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# Examining guests' experience in luxury hotels: evidence from an emerging market

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**ABSTRACT**

Consumer experience has long been recognised as a key component in influencing consumers' habits and attracting, pleasing, and retaining customers. The hospitality sector is often regarded as one of the most experience-rich industries. Lately, the idea of a guest's experience in a luxury hotel has gained popularity. Limited studies have examined the antecedents and outcomes of luxury hotels guests' experiences. This research bridges the void by constructing relationships among cognitive, affective, and behavioural constructs. A total of 414 guests in luxury hotels were contacted, to figure out factors influencing the guest experience. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to analyse the data. According to the results, hedonism, ambiance, escapism, personalisation, and convenience influence guests' experience in luxury hotels, which in turn influence consumers' positive word of mouth (WOM) and revisit intention. In addition, the moderating effect of the guests' visit's purpose was also examined.

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## Introduction

Marketing strategies have evolved from product marketing to service-based marketing, aiming for a delightful customer experience (Jiang et al., 2020). Gartner's customer experience survey states that 81% of all companies by 2020 anticipate engaging primarily or entirely in customer experience (Gartner, 2018). Customer experience is defined as involvement or participation by a person with individualised, personal nature, leading to reactions and behaviours (Knutson et al., 2009; Manthiou et al., 2020). Compared to product marketing, the experience of users in the service sector is even more important due to its intangible characteristic (Liang et al., 2019) which makes the measurement, marketing, and management of 'experience' challenging (Knutson et al., 2009; Kuppelwieser & Klaus, 2021).

The last decade has witnessed a significant surge in scholarly debates and academic publications related to various views and types of customer experience in the service and hospitality industry (Klaus, 2021; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) and this is also true for the luxury hotel industry (Cetin & Walls, 2016; Choi & Kandampully, 2019; Walls et al., 2011). According to Boston Consulting Group (2017), the luxury experience market accounts for more than 60% of the global luxury market. Customer experience is the

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most important business goal and driver for a competitive edge in the luxury industry (Klaus & Manthiou, 2020; Klaus, 2021). Customer experience research is still in its initial days (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) and researchers and practitioners alike recognise the increasing importance of the concept (Klaus & Manthiou, 2020). Yet the advancement of research is still falling short of demand (Klaus, 2021).

Unique experiences delineate the pinnacle of human yearning, especially among luxury consumers (Jebarajakirthy & Das, 2021; Klaus, 2021). Delivering an experience is more than simply a functional operation as it necessitates the guest's participation and emotions (Das & Jebarajakirthy, 2020; Harkison et al., 2018). Owing to the individualised personal aspect, especially in the hospitality and tourism sector, customer experience acts as a confidence builder that can affect the consumer's views and outlook towards a hotel brand (Wu & Gao, 2019).

Today, hotels are becoming ever more conscious of the requirement to build value in terms of experience (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2019). Therefore, keeping up with the change in consumer experience (Klaus, 2021; Yang & Mattila, 2017) and to generate meaningful interactions, luxury hotels (like ITC Mughal, JW Marriott, Taj Palace, The Leela Palace, The Oberoi, The Imperial, Hilton, Trident, The Taj Mahal, Sheraton) being conscious of customers' preferences, aim to provide excellent and superior services, meeting the needs of the consumers (Giglio et al., 2019) by combining physical, human and emotional dimensions (Manthiou et al., 2020). Likewise, due to the significant growth of luxury hotels, an increasing number of studies have contributed to analysing customer experience (see Table 1), which seems to be influential in giving insights into various factors of customer experience. However, existing studies and literature have not clearly outlined how to engage customers' cognitive, affective, and behavioural intentions. As customers, select hotels based on cognitive attributes (Alfakhri et al., 2018), including cognitive components may therefore contribute to a greater insight into the forces impacting the luxury experience. Furthermore, customers' purpose of visit (leisure or business) has a huge impact on their behavioural outcome which has been largely overlooked in the literature (Zhang et al., 2019).

Nonetheless, consumers are no longer just passive buyers, but they collaborate to create experiences by interacting with the provider, the environment, and other customers (Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003). So the contribution of this paper is set as follows: (a) designing a comprehensive framework of customer experience (cognitive and affective) and testing it in the luxury hotel industry, (b) analysing the impact of positive customer experience on outcome variables (revisit intention and WOM), which has emerged as a new research focus and researchers have called for further analysis on this (Kuppelwieser & Klaus, 2021; Wu & Gao, 2019), and (c) studying the moderating role of purpose of visit. The findings are especially interesting since they examine luxury hotels from the customer's point of view. To test the hypotheses, the authors used the structural equation modelling technique. The findings of this study will provide an insightful contribution for luxury hotel managers into the most valuable aspects of guests' experience and the enhancement of guests' procurement process.

**Table 1.** Luxury hotel experience literature.

| Author | Variables | Type of Data | Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| Padma and Ahn (2020) | Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction | Qualitative | The quality of the rooms and interactions with personnel have been identified as key determinants of consumer WOM and their propensity to return. |
| Jang and Moutinho (2019) | Room price, price promotion, user-generated content, consumer spending on luxury hotel services | Quantitative | Price promotion has a detrimental impact on customer spending on luxury hotel services, and this effect is amplified when the room is more expensive. |
| Peng and Chen (2019) | Functional, financial, hedonic, symbolic, emotions, attachment, repurchase intention | Quantitative | Consumers' emotions are influenced by functional, hedonic, and symbolic value, which in turn influences their luxury hotel attachment and repurchase intentions. |
| Wu and Gao (2019) | Emotional customer experience, customer co-creation, human interaction | Quantitative | Customers' most significant feelings, as well as various emotion triggers, are captured in the data. |
| Liu, Wong, Tseng, Chang, and Phau (2017) | Brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand image, brand attitude, and purchase intention | Quantitative | The customer-based brand equity theory is expanded to cover luxury hotel brands, with each CBBE aspect contributing direct, indirect, and total effects on brand attitude and purchase intent. |
| Cetin and Walls (2016) | Physical environment, social interactions | Quantitative | To be competitive, luxury hotels must provide exceptional experiences. This research discovered significant characteristics that have an impact on luxury hotel visitors' experiences. |
| Walls et al. (2011) | Physical environment, human interaction, personal characteristics, trip-related factors, customer experience | Quantitative | Hotel guest experiences include both the physical environment and human contact components. According to the study findings, trip-related elements and customer personal qualities have an impact on luxury hotel experiences. |

## Conceptual background and hypotheses

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) were among the first academicians to push for a more experiential approach to consumer behaviour. However, it wasn't until Pine, Pine & Gilmore's book *The Experience Economy* which was published in 1999 that consumer experience became increasingly significant in marketing literature. Many scholars have since emphasised the theoretical foundations of consumer experience. They stated it as an experience that a consumer gets while engaging with a firm (Holmqvist, Ruiz et al., 2020; Verhoef et al., 2009). According to Meyer and Schwager (2007), consumers' internal and emotional reactions to any direct or indirect encounter with a company define their experience. Customer experience is a broad concept that encompasses several stages (Verhoef et al., 2009). Researchers frequently divide customer experience into parts to better describe it. While Gilmore and Pine (2002) used entertainment, education, escapism, and aesthetic components to describe customer experience, Verhoef et al. (2009) categorised it on the basis of cognitive, affective, emotional, social, and physical dimensions. Similarly, Homburg et al., (2017) described it as sensorial, affective, cognitive, relational, and behavioural components. Schmitt (1999, 2012) defined consumer experience as distinct responses elicited by specific brand experiences, i.e. sensorial, affective, intellectual, and behavioural experiences (Zollo et al., 2020). Lately, Molinillo et al. (2020) have proposed affective and

cognitive characteristics as the foundation for measuring customer experience. Consumers' gathering and processing of the information is predicted by the cognitive component of the experience. And consumers' emotional judgement is predicted by the affective component of the experience (Molinillo et al., 2020). In past literature, cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions are a more common conceptualisation of customer experience (Hamouda, 2021). These attributes are more than likely to describe the core consumer experience (Rose et al., 2012).

