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Designing memorable guest experiences: development of constructs and value generating factors in luxury hotels

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Designing memorable guest experiences: development of constructs and value generating factors in luxury hotels

Purpose – Managing the customer experience is critical for hospitality businesses because business viability can depend on the delivery of valued guest experiences. The industry lacks research that can assist in developing the specific measures and tools to design experiences that meet guests' expectations. This study sought to identify the constructs and generators of memorable experiences from the perspectives of luxury hotel hosts and guests.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected in two sequential phases. In the first phase, non-probability sampling was used to engage luxury hotel experts in a Delphi study. This was followed by in-depth, face-to-face interviews with frequently-staying luxury hotel guests.

Findings – Forty value generating factors emerged from the host data. These were validated with guests, however, guests also revealed a further 19 value generating factors that develop memorable experiences. These factors were clustered into five constructs and formulated into a memorable experience framework that presents the constructs and supporting variables that can facilitate memorable luxury hotel experiences.

Research limitations – Guests were asked to recall previous luxury hotel experiences and it is acknowledged that recall of past experiences can be inaccurate. The sample size was also relatively small.

Practical implications – Critical, value generating factors were identified that hotel operators can employ to actively engage luxury hotel guests and ensure their experiences are memorable.

Originality/value – The study extends our understanding of the constructs and variables that contribute to the development of memorable experiences identifying the importance of sensory generators and the role of authenticity and destination specific culture in creating unique, memorable experiences. These key drivers can be used to increase guest satisfaction, loyalty and repeat visitation.

Keywords Memorable experiences, Luxury hotels, Service experience constructs, Experiential consumption, Value creation, Satisfaction, Loyalty.

Paper type Research paper.

Introduction

The importance of managing customer experiences is recognized in many business contexts, especially within the service sector where it is considered a critical dimension in developing customer loyalty (Minkiewicz et al., 2016; Ihtiyar et al., 2018). The significance of experience management is magnified within the hospitality industry because the viability of hospitality businesses can depend on the delivery of valued guest experiences (Harkison et al., 2018). Research has shown that the value customers' derive from the consumption experience is based on situation-specific, economic and hedonic dimensions evaluated across multiple experience interactions (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015; O'Mahony et al., 2013). Luxury hotels encompass all of these dimensions, however, guests' evaluations are dependent on their perceptions of the physical environment, human interactions and the value they perceive that they have derived from the overall experience (Nilsson and Ballantyne, 2014; Walls et al., 2011).

Harkison et al. (2018), assert that luxury hotel guests have become more discerning, demanding and hedonistic. This requires hotel operators to have a deep understanding of the factors that generate value, satisfaction and loyalty (Johnston and Kong, 2011; Yang et al., 2016). There is a correlation within the literature between experiences, satisfaction and loyalty but there are important distinctions between routine and memorable experiences (Hwang and Seo, 2016; Prebensen and Rosengren, 2016). Pine and Gilmore (1999) defined memorable experiences as encounters that have undergone a level of customization that renders them memorable to the point where customers are willing to pay a premium and repurchase. However, customers determine whether experiences are memorable based on both rational and emotional assessments (Barlow and Maul, 2000).

While scholarly interest in experience management has led to a growing body of knowledge, there is a lack of integration between the outcomes of experience research and the principles of hospitality management (Kandampully et al., 2018). There is also consensus that further research is required to uncover the deeper drivers and antecedents of memorable experiences (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015). Specifically, hospitality researchers have identified the need for (i) research into the factors that affect guests' expectations of experiences, (ii) measures and tools that can improve customer experience management (Kandampully et al., 2018), and (iii) studies that can facilitate the design of customer experiences within the hospitality industry (Hwang and Seo, 2016).

This study seeks to address these gaps by uncovering the major constructs and variables that generate value and lead to memorable experiences from the dual perspectives of luxury hotel hosts and guests. Once uncovered, we synthesise the major experience constructs and value generating factors into a framework that presents a series of specific variables. From a theoretical perspective, these variables can be used to develop appropriate measurement scales for future hospitality research. Hotel operators can also use the framework to ensure that the specific variables that guests' perceive add value and

develop memorable experiences are included in their products and services.

Review of relevant literature

The rise of the experience economy

Toffler (1970) was among the earliest authors to report on the experience economy. He predicted that consumer wealth or affluence and societal improvements would result in an economy dominated by industries centring their offerings on experiences. Schulze (1992) later confirmed that rising affluence within different social strata meant that experiences were becoming an important component of people's lives. Affluence was also a key driver of experiences identified by Lorentzen and Hansen (2009), while Van Doorn (2006) noted that improvements in society stimulated by rising affluence would expand the possibilities for consumer experiences. This captured the essence of Pine and Gilmore's (1998) article and subsequent book *Welcome To The Experience Economy* which charted the transition from services to experiences.

In this book Pine and Gilmore (1999) explain that specific industries, including hospitality, lend themselves to the production of unique and memorable experiences. Morgan and Watson (2007) later confirmed that the industries most affected by experience consumption are leisure, sport, tourism and hospitality. While the literature reflects growing scholarly interest in examining the importance of customer experiences, however, research into the experience phenomenon is still at a relatively early stage (Johnston and Kong, 2011; Koenig-Lewis and Palmer, 2014). One reason cited for this is that diversity in definitions of experiences has inhibited our understanding of the experience concept (Palmer, 2010). For example, consumption experiences have been presented as experiential consumption (Woods, 1981), hedonic consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982), authentic experiences (Cohen, 1979), emotional experiences (Westbrook and Oliver, 1991), extraordinary experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993), holistic experiences (LaSalle and Britton, 2003) and unique experiences (Azevedo, 2010).

