewee 3.

The interviewees mentioned some legislative norms as entrepreneurial challenges, for example, the working time legislation and restrictions related to Finnish alcohol

legislation. Furthermore, they all commented on personnel costs because one of the greatest challenges in luxury service was that it usually requires a large number of service staff. Besides finding personnel with the right attitude and skills, personnel retention was seen as a challenge because of seasonality. Therefore, some interviewees said they were willing to invest considerably in their staff's wellbeing, as this pays off in the long run.

This requires a certain type of person. They need to be willing to do this sincerely, and they're passionate and flexible. As personnel costs are so high in Finland, we can't have as many personnel here as they would have at a hotel in Dubai, for example. We have to replace them with the kind of people who are truly there for others. Interviewee 5.

The interviewed service providers felt that the difficulty of finding personnel and collaborative business partners that would be able to offer luxury services had affected their service development. Potential subcontractors have been carefully selected and briefed about the customer's requirements of privacy and service quality. The service failure risk related to subcontractors has restricted the interviewed companies' growth because they have not wanted to risk the quality of their product and their promises to the customer.

There was a time when our subcontractors were a little intimidated by our company, because they felt luxury was such a strong word. When we explained to them that it was actually more about the authenticity of their product and how they told the story of Finnish culture than it was about traditional luxury, they understood. Interviewee 1.

The interviewees observed that finding the right channels for sales, distribution, and marketing was also challenging. A long marketing and/or distribution channel does not support the need for customer insight and specific customer needs. It might also lead to a contradiction between customer expectations and the offering.

As we're creating the product from the beginning every time, we need to know what's valuable to our customer. Travel agents don't always understand this, because they're used to just booking a holiday for their customers at a resort somewhere. That's not our way of doing things, because we're creating a memorable experience for a particular customer. Interviewee 1.

The interviewees said they have to develop their product continuously otherwise customers would lose interest. As this product – the Finnish luxury tourist experience – is usually formed around elements of nature with the aim of boosting hedonic or eudaimonic wellbeing, the interviewees saw this experience as a somewhat unconventional luxury product that sometimes needed to be explained to the customer.

It's difficult to compare our product to the traditional one, because we're dealing a lot with things that come from the experience of nature and how you can commercialize it for the customer expecting a traditional luxury experience. It's a balancing act between expectations of what we have here [all the resources from the material to the human] and luxury. But here you can have your experience in total privacy whenever you want, using the elements we have here, and we do it in the best way we can. Interviewee 8.

## Discussion and conclusions

First of all, the findings of this study suggest that products designed for the Finnish luxury tourist experience aim to respond to the contemporary luxury traveler's quest for unique,

authentic, physically and intellectually stimulating experiences that add novelty and meaning to their lives. As (2019) note, prudential value, i.e. meaning, meaningfulness, and wellbeing, can only arise in non-commercial contexts, where experiential value contains activity, freedom, and relaxation. Hence, the essence of a Finnish luxury tourist experience product is a combination of non-commercial context, i.e. nature, and commercial product features that may provide prerequisites for experiencing more common value dimensions attached to luxury, and, possibly more intrinsic value aspects creating possibilities for meaningfulness and authenticity during the experience. Furthermore, the elements may enable an eudaimonic experience because it is tailor-made according to the customer's needs and wishes. The study supports the view of Huta and Ryan (2010) in arguing that tourism product activities cannot be categorized as hedonic or eudaimonic because the engagement of individuals affects the experience. This study's findings also respond to the call of Knobloch et al. (2017) by offering an example of a tourist experience product that aims to transcend hedonic elements and achieve eudaimonia; the study further supports their idea that experiential research into tourist experiences should be broadened to include the concept of eudaimonia.

Secondly, according to this study's findings Finnish luxury tourism service providers aim to make their customers feel special. As an expression, feeling special is multidimensional, referring to status, privilege, or close relationships and the feeling of being cared for, for example. Hence, the service providers must understand customers' needs and expectations in order to maximize customer experience, evoking value perception (Haeckel et al., 2003). However, value has different meanings for different people, and the same person may find different values in different situations (Rokenes et al., 2015). Service providers, therefore, need to find a balance between different luxury value expectations and their heterogenic luxury consumers. The findings of this study are in accordance with Correia et al. (2014) indicating that for ultra-rich customers for whom "money is not an issue", a luxury tourist experience refers to privacy with family in a resort that supports a hedonic value, and for the wealthy "ordinary" consumers it may refer to a different, exquisite experience. Therefore, luxuriousness relates to something extraordinarily different to our daily life.