In recent years, the use of experiential marketing to promote hospitality and tourist products has exploded (Chen & Peng, 2014). The hospitality sector is identified based on many factors having fundamentally comparable cognitive characteristics and services that are easily interchangeable (Kim & Perdue, 2013). In this context, differentiating a hotel from its competitors solely based on functional value is becoming extremely challenging. As a result, for both brand and competitive distinction, the hotel sector has become increasingly reliant on experience features. According to experiential marketers, consumer experience is a long-term competitive advantage that may be achieved by continually outperforming not just the cognitive, but also the affective and behavioural expectations of consumers (Kim & Perdue, 2013). Based on some recent studies (Kim & Perdue, 2013) on consumer experience, this study uses a cognitive-affective paradigm to investigate these factors and their interrelationships among various variables that take place in consumers' luxury experiential purchases.

This is centred around the basic notion that an individual's cognition (how they think about a service) plays a major part in their affective (how they feel about a service) and behavioural growth (how they act when they encounter a service). Cognitive abilities are the main components of an individual's feelings and thoughts. Loureiro (2014) classified the experiential state as a cognitive activity. This concept is grounded in modifying the attitude and behaviour of individuals by reflecting on the feelings that a person holds (i.e. the cognitive functioning of the individual), and identifying how these activities contribute to the behaviour of that individual. Past research (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2019; Lee et al., 2019) has posited that in luxury hotels, customer experience involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects of the consumers-service provider relationship (including organisation, environment, and other humans). Based on this view, customer experience (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2019) relies on consumer service encounters, emphasises cognitive and functional factors, addresses consumers' social aspects, and requires the estimation of various benefits generated. Therefore, to study the customer experience in luxury hotels, cognitive-affective behavioural attributes were adopted.

Alnawas and Hemsley-Brown (2019) inferred that the researchers studying guest experience have focused more on guests' interaction with the physical and social environment, ignoring the emotional and sensorial experience generated. So, for this study, cognition variables were adopted from Schmitt (2012) multi-dimensional 'experiencing' process, which refers to the affective, sensory, and physical experience that a consumer has. According to this model, the affective element triggers the intrinsic emotions and feelings of consumers, intending to generate affective experiences ranging from optimistic feelings linked to the product/service to intense feelings of pride and joy. Holmqvist, Ruiz et al. (2020) state that hedonism reflects customers' happiness and joy, so it can act as an important factor in determining customer experience.

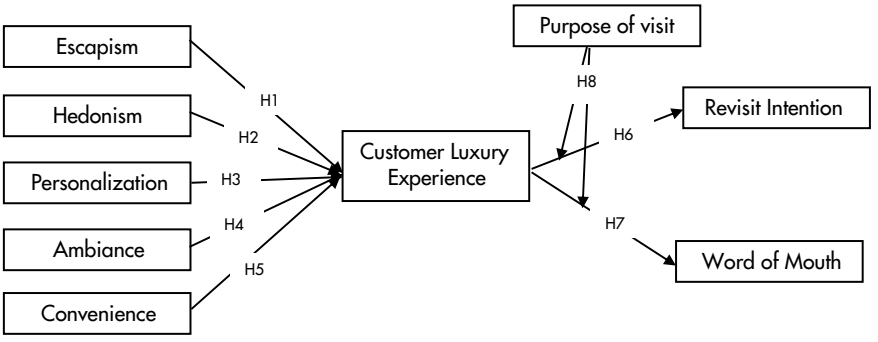



**Figure 1.** Conceptual model.

The sensory element relates to the senses and helps to create an experience by way of enhancing the individual's senses (Biswas et al., 2021). This sensory experience motivates consumers and creates value for goods/services, thus leading to a pleasurable experience. As Chua et al. (2019) state, sensory experience like ambiance influences consumers' senses, and vivid sensory cues define 'escapist experience' (Gilmore & Pine, 2002).

The physical experience (or act) element enhances the experiences of consumers by reflecting on their physical environment, offering them new approaches to accomplishing things (Schmitt, 1999). Becker and Jaakkola (2020), along with other researchers (Pine et al., 1999; Schmitt, 1999; Verhoef et al., 2009), opine that among the few solid measures for experience dimensions, physical dimension is the most common dimension used in the extant research. Researchers (Verhoef et al., 2009; Walls et al., 2011) in the past suggested that ease of use or access i.e. the physical convenience or the stimuli related to a service encounter (e.g. service personal, human interaction, service environment, social surroundings) play an important role in examining consumer experience. Therefore, physical convenience and personalisation were used as variables for the current study.

Gentile et al. (2009) state that 'experience is strictly personal and implies the customer's involvement at different levels (rational, emotional, sensorial, physical, and spiritual)' (p.397). Cognition (affective, sensory, and physical) leads to emotional feelings or experiences (Shahid et al., 2022). The individual's (emotional) experience relies on how they perceive or interpret the events affecting them. Deep emotional experience has an intense impact on psychological aspects and leads to the formation of consumer behaviour (Lin & Worthley, 2012). Moreover, customers' enriched experience with the service/product results in pleased and happier customers (Dessart et al., 2015). An enriched experience is key to influencing customers to say positive things about the service, form a revisit intention in the near future (Kim, 2021), and have personal admiration and interaction for the services encountered. Based on the role of these constructs in demonstrating luxury consumer experience, a conceptual model for our study reflecting guests' luxury experience in luxury hotel settings was proposed (see Figure 1).

## Hypotheses development

There is a long history of research into the experience elements of service (Calver & Page, 2013). Customer experience is defined as a comprehensive term that represents the total feelings generated as a consequence of the interaction process during different phases of consumption (Jain et al., 2017). Experiences are more valuable to customers because they are full of feelings and are memorable (Barnes et al., 2016). Companies may strategically differentiate their services by creating experiences and incorporating environmental factors as elements to boost customer experiences (Walls et al., 2011). Researchers have highlighted the importance of measures that reflect characteristics of service beyond those specified by the organisation, to encompass more emotive and subjective conceptions of guests' experiences (Cetin & Walls, 2016). Scholars have started to establish a theoretical framework concerning luxury consumers' experiences, but there is limited empirical research that seeks to define and assess the experiences that consumers have in luxury hotels (See Table 1).