Nevertheless, the transition to experiences has required service providers to understand changing consumer expectations. Consequently, studies have increasingly centred on the link between customer satisfaction and the experiential elements of consumption (Bagdare and Jain, 2013). Identifying these elements is important because traditionally service evaluation models measure service interactions by exploring the gap between customer expectations and their perceptions of how those expectations have been met (Hall et al, 2017; Berry and Parasuraman, 2004). While meeting consumers' expectations leads to satisfaction, however, behavioral intentions are also influenced by the quality and value determinants (or value generators) of the service experience (Min et al., 2002; Yang et al., 2016). Invoking positive emotions by engaging customers has also been found to positively influence behavioural intentions (Azevedo, 2010.).

Indeed, as early as 1955, Abbot (1955), proposed that people desire satisfying experiences obtained through active engagement with a product or service. This distinction between

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4 active and passive engagement was a feature of Pine and Gilmore's (1998) conceptual paper.
5 According to Schmitt (1999) engagement creates distinctive relational value which
6 differentiates a firm's service experience from competitors. This has prompted businesses to
7 move from the promotion of value based on the features and benefits of services towards the
8 co-creation of value (Vargo and Lusch, 2004)). However, value is difficult to define because
9 it can depend on the context, perspective and expectations of consumers (Oh et al., 2007).

11 12 *Value co-creation*

13 Within Vargo and Lusch's (2008) concept of service dominant logic, for example,
14 customer relationships are extended and enhanced through customer engagement
15 developed through the co-production of personalized services (Vargo and Lusch, 2008).
16 This creates value for customers, referred to as "value-in-use", where organizations are
17 seen as value facilitators and customers as value creators (Grönroos, 2011). This fits with
18 Pine and Gilmore's (1999) view that value is added by customizing services to transform
19 them into experiences under four specific realms. These are; entertainment, aesthetics,
20 education, and escapism.

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24 In contrast, rational responses are based on the functional usefulness of the experience, like
25 counting the number of rides included in a theme park admission price. Lindgreen et al.
26 (2009) conclude that those that design memorable customer experiences should 'blend
27 both emotional and rational features in valuable combination' focusing mainly on
28 emotional features (p.124). Experiences are also defined based on the context in which
29 they are consumed. Consequently, experiences should take into account the situation, the
30 environment, and the intended goal for which they are designed. This includes what Berry
31 et al. (2002) refer to as experience clues, which are based on a deep understanding of the
32 customer journey. These clues allow producers to design experiences based on the physical
33 environment and service setting in which their guests come into contact with the
34 organization.

35 36 37 38 *Experience design*

39 This highlights the need for luxury hotel operators to integrate appropriate clues into
40 guests' experiences. However, most hotels are designed and positioned to meet specific
41 market niches, for example, as resort, business or luxury hotels (Song et al., 2018). This
42 leads to strategic operational decisions that Jones (1999) describes as: '... location,
43 integration, affiliation, configuration, organization, implications and adaptations' (p.429).
44 The configuration of a luxury hotel, however, is determined by standards and brand
45 guidelines-sometimes with additional environmental considerations. Other decisions might
46 be based on distinct design features, product variety, technology-focused innovation, or
47 perhaps location-specific determinants; such as, access to skilled labor (Morey and
48 Dittman, 1997).

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52 The literature thus far has shown, however that the primary characteristics associated with
53 the development of memorable experiences are interactive, experiential, and relational in
54 nature (Edvardsson et al., 2005). These characteristics generate value and customer
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empowerment leading to satisfaction which positively influences behavioral intentions (Wiles and Crawford, 2017). Clearly then, businesses that strive to differentiate their offerings need to have an in-depth understanding of the experience desires of their customers to develop the environment, products services and experiences that generate positive emotional responses (Bastiaansen et al., 2019). Harkison et al. (2018) refer to this as “setting the stage”. Understanding how luxury hotel designers and operators do this is a key focus of this research.

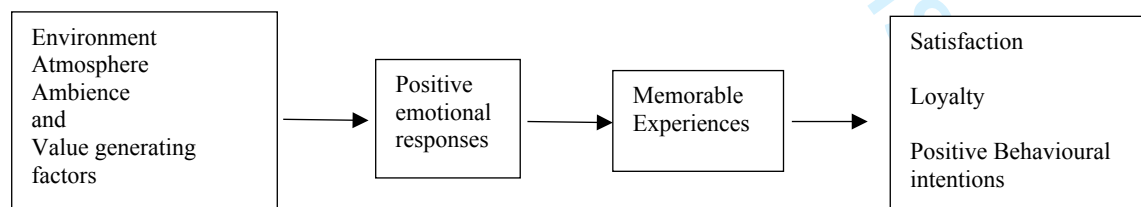
The industry perspective

Since chain hotels adhere to standards developed at head-office, gaining an understanding from those responsible for developing these standards at corporate level was important. As a main driver of the experience phenomenon is the convergence of affluence and advances in technology, those engaged in the delivery of technology within luxury hotels were also included in the research (Beldona et al., 2018).

The customer perspective

As stated earlier, experiences are inherently personal and evoke emotions on psychological, physical, intellectual and spiritual levels (Nickerson et al., 2006; Torres, 2016). Experiences can also occur over several dimensions including atmosphere, ambience and the degree of interaction between guests and the environment (Khan and Rahman, 2017). They are evaluated across multiple experiential components (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). Specific to luxury hotels, the literature review has highlighted that experience design considerations involve clues or value generators that allow producers to design experiences within the physical and relational context in which guests come into contact with the organization. Understanding guests’ perceptions of whether these generators develop emotions leading to memorable experiences is, therefore, critical. A simple theoretical model summarizing this relationship is presented below. It highlights that experience constructs include the environment, atmosphere and ambience and that these constructs are supported by a series of value generating factors. Together they lead to the emotional responses that create memorable experiences, satisfaction, loyalty and positive behavioural intentions.