Thirdly, contrary to earlier studies on luxury tourism, our findings suggest that the Finnish luxury tourist experience is based on the active role of the customer. It is recognized in tourism research that tourists, in general, seek intensity from their activities, which entails discovery and hands-on, multisensory experiences of tourism, as well as interaction and involvement (Bryon, 2012). However, this kind of involvement has not been visible in the findings of studies conducted in traditional luxury tourism and hospitality contexts. Instead, earlier studies typically refer to reactive value with service excellence, suggesting that the customer plays a passive role and is served and pampered by employees (e.g. Bahri-Ammari et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2015; Lee & Kim, 2019). While the company responds to the customer's search for intrinsic value, that is focusing on the value that serves the consumer's self-interest, the versatile activities represented when experiencing the Finnish luxury tourist product offer opportunities for the customer to play an active role that further adds to its experiential value. Mathwick et al. (2001) define such an approach as playfulness, which aims to enrich the escapism and enjoyment within the experience. The recent study of Holmqvist et al. (2020) recognized hedonic escapism as part of unconventional luxury experiences, a view also supported by this study.

The findings of this study are in line with earlier studies of luxury tourist experience product (e.g. Chen & Peng, 2014; Harkison et al., 2018a; Manthiou et al., 2017), indicating that the luxury tourist experience product is a holistic experience where quality, a hassle-free atmosphere, unique convenience for the customer, and ease and comfort are the central elements. However, the findings suggest that there is a difference in the expectations of the service level and composition of the product based on different customer groups, which confirms the notion of Wirtz et al. (2020) that luxury services should not be categorized as such but rather they should be seen as a continuum. In the highest ultimate luxury level or as described by as Wirtz et al. (2020) the “elite luxury” level, the product offering is tailor-made in collaboration with the customer in the pre-trip phase. At the other end of the continuum is the ready-made regular luxury service packages aimed at the masses. Furthermore, during the phases of the trip, the customer insight and co-creation is regarded at different levels based on the customer groups. At the ultimate level, guides and personnel acting on the frontline with the customer play a vital role in creating prerequisites to the meaningfulness of the experience for that certain customer by storytelling and keeping the product flexible.

The findings support Hansen and Mossberg (2017) view and see the guide’s role in the luxury tourist experience as facilitating immersion and creating meaning for the individual. The guides and personnel connect the physical experience and human interaction elements with natural storytelling, referring to Bryon’s (2012) relational guide as a storyteller. Storytelling affords a sense of authenticity and allows a “behind the scenes” experience that may add value to the luxury traveler’s experience in the form of cultural capital. Furthermore, as the co-creation of the product may be very meaningful to the customer, the relationship with the service provider is more profound, which can be seen in the post-trip phase, when possibly the relationship ultimately becomes more in the style of a friendship.

Finally, our findings suggest that the physical experience elements do not necessarily bring value for the luxury tourist, but rather, the material features provide the basis for the atmosphere of the servicescape, which needs to be of high quality. This is in line with Harkison et al. (2018b), who note in their study that more staff, more marble, and other expensive elements do not necessarily create the prerequisites for a luxury experience. Rather, the value of this product the Finnish luxury tourist experience is formed by connections with nature, which may boost happiness and pleasure, and expand self-understanding and create greater self-awareness (Capaldi et al., 2014). The focus of the product in the Finnish luxury tourism service system is on the elements of human interaction and encounters with the customer, which are in line with the study of Ariffin et al. (2018), and these create the most customer satisfaction in the luxury service experience. Therefore, it is also understandable that customer insight and personnel aspects were regarded as the most significant challenges in luxury tourism service provision. The findings further support Harkison et al. (2018a) in emphasizing the essential place of teamwork, guidance, and attitude among personnel in supporting the creation of a luxury experience.

This study contributes to the luxury literature, luxury tourism, and luxury service literature by providing an example of an unconventional luxury tourist experience product. The study’s findings may help tourism providers tailor their offerings into more meaningful and memorable experiences, especially in their interaction and engagement with their customers. The study’s findings may also increase the understanding of the elements of an unconventional luxury tourist experience product that will add value to the customer. By



relying on intangible aspects of the luxury experience, the destination and service provider may gain longer-term value than competing with other destinations and providers with physical product elements. Furthermore, at the operational level, if managers and staff are aware of both hedonic and eudaimonic effects and their potential impact on customer's wellbeing and lives beyond the consumption activity itself, their motivation and engagement to create the prerequisites for such an experience may increase.

As luxury is a cultural notion, and the findings of this study are limited to Finland, the results are not generalizable worldwide. However, this study provides an example of a typical Finnish luxury tourist experience product that may increase the understanding of new and unconventional nature-based luxury. This insight may be of interest in all Nordic countries when targeting the luxury tourism market. Furthermore, as luxury tourism may be the first to lead the recovery of tourism in the post-pandemic era (ÓNeill, 2021), luxury tourism may be offering one way for the recovery of Nordic tourism and hospitality industry as well as opening the discussion for potential research avenues (Lundberg & Furunes, 2021) in Nordic service research (Gjerald et al., 2021) and tourism experiences research (Björk et al., 2021).