While luxury is elusive and has several meanings, traditionally it has been defined based on many aspects like exclusiveness, quality, price, social or economic factors, conspicuousness, uniqueness, to name a few (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Luxury goods include characteristics like 'high level of price, quality, aesthetics, rarity, extraordinarily, and symbolic meaning' (Heine & Phan, 2011, p. 112). And within the luxury realms where the experience of customers is a core element of the package (Wu & Gao, 2019), the luxury hospitality sector is the one where services by nature are highly experiential. In luxury services, the essence of a luxury offering is the consumer experience (Holmqvist, Wirz et al., 2020; Wirtz et al., 2020). In contrast to the luxury industry, the luxury hotel business is centred on selling experiences instead of physical things, thus it attempts to provide exceptional service to fulfil consumers' requirements (Giglio et al., 2019). Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) opined that experience (like hotels), which is more closely related to oneself (Yang & Mattila, 2017), makes individuals happier than owning physical goods (material possessions), and termed it 'experience recommendation'. Luxury services are characterised based on the exceptional one-of-a-kind experience, non-ownership, prestige, hedonic value, and social exclusivity (Wirtz et al., 2020). According to Ariffin and Maghzi (2012), hotel guests have grown into consumers, as they have become more informed about the high standards and value of services offered by luxury hotels. A luxury hotel also demonstrates status, a high price, and a personal understanding of its customers (Walls et al., 2011). Luxury hotel guests may select a hotel based on amenities and attributes like well-trained staff, quality assurance, room service (Zhang et al., 2019), concierge service, and gourmet restaurants (Weaver & Oh, 1993), hedonism (Calver & Page, 2013). As customers become more knowledgeable, they demand meaningful experiences; therefore, a better understanding of how to keep consumers connected with luxury hotel brands is a lucrative way to get future value for these guests.

While there is no widely accepted definition of 'luxury hotel', the inference is that these hotels have history, luscious and beautiful locations, fine dining, elegant and stylish amenities, uniquely tailored services, privacy, and security, to name a few (Harkison et al., 2018). For this study, a luxury hotel is (Peng & Chen, 2019) defined as 'a hotel that is unique, superior in quality, provides excellent service, and can symbolise the wealth and status of the owners' (p.1349). Further, we consider that 'Luxury services are extraordinary

hedonic experiences that are exclusive. Exclusivity can be monetary, social, and hedonic. Luxuriousness is jointly determined by objective service features and subjective customer perceptions' (Wirtz et al., 2020, p. 682). Furthermore 'high quality, offers authentic value, is prestigious, worthy of a high price, and inspires a connection in the consumer' (Ko et al., 2019, p. 406). The customer experience variables influenced by different literature sources will be explored.

### *Escapism and customer luxury experience*

Escapism is a new luxury. Escapism and indulgence provide customers with comfort from the pressure of their daily activities (Hwang & Lyu, 2015), fulfilling their desire to flee into a world of fantasy. As a result, individuals seek out new experiences that provide them with a sense of escape (Hwang & Hyun, 2016). The need for escapism has a strong effect on the actions of consumers. Furthermore, it is classified as immersion since individuals are deeply engrossed in the activities. According to Chang and Lin (2015), escapism is very important in examining customer experience, but this concept is understudied. Escapism has found its place in literature, with a focus on tourist spots (Oh et al., 2007) cruise trips (Hwang & Hyun, 2016), shopping (Rose et al., 2012), and luxury stores (Shahid et al., 2022). Luxurious experiences may be used to break up boring routines (Holmqvist, Ruiz et al., 2020).

The past decade has seen increased interest (von Wallpach et al., 2020) in studying the 'experiential' aspect of luxury consumers, and how these consumers perceive luxury through indulgence and extravagance. Experiences related to restaurants (Heung & Gu, 2012), wine tourism (Thanh & Kirova, 2018), designer boutiques (Atwal & Williams, 2009), and hospitality (Israeli et al., 2011) have become prominent. With luxury hotels selling a desire to be different (Manthiou et al., 2020) to their consumers, such settings are a place for guests' willingness to 'escape from present reality'.

The charm of a luxury escape (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2019), not surprisingly, is more powerful, enticing, and crucial than before. Solitude and tranquillity, and being away from the hustle and bustle and stress of everyday life are significant aspects of world-class luxury hotels (Atwal & Williams, 2009). The guests' experience may be significantly more memorable if the service delivery and performance incorporate a sense of escapism (Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2020). Consumers lookout for luxurious escapism to transform the experience into a moment of luxury (Holmqvist, Ruiz et al., 2020). For example, with larger-than-life architecture (Lu et al., 2015), these hotel guests' luxurious escape could include spending hours experiencing authentic dining with lavish meals, relaxing with a masseur's expert touch – i.e., customers in luxury hotels get the royal treatment (Chen & Peng, 2014). The essence of luxury, and the desire to reach beyond the ordinary, offers an insight into the world of fantasy (Holmqvist, Ruiz et al., 2020), and luxury hotels are established with their guests' loftiest desires in view. Using the notion of escapism to better assess consumer value in the framework of luxury services, we base our views on research that identifies escapism as a key component of luxury experiences. Therefore, we hypothesise:

**H1.** Escapism has a positive impact on guests' experience in luxury hotels.

### *Hedonism and customer luxury experience*

Today's customer resides in a hedonistic culture where pleasure takes precedence over need (Ryu et al., 2010). Hedonism is an established concept in consumer experience research and is grounded in an urge for emotional happiness (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Shahid et al., 2021). Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) define hedonic consumption as 'those facets of consumer behaviour that relate to the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's experience with products' (p.92). Hedonism influences luxury consumption through visual cues, and experiences encountered with the product (Christodoulides et al., 2021). Hedonist motives include cognitive, sensory, and affective pleasure (Oh et al., 2007) and emotional arousal linked to intrinsic enjoyment (Barnes et al., 2016). Hedonic customers are those who seek out luxury brands (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Shahid and Paul (2021) highlighted hedonism as a way for customers to add a touch of luxury to their lives. Mandler et al., 2020) state that a hedonistic feature is vital for luxury companies since it may build customers' attachment to a brand and additionally validate its worth over the product's actual attributes. Hudders (2012) found that consumers purchase luxury products/services to fulfill their desire for pleasure and satisfaction which results in emotional experience (Lajante et al., 2021).