Figure 1: Supporting theoretical model



Methodology

The luxury guest room

The study is positioned within luxury hotels focusing primarily on the guest room. This is justified because Khoo-Lattimore and Ekiz (2014) found that the guest room was the most important component of the overall stay experience. Product development within hotels also centres around guest rooms because revenue from room sales makes up the bulk of hotel profits (Jones and Paul, 1993). Hence, the luxury hotel room provides a meaningful backdrop to explore luxury hotel experiences among affluent consumers.

Collecting data from luxury hotel hosts and guests

To identify the major memorable experience constructs and value generators of luxury hotel experiences, a constructivist approach was used to collect data from hosts and guests. When employing a constructivist perspective, the emphasis is placed on ways that people create meaning through a series of individual constructs (Glaserfeld, 1989). This allows participants to display multiple constructed realities of meaning which the researcher interprets within the specific context of the research (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). In other words, data and interpretation is relative to the specific study and those that participate in the study are selected based on their ability to provide deep, qualitative insights into the research phenomenon. This approach was appropriate because experiences are multifarious and evoke emotions among those recalling those experiences that cannot easily be captured using standardized measurement approaches (Koenig-Lewis and Palmer, 2014).

In Phase 1, the developers of experiences within luxury hotels were asked to identify the experience constructs delivered within the guest room. In Phase 2, the results were presented to a sample of frequent luxury hotel guests to validate these constructs, discover further experience constructs and identify gaps between producers and consumers' perceptions of what generates value for luxury hotel guests.

Defining luxury hotels

Before embarking on the collection of data, however, it was important to define luxury hotels. Hotels operating within the luxury segment are typically rated based on industry standards. 'Forbes Travel Guide' is a widely accepted industry rating system that considers the overall guest experience. For example, Five Star Hotels are defined as:

These exceptional properties provide a memorable experience through virtually flawless service and the finest of amenities. Staff are intuitive, engaging and passionate, and eagerly deliver service above and beyond the guests' expectations. The hotel was designed with the guest's comfort in mind, with particular attention paid to craftsmanship and quality of product (Forbes, 2013).

Study Phase 1: Delphi study with hosts

In Phase 1, we selected industry experts operating within the ‘five star’ segment who were either in senior management positions within luxury hotel groups or luxury boutique hotels. One expert was not engaged in a hotel but was a senior executive within a global technology company that supplied luxury hotels. We refer to these respondents collectively as “hosts”.

The Delphi method has been successfully used in science, technology and business since it was developed in 1944. The method was developed because group judgments are considered more valid than individual judgments and thus it was appropriate for this study phase (Buckley, 1995). It is a structured and iterative approach that allows a group to reflect on complex issues and provide anonymous feedback (Donohoe and Needham, 2009). It was valuable in this study because luxury hotel experts can be geographically dispersed making it difficult to engage with them in one physical space.

A three-stage Delphi study was employed where each stage builds on the themes generated during the first stage to gain deep insights and achieve consensus (Day and Bobeva, 2005). The first stage was designed to gain a conceptual understanding of the memorable experience constructs and value generators that hosts perceived addressed guests experience desires. The emphasis was on whether memorable experiences were central to guest room design and how hosts expressed their understanding of the generation and exchange of experiences.

Sampling

The Delphi method relies on capturing the views of experts which involves selecting qualified respondents using purposeful sampling. This sampling method is used because researchers need to identify and select an expert panel made up of participants that are motivated by the shared knowledge and insights to be gained from the study (Garrod and Fyall, 2005). While Smith (1995) has asserted that the size of a Delphi panel should be based on the number of experts available, tourism researchers have determined that between 9 and 12 experts is appropriate (Okoli and Pawlowski, 2004).

In this study, hosts were experts in their field and held senior positions in branded luxury hotels or luxury boutique properties. They were targeted based on job titles and decision-making responsibilities and were engaged via an online data capture process. Due to the large concentration of global hotel chains headquartered in North America, all were in leadership positions based in either the United States or Canada. A total of 20 hosts were contacted and 17 agreed to participate. Of these four were unable to fully participate and, having provided limited data during round one, withdrew from the study. The sample profile of the remaining 13 is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Delphi study participant profile

| Study Phase | Phase I – Study Participants |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Number of Participants | 13 |
| Age range | 30-65 |
| Titles / Roles | Chief Brand Officer Snr. VP Brand Design Vice President Development Vice President Global Brands (A) Vice President Global Brands (B) Snr. Director Global Guest Initiatives Manager Global Guest Initiatives |
| | <i>Management</i> General Manager (Global Chain Hotel) General Manager (Luxury Boutique Hotel) Executive Housekeeper (Luxury Boutique Hotel) Executive Director (Marketing) |
| | <i>Technology / Innovation Executives</i> Chief Technology Officer (Luxury Global Hotel Chain) Snr. Vice President (Global Technology Co.) |

Stage one data

In stage 1, the 17 hosts were asked to identify the dimensions that they perceived generated memorable experiences. They were then encouraged to present their perspectives on how these dimensions were delivered within luxury hotels and how they generated value for guests.