Future research should explore products for the unconventional luxury tourist experience from the customer's perspective to discover if the experience is valued in the same way as it is from the service provider's perspective. More research on the similarities and differences in this field is needed to highlight the products of the contemporary luxury tourist experience and the heterogeneity of luxury tourism consumers. Future studies need to understand the customer's economic background better as it may have a considerable impact, especially in studies of the perceived luxury values of customers. Most of the studies conducted with luxury consumption have analyzed the consumer, many of whom may be wealthy but not ultra-rich. Moreover, as the current study shows, there are differences in the consumer background and value perceptions from the service providers' perspectives. Furthermore, future studies might also investigate how these experiences contribute to the wellbeing and quality of life beyond the actual consumption experience.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview guide:

Background information of the company and participant

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#### Factors affecting the service providers' own understanding of luxury

How do you define luxury?

What elements of luxury exist in your company?

How do you understand luxury, and what is luxury?

#### A definition of a Finnish luxury experience

Could you describe what you understand by the term "Finnish luxury"?

Could you describe what you understand by the term "luxury experience"?

Could you describe how you facilitate prerequisites for a luxury experience?

#### Perceptions of customer service experience and its features

Could you describe what you understand by the term "luxury service"?

Could you describe what it requires from the service provider?

Could you describe from what aspects the customer acquires the feeling that this is luxury?

Could you describe what your customers' value and seek from Finnish luxury?

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Probes for each question: Can you give me an example? What do you mean by that? Could you explain and describe that a little more?

### Appendix 2. Content analysis categorization

Main category	Subcategories	Under subcategory
Definition of luxury 188	Luxury 7 Old luxury 7 New luxury 21 Finnish luxury 153	Finnish luxury 153: Purity 12 Remoteness and privacy 16 Well-being 9 Nature 25 Freedom 5 Tranquility 7 Safety 5 Uniqueness 34 Authenticity 19 Humans and interaction 15

(Continued)

Continued.

Main category	Subcategories	Under subcategory
Luxury tourist experience product development 384	Creating the prerequisites 246 Storytelling as part of product development 21 Marketing 10 Sustainability 12 High-quality 21 Holistic 8 Customer expectation 15 Experience 38 Service recovery 9 Multisensory 4	Storytelling Finnish culture and society 6 Creating the prerequisites: Building details 24 Possibility to be creative 15 Starting with internal minimal requirements 17 Co-creating with customer 28 Having a strong brand identity to keep the luxury and quality 32 Great subcontractors and network 21 Role of guide and employee 25 Knowing the customer 45 Continuous learning and development 8 Good processes 31
Challenges 171	Balancing with luxury expectations 46 Balancing with business 37 Balancing with customers 28 Network and subcontractors 13 Employee 11 Sales and marketing 10 Destination image 26	
Customer journey 66	Pre-trip 30 During-trip 25 Post-trip 11	
Human interaction elements and customer encounter 192	Flexibility 14 Empathy and warmth 41 Seamless 10 Storytelling in encounter 4 Employee 16 Comfort 10 Presence and situational awareness 28 Personalization 32 Great customer service 33 Other skills in encounter 4	
Physical experience elements 136	Certain luxury level with well-known brands 28 High-quality 19 Cleanliness 9 Bed and linen 6 Physical elements giving ability to connection with nature or feeling of authenticity 15 Aesthetics 13 Multisensory 10 Atmosphere 19 Storytelling as a way to tie physical experience elements to human experience 10 Technology 7	
Customer 43	Different nationalities 8 High expectation 11 Different expectation 8 Heterogenic 9 Has a "backstage access" with stories 3 Demanding clientele, but willing to pay 4	
Service Provider 25	Own experience 12 Own luxury 4 Own attitude 9	

(Continued)

Continued.

Main category	Subcategories	Under subcategory
Possibilities of Finnish luxury tourism products 27	Potentiality as luxury 12 Seasonality 5 Destination 4 Uniqueness and remoteness 6	
Future of luxury 41	Uniqueness 16 Sustainability 13 Experiences 4 Technology 5 Polarization of luxury 3	
Marketing and social media 25	Social media and customer feedback 5 Channels 4 Customer acquisition 3 Segments 5 Other 8	
Employee and teamwork 44	Strategic direction to luxury 4 Importance of teamwork 11 Attitude and skills of employee 25 Wellbeing of employees 4	
Activities 94	Culture and Santa Claus 10 Sports related 13 Animal related 9 Meal 8 Being in nature 12 Nature (picking up berries etc.) 19 Fishing & Boating 5 Expertise knowledge 8 Wellbeing and sauna 10	
Experience 61	Uniqueness 21 Authentic 11 Personalized 10 Privacy 6 Immersion and being in the moment 13	











## RIINA ILORANTA

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The dissertation examines luxury tourism experiences. In academic discussions, luxury tourism has been heavily linked to the contexts that represent traditional luxury. However, luxury as a concept has changed and become more multidimensional. Several theoretical perspectives help examine how the service provider facilitates prerequisites for experiencing a luxury experience in an unconventional luxury context, Finland, and highlights the heterogeneity of the contemporary luxury consumer.



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