The luxury experience is a mirror of hedonist consumers' thoughts and feelings (Paul, 2019; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). It emphasises the cognitive and subjective rewards gained through consumption (Molinillo et al., 2020). This research proposed the impact of hedonism on the luxury customer experience. The 'happiness' that individuals think they have gained from such consumption is used to evaluate their experience (Shahid & Paul, 2021). Consumers staying in luxury hotels are in pursuit of happiness and are inclined towards hotels with modern, aesthetically pleasing, and appealing layouts. Studies that define consumer experience with regards to the consumption of luxury assert that consumers' hedonism concerning luxury products/services is strongly linked to consumers' satisfaction and gratification (Rajaguru & Hassanli, 2018). These customers are enticed by the unique collection of emotional experiences. Lu et al. (2015) opine that luxury hotels have evolved as a destination to fantasise about luxuriousness and an extravagant lifestyle; therefore, luxury hotels emphasise consumer experience (Padma & Ahn, 2020; Ryu et al., 2010). Hence, we hypothesise:

**H2:** Hedonism has a positive impact on guests' experience in luxury hotels.

### *Personalisation and customer luxury experience*

Personalisation is the activity of gathering and using personal insights into customers' needs and desires and generating deals that perfectly suit customers' requirements (Cetin & Walls, 2016). According to Kim et al. (2020), personalisation is the expertise to furnish information/services pertinent to users or a group of people according to their likes, needs, and preferences. Surprenant and Solomon (1987) state that personalisation is the activity that occurs after a customer interacts with the service, to encourage them to believe that they are receiving personal consideration. Furthermore, Harkison et al. (2018) state that personalisation represents how consumers decide to participate within the experience setting by creating their own unique experience.

The luxury industry has largely focused on personalised and customised experiences (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2019). Luxury hotels are distinguished from business-class and first-class hotels by their extravagance and personalised services along with luxurious surroundings (Harkison et al., 2018). Personalised experience in luxury hotels is either inherently unique for the customers or uniquely tailor-made to the guest's preferences (Wu & Gao, 2019). For example, personalised cocktail butlers or chefs, spa treatments, recognising guest preferences before they check in, and high-end VIP treatment are some services that make guests appreciate the experience.

As personalisation has become a necessity in the hospitality industry, and luxury hotel guests like to live with the ease, warmth, and comfort they experience in their own homes, along with a 'wow factor' (Harkison et al., 2018), these consumers are looking for personalised attention and experiences that are entirely exclusive and tailor-made according to their preferences (Ramadan, 2019). For luxury hotel managers, personalisation generates extensive and more genuine connections (Tynan et al., 2010) with their esteemed guests. As a result, luxury hotel managers gather customers' information to provide the right deal to their consumers at the right time. Furthermore, the hospitality experience is unique. It is the expression of excellence that guests experience by transforming from a visitor to a friend in a brief duration (Xiang et al., 2015). Researchers (Gilmore & Pine, 2002) are of the view that luxury hotels are considered a segment of the experiential landscape. Gilmore and Pine (2002) opine that delivering novel customer experience inevitably becomes a vital pillar of effective hotel management. Therefore, we posit that:

**H3:** Personalisation has a positive impact on guests' experience in luxury hotels.

### *Ambiance and customer luxury experience*

According to Lewis and Chambers (2000), consumer experience is not limited to tangible aspects of products; instead, it is referred to as an entire package including goods, services, and ambiance. In the service industry, consumers generally depend on the physical environment while assessing their comprehensive experience (Alfakhri et al., 2018). Ambiance offers everything with elegance, and acts to enhance the customer experience. It is the most significant dimension of the physical environment (Suh et al., 2015). Ambiance refers to place conditions (Heung & Gu, 2012) including air quality, adequate lighting, temperature, odour/aroma, a combination of colours, music, and noise/sound level. As these cues can be designed for harmonising sensory signals, they can arouse sensory pleasure among hotel guests (Lin & Worthley, 2012). Furthermore, these dimensions may provide information on how to use ambiance to escalate guests' experience (Heung & Gu, 2012).

Focusing on the physical environment, culture, art, and aesthetics (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017), the ambiance created by hoteliers impacts the interest of guests who visit the hotels (Lin & Worthley, 2012). Past studies (Walls et al., 2011; Wu & Gao, 2019) have also highlighted the importance of analysing ambiance to study service experience, as

positive ambient conditions give a competitive advantage to the service providers. Moreover, the impact of ambient conditions creates emotional experiences that influence the mood of the service customers (Peng & Chen, 2019).

**H4:** Ambiance has a positive impact on guests' experience in luxury hotels.

### *Convenience and customer luxury experience*

In hotels that want to outperform their competition, service is critical for enhancing client satisfaction (Higgins, 2007). According to Stephens (2013), the status of true luxury is determined by convenience. Brands that provide convenience are lauded as time savers (Padma & Ahn, 2020). Convenience is considered to be more essential to customers, yet very few studies have defined or studied the service convenience construct (Berry et al., 2002). Service convenience for customers is defined as 'a judgement made by consumers according to their sense of control over the management, utilisation, and conversion of their time and effort in achieving their goals associated with access to and use of the service' (Farquhar & Rowley, 2009, p. 434). Bazi et al. (2020) state that convenience reduces the time and energy needed by consumers to purchase, utilise and dispose of the service. When contemplating the accessibility of hotel services, convenience is considered a crucial aspect by guests.

Wernick and Von Glinow (2012) opine that luxury properties are designed with both beauty and convenience in mind. Researchers in the past (Padma & Ahn, 2020; Zhou et al., 2014) have stated that location, service and value should be considered key features of luxury hotels. Furthermore, Qiu et al. (2015) also found that luxury hotel guests place a greater emphasis on convenience features. Luxury hotels are oftentimes located in high-rise buildings that offer the best view of the locale and fascinate the guest's senses (Lu et al., 2015). Equipped with cameras and unique key cards to the rooms and elevators, luxury hotels tend to have excellent security systems. With beautiful rooms and high-quality beds, these hotels come with plenty of facilities and amenities for their guests; likely everything they may need (Harkison et al., 2018). Finally, the hotel staff is friendly, professional, and efficient in completing their tasks (Harkison et al., 2018). Prioritising convenience for guests and providing them with a unique and hyper-convenient functioning experience is the manifestation of all luxury hotels. For this study, the authors conceptualise service convenience in a luxury hotel based on Brown's (1990) dimension of place (location of the luxury hotel), acquisition (ease in using luxury hotel amenities), use (luxury hotel facilities provided), and execution (luxury hotel staff). This framework represents a multi-step, experience-based cycle wherein convenience analysis differs at each level (Hui et al., 1998). In line with previous findings and suggestions in the literature, we propose that luxury hotel guests' look for convenience. Therefore, we posit:

**H5:** Convenience has a positive impact on guests' experience in luxury hotels.

### *Customer luxury experience and word-of-mouth (WOM)*

According to Richins (1983), WOM corresponds to interpersonal interaction between customers regarding their individual experience and perception of a service/product. In the services sector, WOM is a significant component in an organisation's growth, receiving substantial attention from scholars for years (Padma & Ahn, 2020; Yang & Mattila, 2017). Brands are also looking for WOM communications among customers to promote their message and enhance their identity (Klein et al., 2016). As per Yang and Mattila (2017); a single WOM communication can influence a great many consumers. Moreover, consumers in general trust and value opinions and reviews from their family and friends and perceive their responses to be more reliable and credible (Filieri et al., 2015; Schiffman & Kanuk, 1995). As luxury brands are known for providing customers with physical, psychological, and emotional benefits (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999), in the case of hotels, characteristics such as basic, excitement, and performance elements may vary depending on the hotel star ratings (Li et al., 2020).