Analysis of the first stage

Stage 1 data were analysed prior to embarking on Stage 2. The data were compiled in a spreadsheet and the analysis focused on extracting frequent, dominant, or significant themes that were coded and sorted into value generator themes. This is consistent with the description of how qualitative data should be analysed using data reduction and display techniques (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) highlighted the benefits of using this matrix approach to analyse large amounts of data because it allows researchers to organize information coherently while focusing on the data required to answer the research questions. This inductive approach also allowed the importance placed on specific topics by hosts to be compared later with those of guests. A content analysis was then conducted and a total of 150 memorable experience (ME) generators were found.

The next step was to sort and cluster similar topics into categories or constructs. Four primary experience constructs emerged each of which was underpinned by multiple themes. Construct titles were assigned that would be understood by interviewees when validating the constructs with luxury hotel guests. These were: Technology, with four subcategories; Services, with five subcategories; Atmosphere, with four subcategories; and Culture, with five subcategories. To assist in managing the data, each was given a short category abbreviation (or ID). Table 2 shows the data analyses procedure where the data reduction process is presented from left to right.

Table 2. Number of ME generators by construct category

| TECHNOLOGY | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Coded Data</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Sub-category</i> |
| 21 themes/factors | 11 | <i>Technology</i> |
| | 2 | <i>Connectivity</i> |
| | 4 | <i>Audio/TV</i> |
| | 4 | <i>Wireless</i> |
| SERVICES | | |
| <i>Coded Data</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Sub-category</i> |
| 67 themes/factors | 19 | <i>Services</i> |
| | 21 | <i>Content</i> |
| | 8 | <i>Customization</i> |
| | 4 | <i>Amenities</i> |
| | 5 | <i>Collateral</i> |
| 10 | <i>Staff</i> | |
| ATMOSPHERE | | |
| <i>Coded Data</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Sub-category</i> |
| 47 themes/factors | 15 | <i>Atmosphere</i> |
| | 9 | <i>Artefacts</i> |
| | 6 | <i>Seating/Comfort</i> |
| | 14 | <i>Design</i> |
| | 3 | <i>Home-away-Home</i> |
| CULTURE | | |
| <i>Coded Data</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Sub-category</i> |
| 15 themes/factors | 10 | <i>Culture</i> |
| | 4 | <i>Participation</i> |
| | 1 | <i>Location</i> |
| <i>150 factors, 18 Sub-Categories, 4 Categories/constructs</i> | | |

Stage 2 of the Delphi study

In preparation for Stage 2, the Stage 1 data were further refined and each memorable experience construct was summarised into a broad definition that included the sub-categories that made up the category. The purpose was to present these summaries under each of the constructs that had been assigned and to seek consensus that these constructs

were appropriate. The process was also designed to ensure that the sub-categories or themes that made up the constructs were accurate and that nothing had been missed in the summary of the first stage data (see Table 3). Once validated, hosts were asked how they perceived these subcategories influenced memorable experiences.

Table 3. Round 1 Data Sets – Memorable experience construct definitions

| Category | Summary |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Technology | Systems, hardware, software or applications, the use of which delivers an outcome including connectivity (wired/wireless). The category <i>Technology</i> includes themes such as technology, connectivity, Audio/TV, and wireless. |
| Services | Composing and orchestrating the appropriate level of resources, skills, ingenuity, and experience for effecting specific benefits extended to guests (either on a monetary or non-monetary basis). The category <i>Services</i> include themes such as services, content, customization, amenities, and collateral. |
| Atmosphere | Mood-enhancing lighting, design, services or solutions, and sensory environments. The category <i>Atmosphere</i> includes themes such as atmosphere, artefacts, seating/comfort, and design. |
| Culture | The category <i>Culture</i> includes themes such as culture, staff, home-away-from-home. Guest participation, and location. |

This process allowed the experts to provide more depth and for additional perceptions and opinions to emerge. For example, they advised that the Services category was the most important area where memorable experiences are delivered, followed by Atmosphere, then the Culture and Technology categories. We then further refined each validated theme to provide a clearer, more robust scenario that captured the combined hosts' opinions on what they perceived constituted memorable experience generators. We presented these back to hosts and again solicited their opinion on the accuracy of the analyses. In total, 16 memorable experience generator scenarios were developed and presented under their experience construct categories. Hosts unanimously agreed that the most dominant categories were Services, Atmosphere, Culture and Technology. They also validated the experience generators. Examples of the scenarios developed to capture the combined generators for each category are provided below:

Services scenario:

Memorable experiences are generated through creating customizable 'themes' (wellness, comfortable robing, scented linen, espresso-making facilities) or

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4 uniquely staged events, that are discreetly delivered within the guest room, the
5 hotel, or through services focused on personalization and comfort.
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8 **Atmosphere scenario:**

9 Memorable experiences are generated by the holistic impact of quality and
10 luxury designed space that emphasizes a home like setting, complemented by
11 the alignment and shape of furniture, fixtures and fittings that provide comfort
12 and sense of space supported by the anticipation of mood enhancing elements
13 (music, lighting, air, textures) that make guests feel special.
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17 **Technology scenario:**

18 Memorable experiences are generated by providing effortless connectivity
19 (wired/wireless) of guests' personal devices to quality in-room systems (AV and
20 Control Equipment), providing access to their own, and in-house content (e.g.
21 movies, music, presentations) whilst allowing for physicality and functionality
22 of in-room technology to be controlled via auxiliary devices, e.g. tablet.
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26 **Culture scenario:**

27 Memorable experiences are generated through personalized welcome rituals,
28 customized services, and commitment of staff to the hotel guest experience that
29 contain elements of surprise further enhancing the hospitality culture of the
30 property.
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33 *Stage 3 of the Delphi study*