Luxury hotels create a luxurious lifestyle and extravagant experience for their guests, giving luxury a new meaning. In luxury hotels, guests are in pursuit of experience over possessions. For luxury hoteliers, providing these consumers with unique and emotional experiences that satisfy their luxurious desires triggers positive WOM (Klein et al., 2016). Moreover, these consumers are more inclined to engage in WOM communication and share their excitement (Liu & Lee, 2016) and experiences with significant others. Therefore, to analyse the luxury hotel stay experience by assessing the word-of-mouth among customers, we posit:

**H6:** Guests' hotel experience positively influences their WOM communication with significant others.

### *Customer luxury experience and revisit intention*

The luxury hospitality sector is considered to be human-centric, pushing towards guest experience (Padma & Ahn, 2020) and enhancing their inner-self. This sector relies on its impeccable service and memorable experience (Walls et al., 2011).

As experience captivates consumers by creating unforgettable memories, it emotionally connects the consumers to the service/product (Gilmore & Pine, 2002). Today, many firms are considering experience as being at the heart of their business model (Cetin & Walls, 2016; Giglio et al., 2019), and for luxury consumers, experience is an integral part of their consumption (Klaus, 2021). As consumers often build an opinion towards a provider dependent on their encounter and experience with the product/service, a consumer's experience is holistic (Verhoef et al., 2009). Addis and Holbrook (2001) state that consumer experience is primarily based on a range of diverse encounters between consumers' emotional reactions and the rational attributes of a product/service, like atmospherics and human involvement. It is intricately linked to their wish to repurchase/revisit the product/service (Liu & Lee, 2016).

Zeithaml et al. (1996) opine that revisit intention is among the attributes of behavioural intentions and is defined as a consumer's intention to encounter the same product/service in the near future. Consumer revisit intention (Kim, 2021) is also applied to the cognitive experience such as enjoyment and happiness. Many past studies (Hwang & Hyun, 2016) have found that pleasurable experience leads to revisiting intentions. Visitors in luxury hotels are not looking for just experience, but also transformational experience. Because luxury hotels provide their visitors with a royal experience, linking customers' emotions leads to the formation of a memory over time (Manthiou et al., 2020). Moreover, the remembrance of these memorable experiences also determines guests' revisit intention (Barnes et al., 2016). Therefore, for our study, revisit intention is defined as a confirmed probability of revisiting the luxury hotel in the future and the impact of experience driving visitors' revisit intentions. Hence, we posit that:

**H7:** Guest's hotel experience positively influences guests' revisit intention to luxury hotels.

### *Moderation- the purpose of visit*

Hotel guests can be categorised according to the intent of their visit, yet few researchers have examined business and leisure guests' purpose of their visit and looked at the value they add to those hotels (Kashyap & Bojanic, 2000; Rajaguru & Hassanli, 2018). The hotel experience has an emotional, physical, and cognitive impact on the guests (Mossberg, 2007). Researchers (Chu & Choi, 2000; Zhang et al., 2019) have noticed major variations between leisure and business travellers and their assessment of their hotel experience. For example, Kashyap and Bojanic (2000) in their study found a major difference between leisure and business travellers' overall value assessments. Chu and Choi (2000) found no difference between leisure and business travellers in terms of quality and value in their research. Rajaguru and Hassanli (2018) opine that hotel guests' experiences differ based on the purpose of their trip. Radder and Wang (2006) and Wu et al. (2017) encouraged future scholars to evaluate business and leisure purposes, as it might help hotel executives in fulfiling the needs of their guests.

According to Umasuthan et al. (2017), as they travel regularly, business guests prefer star-rated hotels as their reason for visiting is either for meetings or conferences, etc. and they look out for home-like comforts during their stay. Leisure visitors, on the other hand, are more informal due to their vocational mood and seek personal and emotional experiences as well as warmer attitudes (Heung et al., 2001) and enjoy the experience (Holmqvist, Wirtz et al., 2020). Walls et al. (2011) opine that because of the variation in personal consumption objectives, a leisure guest is more likely to explore the ambient surroundings in the luxury hotel; business visitors, on the other hand, are more likely to notice the staff's attitude and a high level of hospitality throughout their visits. (Herjanto et al., 2017). Furthermore, past literature (Umasuthan et al., 2017) suggests that leisure guests' positive experience results in a recollection of positive emotions, which is heavily influenced by reference groups (like reviews and WOM). As positive WOM is considered important to optimal success in the service context, especially in the hospitality sector, positive experience promotes meaningful suggestions (Yang & Mattila, 2017). WOM is

more likely to be produced by positive experiences (Klein et al., 2016). Furthermore, concerning WOM, telling people about their experiences is a crucial aspect for individuals (Shahid & Paul, 2021). Rajaguru and Hassanli (2018) viewed that the purpose of a trip plays a significant role and influences guests' WOM based on the experience they receive at the hotel. So, based on the literature, we predict that, in the context of WOM, the guests' purpose of visit will moderate the relationship between hotel experience and WOM.

**H8a:** The effect of guests' hotel experience on WOM is stronger for leisure guests than for business guests.

Customers' revisit intention indicates the certainty of a positive experience (Padma & Ahn, 2020; Wu & Gao, 2019). Customers' decision to revisit is critical to the profitability of the hospitality industry (Chu & Choi, 2000). Past studies have examined revisit intention for leisure guests (Padma & Ahn, 2020). Kashyap and Bojanic (2000) state that revisiting intention would offer a solid base for the creation of marketing practices, and that the hotel set-up must be such that it satisfies both business and leisure travellers. Based on the literature, we predict that business guests want more comfort and convenience, and leisure guests are more engaged in the experience at luxury hotels. Therefore, we posit:

**H8b:** The effect of guests' hotel experience on revisit intention is stronger for leisure guests' than for business guests.

## Research methodology

### *Sample and data collection*

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors affecting customer experience from the luxury hotel guests' perspective. Before conducting the survey, the questionnaire was pre-tested on a sample of 45 doctoral students to identify and rectify any readability and clarity issues. The instrument was also shared with two academics and two researchers in the luxury domain for face validity, and measures were improved based on their advice.

The Indian luxury hotel sector has witnessed significant growth in recent years and the numbers are expected to rise (Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010). As per the 2014 India Tourism Statistics report, luxury hotels are categorised as heritage hotels, and five-star deluxe, five-star, and four-star hotels. Currently, there are 731 hotels (by 2018) that fall into these categories. Using an offline questionnaire, the data was collected from luxury hotel guests in North India with a focus on 5-star hotels (hotels that provide the greatest levels of luxury to their visitors through customised services, a broad variety of conveniences, and sophisticated accommodations), 5-star deluxe (hotels with amenities and attributes that outperform the existing spectacular five-star properties), and heritage hotels (forts, ancient palaces, and mansions that have been turned into heritage hotels that are managed by royal families and large hotel companies; Chittiprolu et al., 2021). The respondents were contacted in the hotel lobby or while exiting the hotel, and their

permission was taken. They were informed about the aim of the research and the confidentiality of their personal information and responses. They were also informed that there were no right or wrong answers to any question.

The data was collected from 15 hotels in and around New Delhi, and 447 guests filled out the survey during the first quarter of 2020, with a response rate of 64%, out of which 33 questionnaires were incomplete and therefore excluded from further analysis. A final sample of 414 usable questionnaires was considered fit for the study. 63% of respondents were male, 37% of respondents were between 25–35 years old, 45% earned 13,500 US dollars per annum, and 62% of respondents reported leisure as the purpose of their visit.