34 In the third and final Delphi stage, respondents were asked to provide information on their
35 earlier input. Specifically, they were asked which of the value generating factors would
36 provide a return on investment. This process was included to assess whether these experts
37 would seek to invest in those areas in the future. We sought to determine if they were
38 aware of any value generators that were important to guests but perhaps were not willing to
39 introduce them because the costs may outweigh perceived benefits. This stage set up the
40 research phase with consumers by allowing the researchers to look for gaps between hosts
41 and guests' perceptions of aspects of the service experience that create value.
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45 *Study Phase 2: Luxury hotel guest interviews*

46 The aim of the second research phase was to validate the host data, identify any additional
47 experience constructs or value generating factors and uncover any gaps between hosts and
48 guests. In this phase, data were collected using in-depth, semi-structured face-to-face
49 interviews with luxury hotel guests.
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52 *The guest sample*

53 Guests were selected based on the frequency of stays in luxury hotels. Those that matched
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4 this selection criteria were introduced to the research project by Regional Vice Presidents
5 or General Managers of luxury properties. Each guest was sent research information and
6 asked to contact the researchers directly. The number of qualified respondents who made
7 contact was substantial. As a result, the researchers chose the most experienced travelers
8 based on number of room nights in luxury hotels. This selection process was used because
9 Pikkemaat and Schuckert (2004) asserted that:

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12 The combination of the twin forces of accumulated travel experience from
13 the past, plus aging implies that today's traveling public has become much
14 more quality conscientious and travel smart, wanting at the same time to have
15 the options and/or combinations of old and new, traditional and modern,
16 active and passive, authentic and derived goods and services including
17 cultural goods and/or cultural encounters (p.2).

19
20 The majority of those that best fit the criteria were male and traveling for business
21 purposes. Consequently, diversity was sought based on differences in country of origin and
22 experience staying in different luxury hotels, including the number of luxury brands
23 experienced. Those most experienced had stayed an average of 100 days a year in luxury
24 hotels across the Northern and Southern hemispheres.

26
27 A semi-structured interview schedule was developed based on the literature and the
28 findings of the Delphi study. The interviewer stimulated the interviewees by first asking
29 each hotel guest to recall the luxury hotel stays they perceived as memorable. Using the
30 four memorable experience constructs and factors identified in research phase one
31 (Services, Atmosphere, Technology and Culture) as a guide, the interviewer then probed to
32 unearth specific experience elements that interviewees considered had contributed to the
33 development of memorable experiences. The interviewer then discussed each of the
34 memorable experience constructs and value generating factors that had emerged in phase
35 one.

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39 Interviewing continued until the researchers felt that saturation point had been reached.
40 This is the point at which any further interviews fail to unearth new or additional insights
41 (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006). This occurred after the 24th interview, however, the
42 researchers decided to conduct one further interview with the most frequent luxury hotel
43 guest on the list. This interview yielded no new information confirming that saturation
44 point had indeed been reached (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). The total number of participants
45 was 25. The brands that interviewees most frequently used were: Four Seasons, Starwood
46 (includes W, St. Regis, Luxury Collection, Sheraton), Fairmont, Raffles, InterContinental,
47 Mandarin Oriental, Hilton, Hyatt (Park Hyatt, Grand Hyatt), Marriott (Ritz Carlton),
48 Shangri-La, Peninsula, and Aman Resorts. A significant number of interviewees had also
49 stayed in independent luxury boutique hotels.
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Findings

Hotel guests perspectives

The interviews were transcribed and a content analysis of the transcripts was conducted using the same sorting and coding process that had previously been used with the host data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This involved identifying key themes, the number of times these themes were mentioned and the number of respondents who mentioned a theme (Harkison et al. (2018). A total of 38 memorable experience value generating factors were extracted from the data and these were clustered under the four memorable experience constructs identified in phase 1 (Technology, Services, Atmosphere, and Culture). Guests identified 19 additional memorable experience generators to those that hosts had presented. Although most of these could be presented under the initial four constructs that emerged from the host data, some were not associated with those construct categories.

The researchers labelled these as sensory themes and created a new Sensory category which was defined as: The emotion evoking dimensions of experiences that interviewees asserted provided a general sense of wellbeing. These were; views, spaciousness, color scheme, olfaction (smell) and touch (fabrics, materials). This category captured the emotional aspects of experiences, and tapped into the meanings interviewees placed on their past memorable experiences. The new category was added to the four primary experience construct categories. The five categories and their respective value generating factors are presented in Table 4. Those value generating factors that were not identified in the research with hosts are presented in bold.

Table 4: Guest data with additional themes in bold

| <i>Analysis of Guests` data (Five Categories/Constructs)</i> | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Categories – Sub-categories | ID | No. |
| Technology | TECH | Coded Data |
| <i>Technology</i> | | 20 |
| <i>Connectivity</i> | | 12 |
| <i>Audio/TV</i> | 55 | 11 |
| <i>Wireless</i> | | 6 |
| <i>Pre-arrival Personalization</i> | | 2 |
| <i>Location-Based Services</i> | | 2 |
| <i>Social Network (Apps)</i> | | 2 |
| Services | SERV | Coded Data |
| <i>Services</i> | | 53 |
| <i>Content</i> | | 26 |
| <i>Customization</i> | | 6 |
| <i>Amenities</i> | | 33 |
| <i>Staff</i> | | 43 |
| <i>Collateral</i> | | 5 |
| <i>Personalization</i> | 201 | 3 |
| <i>Preferences (personal)</i> | | 8 |
| <i>BathRecognitionSurprises</i> | | 0 |
| <i>Complimentary Services</i> | | 7 |
| <i>Learning new things</i> | | 11 |
| <i>Experiencing new things</i> | | 6 |
| <i>Dining (in-room)</i> | | 0 |
| Atmosphere | ATMO | Coded Data |
| <i>Atmosphere</i> | | 30 |
| <i>Artefacts</i> | | 11 |
| <i>Seating / comfort</i> | 157 | 25 |
| <i>Design</i> | | 56 |
| <i>Hone away from home</i> | | 9 |
| <i>Bathroom</i> | | 12 |
| <i>Purposeful Design</i> | | 12 |
| <i>Lighting</i> | | 2 |
| Culture | CULT | Coded Data |
| <i>Culture</i> | | 8 |
| <i>Participation</i> | | 3 |
| <i>Location</i> | 50 | 10 |
| <i>Recognition</i> | | 18 |
| <i>Familiarity</i> | | 2 |
| Sensory | SENS | Coded Data |
| <i>Views</i> | | 7 |
| <i>Spaciousness</i> | | 10 |
| <i>Colour Scheme</i> | 24 | 2 |
| <i>Touch (fabrics/materials)</i> | | 5 |
| | | 478 |

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4 The most important value-generating factors that emerged within the Sensory category
5 were memorable experiences reflecting ‘spaciousness’, window ‘views’ and ‘touch’.
6 Several guests commented on the quality, feel and touch of materials, such as linen, fabrics
7 and amenities. They also appreciated attention detail in the presentation of luxury hotel
8 rooms. While the overall size of the room was important, it was the upkeep and the size
9 and quality of the bathroom that generated memorable experiences. For example:

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12 It’s the bathroom. It’s the space. It’s the tidiness. If it is light or dark. I prefer it
13 being light. And then it’s really the cleanliness – little spots on the walls are an
14 absolute no-go. If I’m in a high-class hotel, the smallest things are an absolute
15 no-go. I think this is the justification for the high price that it’s flawless. I would
16 even say it’s more the bathroom than the bedroom maybe. (Interviewee ID08,
17 female)
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19
20 Apart from the size, quality and upkeep of the room; window views were important
21 generators of memorable experiences. For example: “Well, what I do love is the view. Views
22 are always an important criterion for choosing a guest room” (Interviewee ID04, male). The
23 quality of materials and sensation of touch also generated memorable experiences:
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26 It’s the materials. It’s very much the materials. I love the menu in a real folder,
27 best in leather with the logo being pressed into it. Everything being of high quality
28 and I can feel it. That makes it very memorable for me because it’s the ‘real’ you
29 want. So, if I go somewhere and it feels solid and well handcrafted, this is
30 something that I remember for ages (Interviewee ID08, male).
31

32 And:

33 It is never only the space. It is everything that you feel and you touch. It’s the
34 fabric or the material of the things, of the sofas, of the linen. It’s the comfort of
35 materials (Interviewee ID16, female).
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38 While the size of the room was linked to guests’ expectations of luxury, the main emphasis
39 was on experiences generated through views from the room, quality of materials and the
40 sense of touch felt from fabrics and other surfaces. These sensory generators had not been
41 identified by hosts indicating a significant gap between hosts and guests’ perceptions of
42 what generated valuable and memorable guest experiences. Overall, however, the most
43 dominant constructs perceived by guests belonged to the Services and Atmosphere
44 categories, followed closely by the Culture and Technology categories and then the
45 Sensory category.
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49 From the host perspective, experiences were predominately designed and delivered around
50 generators that belonged to the Services category. These factors were content,
51 customization, amenities, and collateral. Hosts referred to digital and non-digital content
52 and service factors as the most frequent generators of memorable experiences. They
53 perceived that they were delivering memorable experiences that immersed guests actively
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4 in the experience itself.
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7 Guests also perceived that services, amenities and content were value generators. Key
8 words that described the meaning guests' gave to services were "at a moment's notice" and
9 "the quality" of the service experience. This related to "touch", "feel", and "consistency"
10 which they remembered as memorable sensations. The most significant finding from
11 guests, however, was being acknowledged and personally recognized. This stood out as a
12 gap between what hosts considered "personalized" and guests' desires to be recognized
13 and remembered as unique individuals.
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15 16 **Discussion and conclusions**