### *Measures*

Constructs for the variables were obtained from the previously published studies, with a few changes in wording to ensure adequate integration into the framework of our research. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. In the first section, the respondents were surveyed about their experience staying in luxury hotels, followed by their demographic information. Four items for Escapism were measured using a scale from Sparks et al. (2007), Varshneya and Das (2017); three items for Personalisation were measured using a scale by Xu et al. (2011); four items for Hedonism were adapted from Yang and Mattila (2017); six items for Ambiance were adapted from a scale by Sim et al. (2006); five items for Convenience were measured using a scale by Knutson et al. (2009); five items for Luxury Customer Experience were adapted from Bustamante and Rubio (2017); five items for Revisit Intention were adapted from Ryu et al. (2010); and the three WOM items were taken from Zeithaml et al. (1996) scale. The items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 for Strongly Disagree to 7 for Strongly Agree).

### *Data analysis, common method bias test and results*

To assess the hypothesised relationship, this study examined the data using a two-step framework (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), which included Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). AMOS v 22.0 software was used to analyse the data, and CFA was run to measure the convergent and discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) followed by SEM.

Due to the self-reporting aspect of the questionnaire, the data were tested for common method bias (CMB). To eliminate this, Common Method Variance (CMV) was tested using Harman's single factor test and common latent factor (Podsakoff et al., 2003). With the unrotated factor solution, our results revealed that the single factor accounted for 39.74% (<50%) of variance, indicating no significant common method bias in this data. Furthermore, Common Latent Factor analysis was also done by comparing the regression weights of the constructs with and without CLF (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The variations in the regression weights were reported to be relatively low i.e. less than 0.5, therefore no CMB issues were reported.

**Table 2.** Reliability and validity of the constructs.

| Items | Factor Loadings | Cronbach α | Composite Reliability | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Hedonism** | | 0.87 | 0.87 | 0.62 |
| HE1: I stay at luxury hotels for the pure enjoyment of it. | 0.78 | | | |
| HE2: Staying at luxury hotels is self-indulging. | 0.81 | | | |
| HE3: Staying at luxury hotels gives me a lot of pleasure. | 0.77 | | | |
| HE4: Being at luxury hotels is fun. | 0.78 | | | |
| **Ambiance** | | 0.90 | 0.90 | 0.61 |
| AM1: Luxury hotels give me a feeling that I am staying at a high-class place. | 0.82 | | | |
| AM2: I am impressed with the architectural design, interior decorating, accessory selections, artwork, and overall colour and décor of luxury hotels. | 0.75 | | | |
| AM3: There is an ambiance of genuine friendliness and warmth at luxury hotels. | 0.80 | | | |
| AM4: The atmosphere here makes me feel welcome, comfortable, and at ease. | 0.85 | | | |
| AM5: This hotel ambiance offers me a lifetime setting of elegance. | 0.78 | | | |
| AM6: The dress code, colour harmony, and audio effects of this hotel all blend in very well to create an elite atmosphere. | 0.69 | | | |
| **Escapism** | | 0.87 | 0.87 | 0.63 |
| ES1: Stay in a luxury hotel helps me to experience a state of total relaxation. | 0.73 | | | |
| ES2: Visit to luxury hotels serves as a way of temporary escape from daily routine and helps me truly enjoy myself. | 0.78 | | | |
| ES3: I get so involved in a luxury hotel that I forget everything. | 0.82 | | | |
| ES4: Stay in a luxury hotel gives me the opportunity to unwind while I am on holiday. | 0.81 | | | |
| **Personalisation** | | 0.88 | 0.88 | 0.70 |
| PE1: Luxury hotel treats me with great care. | 0.82 | | | |
| PE2: Luxury hotel provides me with personalised services tailored to my specific preferences or personal interest. | 0.86 | | | |
| PE3: Luxury hotel makes an effort to find out my needs. | 0.83 | | | |
| **Convenience** | | 0.90 | 0.89 | 0.61 |
| CO1: The luxury hotel products (web-based or otherwise) are clutter-free, convenient, and easy to use. | 0.85 | | | |
| CO2: The services at luxury hotels are always readily available. | 0.77 | | | |
| CO3: The rooms in luxury hotels are clean and attractive. | 0.76 | | | |
| CO4: Luxury hotels have layouts that make it easy to get to where you want to go. | 0.76 | | | |
| CO5: The information at luxury hotels is always readily available and easy to acquire. | 0.78 | | | |
| **Luxury Experience** | | 0.91 | 0.90 | 0.67 |
| LCE1: The whole experience of luxury hotels interests me and attracts my attention. | 0.85 | | | |
| LCE2: I feel confident with luxury hotels because of their reputation. | 0.81 | | | |
| LCE3: The whole experience of luxury hotels is happy, optimistic, and amazing. | 0.78 | | | |
| LCE4: I have experienced positive feelings during my stay at luxury hotels. | 0.79 | | | |
| LCE5: Overall the experience in a luxury hotel is hospitable and pleasant. | 0.86 | | | |
| **Revisit Intention** | | 0.85 | 0.86 | 0.55 |
| RI1: I would like to come back to this luxury hotel in the future. | 0.67 | | | |
| RI2: I would recommend luxury hotels to my friends or others. | 0.78 | | | |
| RI3: I will more frequently visit luxury hotels in the future. | 0.78 | | | |
| RI4: I intend to stay in a luxury hotel on my next visit. | 0.72 | | | |
| RI5: I am likely to stay at luxury hotels when travelling for tourism/ business purposes next time. | 0.76 | | | |
| **Word of Mouth** | | 0.87 | 0.87 | 0.70 |
| WOM1: I intend to encourage friends and relatives to visit luxury hotels and stay there. | 0.82 | | | |
| WOM2: I intend to say positive things about luxury hotels to other people. | 0.84 | | | |
| WOM3: I intend to recommend luxury hotels to someone who seeks my advice. | 0.85 | | | |

**Table 3.** Correlation matrix.

| | CO | AM | RI | HE | ES | LCE | WOM | PE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **CO** | **0.786** | | | | | | | |
| **AM** | 0.575*** | **0.781** | | | | | | |
| **RI** | 0.438*** | 0.457*** | **0.742** | | | | | |
| **HE** | 0.623*** | 0.686*** | 0.526*** | **0.787** | | | | |
| **ES** | 0.646*** | 0.665*** | 0.498*** | 0.712*** | **0.793** | | | |
| **LCE** | 0.623*** | 0.677*** | 0.371*** | 0.666*** | 0.662*** | **0.817** | | |
| **WOM** | 0.451*** | 0.421*** | 0.303*** | 0.430*** | 0.431*** | 0.447*** | **0.839** | |
| **PE** | 0.554*** | 0.644*** | 0.481*** | 0.634*** | 0.598*** | 0.664*** | 0.353*** | **0.838** |

(Note: CO= Convenience; AM= Ambiance; RI= Revisit Intention; HE= Hedonism; ES= Escapism; LCE= Luxury Experience; WOM= Word of Mouth; PE= Personalisation. ***Correlation significance at 0.01 level; N = 414.