17 18 *Conclusions*

19 The analysis of both research phases yielded five major constructs underpinned by tangible
20 and intangible experience generators. For example, the technology construct was
21 predominantly comprised of tangible generators, such as; systems, hardware, software,
22 applications and connectivity to audio and TV. However, guests indicated that they sought
23 to experience new things and to actively engage with entertaining content that is
24 interactive, co-produced and accessible via their personal devices. They frequently
25 mentioned their experiences with in-flight entertainment noting that these were interactive
26 and on demand.
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30 The services construct, which included 57 value generating factors, was the most dominant
31 for hosts and guests and included in-room services, amenities, opportunities for
32 customization and audio and TV content. However, guests identified the experience and
33 skills of service staff, coupled with their local knowledge and level of guest engagement,
34 as central to the development of memorable experiences. These were described as a desire
35 for human-to-human interactions with staff on a personal level. The majority of service
36 generators within this construct were also intangible and thus subject to guests' perceptions
37 of satisfaction.
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41 The atmosphere construct played a supporting role in memorable experiences generation
42 and included room design, furnishings, mood enhancing lighting, artefacts and levels of
43 comfort. These findings connect with previous research where ambience and overall
44 atmosphere have emerged as important cues in a variety of service environments (Hall et
45 al., 2005). However, it was not so much the physical or artistic attributes of the
46 environment that triggered memorable experiences. Rather, it was the local cultural context
47 and levels of engagement with service staff that created the memorable moments that
48 transformed ordinary experiences into those that were memorable. This transformation is
49 underpinned by what Koenig-Lewis and Palmer (2014, p.198) describe as '... stimuli that
50 create value for consumers'.
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4 The culture construct was also heavily influenced by service staff, mainly because guests
5 sought their advice on local culture as well as opportunities for participation and co-
6 creation. Guests stressed the importance of experiencing the place, which they considered
7 must be reflected in the location, culture, engagement with local staff and opportunities to
8 learn new things. Thus, this construct has the potential to engage guests as co-creators of
9 value (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) while also creating an active role for hosts as value
10 facilitators (Grönroos, 2011).
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14 Guests reflected on the importance of sensory elements in emotive terms including the
15 touch of materials and the sense of luxury experienced through the spaciousness of
16 bathrooms, or inspiring views. These generators evoked strong feelings that can influence
17 brand attitudes and the overall evaluation of services (Grace and O'Cass, 2004; Chou et al.,
18 2016). Guests also spoke of the importance of multi-sensory experiences indicating that
19 when sensory themes were combined, the emotions and feelings that were created
20 triggered their most memorable experiences. This is significant because when sensory
21 characteristics are combined they can provide unique experiences that create a competitive
22 advantage (Palmer, 2010). Previous studies have also uncovered a direct link between
23 emotions, satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Koenig-Lewis and Palmer, 2014).
24 Consequently, the sensory construct plays a significant role in achieving unique selling
25 points along with repeat visitation and/or positive communication.
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30 Hosts had not recognized the importance of the sensory experience generators showing a
31 gap between hosts' perceptions of guests needs and guests expectations of a luxury hotel
32 experience. Differences were also found in the expected levels of engagement, co-creation
33 opportunities, connecting guests to the destination and the local culture, as well as the
34 fundamental role of service employees. While these co-creation experiences can empower
35 guests, they can also bridge the gap between guests' expectations and their perceptions of
36 performance (Hall et al., 2017). Consequently, it is important for hosts to understand the
37 generators that drive satisfaction, create value and transform a luxury hotel stay into a
38 memorable experience that enhances consumers take-away value perceptions (Arnould and
39 Price, 1993; Carbone and Haeckel, 1994).
40

41 *Conceptual model of memorable experience constructs*

42 To address the disparity between hosts and guests five significant constructs underpinned
43 by 36 value generating factors were identified. These were formulated into a memorable
44 experience framework that presents the antecedents, constructs and variables that facilitate
45 memorable experiences (Figure 1). The purpose of this framework is twofold. Firstly, it
46 highlights the key drivers of memorable experiences that are valued by guests and lead to
47 overall satisfaction, loyalty and repeat visitation. Secondly, it provides a foundation for the
48 development of a quantitative instrument that researchers can use to conduct further
49 research into the memorable experience phenomenon.
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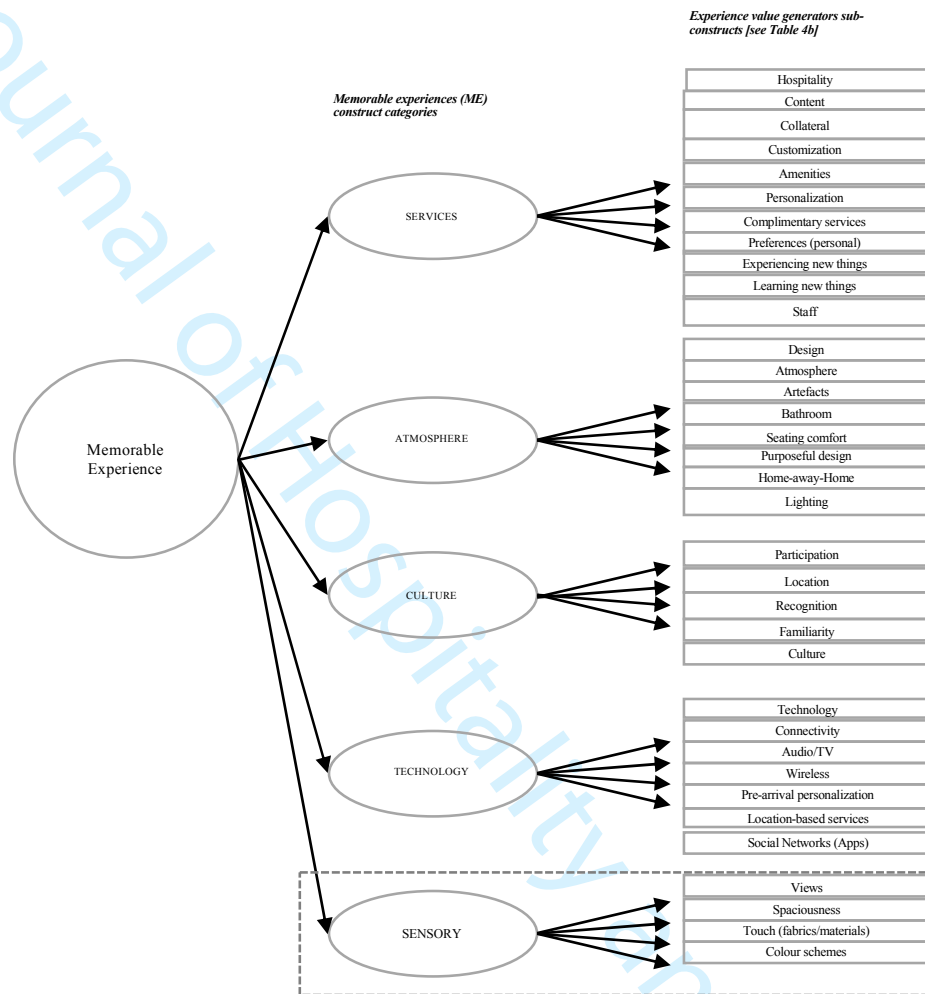