**Table 4.** Hypothesis testing results.

| **Hypotheses** | *β* | *t*-values | Test Results |
|---|---|---|---|
| H1: Escapism → Luxury Experience | 0.17 | 2.54 | Supported |
| H2: Hedonism → Luxury Experience | 0.16 | 2.21 | Supported |
| H3: Personalisation → Luxury Experience | 0.23 | 4.26 | Supported |
| H4: Ambiance → Luxury Experience | 0.22 | 3.56 | Supported |
| H5: Convenience → Luxury Experience | 0.18 | 3.27 | Supported |
| H6: Luxury Experience → Revisit Intention | 0.39 | 7.61 | Supported |
| H7: Luxury Experience → Word of Mouth | 0.47 | 8.78 | Supported |

## *Model reliability, validity, and fit*

CFA was used to assess the reliability and validity of all the constructs in the final measurement model. The fit indices ($\chi$ 2/df = 1.25, RMSEA = 0.02, CFI = 0.98, GFI = 0.90, NFI = 0.91) indicate that the model proposed is a good fit for the data (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Further analysis was carried out to access the model for internal consistency and composite reliability. Cronbach's alpha values were also greater than the minimum threshold of >0.70, indicating construct validity (see Table 2).

The model indicated confirmation for both convergent validity (critical ratio and average variance extracted were above 0.50 for all items) and discriminant validity ('squared root of each construct's AVE' exceeded its corresponding inter-construct correlations) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). (See correlation Table 3).

## *Structural model and path analysis*

The overall fit measures ($\chi$ 2/df = 1.40, RMSEA = 0.03, CFI = 0.97, NFI = 0.90, GFI = 0.88) report that the hypotheses proposed are an acceptable representation of the framework that encompasses the assessed data (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

**Table 5.** Moderation.

| | Leisure (N=216) | Business (N=198) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hypotheses | β | B | p-value | Result |
| H8a: Luxury experience → Revisit intention | .44 | .37 | .001 | Supported |
| H8b: Luxury experience →WOM | .51 | .43 | .938 | Not Supported |

(Note: WOM= Word of Mouth)

The next step is hypothesis testing (see Table 4). As proposed, the results reveal that Escapism ($\beta = 0.17$; $p < 0.010$), Personalisation ($\beta = 0.23$; $p < 0.050$), Hedonism ($\beta = 0.16$; $p < 0.010$), Ambiance ($\beta = 0.22$; $p < 0.050$) and Convenience ($\beta = 0.18$; $p < 0.010$) assist in enriching luxury customer experience, with Personalisation and Ambiance indicating a stronger effect than the others. The analysis further supports that luxury customer experience has a positive impact on Revisit Intention ($\beta = 0.38$; $p < 0.050$) and WOM ($\beta = 0.47$; $p < 0.050$). Therefore, the data supports all the hypothesised relationships (H1-H7).

### *Moderation effect*

To test H8a and H8b, the purpose of the visit of the guests was studied. Using multi-group analysis in SEM (Dash & Paul, 2021), the structural path of two sample groups was tested. The findings (Table 5) indicate that H8a, i.e. the effect of luxury experience on revisit intention is the same for both leisure guests ($\beta$=.40, $p < 0.010$) and business guests ($\beta$=.52, $p < 0.010$), supporting our hypothesis. The significant effect indicates that the leisure and business guests do not differ on their intention to revisit the luxury hotel, and due to the luxury experience encountered, both have shown intention to revisit.

Whereas H8b (i.e. the effect of luxury experience on WOM) is not the same for the leisure guests ($\beta$=.40, $p < 0.050$) and business guests ($\beta$=.43, $p < 0.050$), thus not supporting our proposed hypothesis. This insignificant effect indicates that both the groups differ when it comes to WOM communication about their experience at the hotel.

## Discussion and implications

### *General discussion*

In this study, we examined the guests' luxury hotel experience based on their cognitive, affective, and behavioural factors. Further, the role of guests' purpose of visit is explored. We empirically assessed this concept using SEM analysis. First, while describing the concept of examining guests' experience in luxury hotels, we brought together luxury characteristics, namely escapism, hedonism, ambiance, personalisation, and convenience, to provide guests with a luxurious hotel experience.

Second, our study empirically validated that guests' experience is impacted by their thoughts or beliefs about luxury hotels. The result of our study emphasised the important role played by escapism in influencing guests' experience in luxury hotels, thus supporting H1. Escapism is an essential condition for luxury (Holmqvist, Wirtz et al., 2020). The results revealed that the consumers look for exceptional experiences to take a break from their mundane life. The results of our study confirm a direct impact of hedonism on luxury experience, supporting H2. This hypothesis has previously been proven in the context of consumer experience in physical stores (Baker et al., 1992; Sheng & Teo, 2012). This shows that people purchase luxury goods/services for personal pleasure and to expand their goods/services experience. H3, i.e. the influence of personalisation on luxury experience in hotel settings, was also found to be positive. The results indicate that personalisation has become an essential aspect of consumer experience as it makes every consumer

believe that the hotel is aware of their specific requirements (Cetin & Walls, 2016; Ramadan, 2019). Further, we identified ambiance as a predictor of luxury experience, supporting H4. The findings of our study are in line with the previous study (Lee & Hwang, 2011; Walls et al., 2011). When evaluating their whole experience, customers frequently rely on the physical surroundings, so the ambiance is one of the most important aspects of the hospitality industry. This study confirms convenience as having a significant influence on consumers' luxury experience in luxury hotels as hypothesis H5 has been validated. These findings have been supported in the past literature (Wernick & Von Glinow, 2012). Emphasising the convenience for guests and giving them a one-of-a-kind, convenient experience is the epitome of all luxury hotels.

These results contribute to the current understanding of the luxury experience by describing the anatomy of luxuriousness as a cognitive facet. Luxury hotels give guests the feeling that they've reached somewhere special, and they offer a more personalised ($\beta = 0.23$) service during host-guest interactions (Harkison et al., 2018). The convenience ($\beta = 0.18$) for guests and their comfort are prioritised at luxury hotels (Wernick & Von Glinow, 2012), further enabling a luxurious hedonistic ($\beta = 0.16$) and escapism ($\beta = 0.17$) experience (Holmqvist, Ruiz et al., 2020). Creating a refined environment with a sophisticated experience and ambiance ($\beta = 0.22$) (Cetin & Walls, 2016) allows guests to forget about their worries for the duration of their stay.

Further, our results indicate that in the hotel industry, customer experience (i.e. what guests feel) which is promoted by guests' cognitive factors (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2019), is a significant predictor of guests' behaviour (i.e. Revisit intention and WOM). As a result, the findings imply that hotel managers should emphasise offering excellent and pleasurable experiences, rather than just focusing on the functional or emotional attributes of services (Homburg et al., 2017). Thus guests' luxury experience subsequently has a strong impact on their revisit intention (supporting H6, $\beta = 0.39$) and the likelihood that they would speak positively (supporting H7, $\beta = 0.47$) about the hotel. Cetin & Dincer (2014) in their study supported these findings where word-of-mouth recommendations were an outcome of consumer experience. And a customer who relies on the recommendations of other consumers is more likely to make better decisions (Filieri et al., 2015).