Fig. 1. Memorable Experience Construct Framework

Theoretical contribution

The study extends our understanding of the constructs and variables that contribute to the development of memorable experiences within a hospitality context and specifically within luxury hotels. It goes beyond the conceptual to develop a framework based on an in-depth research process that incorporates the views of senior luxury hotel executives and frequent luxury hotel guests. The research also validates a number of the constructs presented in recent studies, for example, the critical role of technology and co-creation opportunities, which are important in all hospitality services (Hwang and Seo, 2016).

Our study goes further, however, by identifying the importance of the touch, feel and consistency of the sensory construct and the role of authenticity and destination specific culture in creating unique, memorable experiences. By developing five constructs with their underpinning value generators, we have addressed the need to understand the factors

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4 that affect guests' expectations of experiences emphasized by Kandampully et al. (2018).
5 Additionally, we have gone some way towards uncovering the important design elements
6 for customer experiences specific to hospitality called for by Hwang and Seo, (2016).
7 These constructs and value generators can also be developed as scales that can form the
8 basis of a quantitative research instrument and thus go some way towards providing the
9 better measures and tools that are required for customer experience management.
10 (Kandampully et al., 2018).
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12 13 14 *Practical implications*

15 The study identified a mismatch between hosts' perceptions of the factors that drive
16 memorable experiences and create value for guests. Hosts, therefore, risk designing luxury
17 guest experiences that fail to provide the quality services that align with the needs of their
18 guests and generate memorable experiences (Wu and Yang, 2018). This is significant
19 because of the increasing cost of real estate as well as intense competition within the
20 luxury hotel sector.
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24 To overcome this misalignment, hosts need to emphasise those elements of the experience
25 that enhance guests' perceptions of value (Sipe and Testa, 2018). With this in mind, the
26 framework that has emanated from this study can provide a practical toolkit to assist hosts
27 to better understand the generators that connect their guests with positive experiences
28 (Johnston and Kong, 2011). Thus, the framework can allow hosts to develop strategies to
29 transform ordinary experiences into value-generating experiences that address the needs
30 guests (Sundbo, 2009).
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33 This begins with setting the stage and in this study several important elements emerged.
34 For example, guests' reporting on technology indicated that they sought to connect with
35 hotel systems and view personally curated content. These preferences could easily be
36 gained in a pre-arrival call where content preferences could be determined in advance.
37 Similarly, being acknowledged and personally recognized was important. Using social
38 media to reach out to guests or simply to be informed about them could also be done pre-
39 arrival, while returning guests' preferences could be noted in the guests file prior to check
40 in.
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45 Within the sensory construct, the feel and touch of materials and fabrics needed to exude
46 the luxury experience. These guests' understood the difference between high and low
47 quality fabrics and it was the feel of the fabric that they used to define quality. As such, the
48 finest grades of cotton and linen should be used on sheets towels, robes, slippers and all
49 fabrics that guests' touch or feel. Handcrafted was mentioned as a sign of luxury and
50 quality and this related to furniture as well. Quality was also mentioned in relation to in-
51 room amenities, for example, a preference for menu covers to be leather and the bathroom
52 amenities to be luxury brands. The quality of the bathroom was paramount and the size of
53 the bathroom was more important than the size of the bedroom. The overall design of both
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4 the bedroom and the bathroom was also important with the décor and furnishings coming
5 together seamlessly so that the space itself is stylish, comfortable, tasteful and pleasant.

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7 Flawlessness was mentioned several times not only in relation to the sensory elements of
8 the room but also to service. Service was expected to be immediately available, of high-
9 quality and consistent with the luxury concept. Quality in-room dining options that allow
10 guests' to experience new things were also important along with local produce. Service
11 staff were also expected to have local insights.

12
13 While these individual value generating factors were important to develop atmosphere, and
14 ambience, the issue of engaging guests' emotionally is critical. Hotel operators need to
15 consider ways to actively engage these guests' if their experiences are to be memorable.
16 Examples, might be in-house wine tastings with a sommelier, trips to local vineyards,
17 dining with the hotel manager, learning specific cooking techniques, for example, making
18 dim sum, or using a blowtorch to personally caramelize a crème brûlée. These "value in
19 use" activities can leave the lasting impressions that create memorable experiences (Vargo
20 and Lusch, 2008). From a learning perspective, discussing the history of the hotel or any
21 special paintings, plants or famous guests can also invoke positive emotions that lead to
22 memorable experiences. These in turn lead to satisfaction, loyalty and positive behavioral
23 intentions but they are also unique to a property which provides a competitive edge (Yang
24 et al., 2016).

25 26 27 *Limitations and future research*

28 One limitation of the research is that guests were asked to recall previous luxury hotel
29 experiences and it is acknowledged that recall of past experiences can be inaccurate. The
30 sample size was also relatively small. Nevertheless, the findings uncovered significant
31 memorable experience construct categories and their experience value generating factors
32 that hosts and guests considered important. Future research, therefore, might include other
33 areas of the hospitality industry or service-centric industry sectors such as retail and
34 professional services. Quantitatively testing the constructs and variables of the experience
35 framework could also provide a valuable research instrument for future studies.
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