Our findings also show that the purpose of the visit has a moderating effect on the hypothesised relationships in our model. That is, the findings back up our core claim that guests' behavioural outcome differs based on the purpose of their visit. This indicates that the needs of the guests differ based on their reason (leisure or business) to visit a luxury hotel. It is thus important for both academicians and hotel managers to address the guest's needs while exploring strategies to create a successful experience for hotel guests.

As our empirical findings accept all the hypotheses, this study adds to the current literature on guests' luxury hotel experiences by examining their cognitive and behavioural effects. This study, therefore, offers some important theoretical and practical implications.

### *Theoretical implications*

The main aim of this research was to delve deeper into the cognitive and behavioural effects on the luxury hotel guest experience. By adopting an experience-centric approach and including the cognitive behavioural model, this study's findings yield interesting theoretical implications.

Firstly, our main contribution has been that brands and consumers are held together through cognitive facets, which influence customers' experience and purchasing behaviour. Applying cognitive-affective behavioural underpinning to customers' experience in luxury hotels gives an insight into which attributes customers think are more important when they evaluate the luxury hotel experience; thus, providing empirical evidence for a comprehensive framework of guests' hotel experience, establishing a relationship between hotel guests' experience, antecedents, and outcomes, which have not been examined before. For example, we interpret the results from a cognitive perspective, i.e. the customer engages in the cognitive evaluation of the hotel experience, resulting in a lasting impression that is formed in their memory.

Secondly, experience-based research is still neglected in the literature (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2019). As a result, the findings suggest that the cognitive component plays a significant part in the formation of consumer experience (Padma & Ahn, 2020) by suggesting that a luxury hotel's visitor experience is a blend of affective, sensory, and physical experience (Schmitt, 2012). The study constructs examine and empirically analyse the antecedents of luxury hotel experience, providing insights into the gaps that are of concern. A luxury hotel that provides a personalised experience with appealing architectural designs influences customers' luxury experience. Similarly, convenience gives luxury hotels an edge and enhances the experience of the visitors. For these customers, comfort and hyper-convenient functioning are prerequisites. Moreover, consumers look for luxurious escapism to transform the experience into a moment of luxury. These customers want to escape from their daily mundane routine into a world where they can relax, enjoy the food and ambiance, and leave their everyday worries behind. Lu et al. (2015) opine that luxury hotels have evolved as a destination to fantasise about luxuriousness and an extravagant lifestyle; therefore, in our study, hedonism is also considered an important aspect of guests' experience at luxury hotels. The importance of these constructs for the luxury experience is also supported by various studies (Cetin & Walls, 2016).

Thirdly, experience has the greatest influence on the intention to revisit. Our study, in line with previous findings (Huang & Liu, 2017; Zhang et al., 2019), emphasises that cognitive facets and memorable experiences impact positively on customers' intention to revisit. Furthermore, WOM is one of the critical indicators of services growth, and identifying WOM behaviour predictors is of great significance for hoteliers. Our research work addresses this factor, particularly to determine the impact of experience on WOM behaviour. The results from our study clearly show that the enhanced luxury experience encountered at the hotel has a positive impact on the WOM behaviour of guests because when a customer is happy with the service encounter, they will recommend the experience to their family, friends, and relevant others. For example, guests who are highly satisfied with the service will engage in WOM praises for the hotel (Liu & Lee, 2016), assisting in that hotel's success.

The fourth and most important contribution to new knowledge has been made by expanding the literature by identifying the role of guests' purpose of visit and its effect on their revisit intention and WOM behaviour. A growing number of consumers looking for leisure are opting for luxury hotels. And Liu and Lee (2016) state that the purpose of visits leads to customer motivation in hotel settings. Therefore, studying guests' purpose of visit offers adequate details for hotel managers to ensure strategic decisions.

### *Managerial implications*

This research offers many implications for hoteliers. Measuring these facets of experience can assist brand managers in designing and implementing plans that have a beneficial impact on consumer behaviour. It will enable businesses to better handle customer experience, which inevitably leads to positive WOM and customers' revisit intention.

Providing high-quality, personalised, VIP treatment is a key facilitator of luxury customer experience and requires considerable managerial interest. It's important to remember that each customer's experience is unique, and these customers want to stand out from the crowd. So, hoteliers should provide the best experience to all their guests but paying personal attention to individual guests to ensure that they get the expected experience is crucial. Further, the hotel staff must serve the guests by ensuring improved human contact and being compassionate with them, thus creating a personalised experience for the customers. For this purpose, it is encouraged that hoteliers should efficiently recruit, educate, and allocate employees for value-addition and a high level of hospitality.

As the concept of luxury is evolving, this research workplace emphasises how hoteliers can focus on constructing their strategies around hotel ambiance to enhance customer experiences. Customers do not buy what you are offering; they consider buying why you are offering it. Therefore, an effective campaign will highlight the hotel's unique story to attract customers. Staycations can also be a way to attract customers. Luxury hotels need to focus on creating an enticing atmosphere that adds a degree of comfort and an exquisite experience for their guests. Hoteliers can use images or videos of their luxurious offerings on their websites and social media pages to attract the attention of customers. Moreover, to stay competitive, hotels must keep incorporating new and innovative convenience technology like mobile check-in, keyless entry, etc.

As escapism is a new luxury, luxury hotels need to provide an exclusive experience away from the hustle and bustle of life. In addition, concentrating on identifying the guests' purpose of visit can also assist in serving their guests accordingly. Therefore, luxury hoteliers are advised to become a hub for providing prominent luxury experiences. More mainstream luxury brands will profit from our observations to enhance the experience of their customer

## Limitations and directions for future research

There are some limitations that will open up the prospects for future research. Firstly, the study is limited to luxury hotels in North India. To generalise the findings of the study, future researchers can validate the model in different countries and settings such as China (Paul, 2019), and that could open up the prospects for future research.

Second, studying new insights into the concept of experiential marketing would require a more comprehensive range of methodologies. The conceptualisation of consumer experience is quite vague as to whether the spectrum of experience is static or a dynamic concept. The qualitative study could delve successfully into effective customisation of the questionnaire items. The themes can be linked to the hypotheses that the research aims to endorse and may contribute to the discovery of new theories or updating of old theories (Paul, 2019). Moreover, mixed methodology, triangulation approach, or meta-analysis could also strengthen the complexity and effectiveness of customer experience.

Third, although this research examined the cognitive and affective dimensions of experience, future researchers can study the behavioural and sensory dimensions in the context of the hotel industry. Further, there is a range of relevant variables that can be used by future researchers. Constructs like dining experience, exotic food, social media, eWOM, and timeliness of services can also be considered. The mediation and moderation effects of brand love and hotel location may also offer future insights. The relationship between brand engagement and brand experience can also be explored (Shahid et al., 2022). Moreover, this study offered a one-sided view of hotel guests' experience, deliberately omitting the perspectives of managers, frontline staff (Pugh et al., 2018), and other players within the hotel industry. Taking a brand management approach in line with this would require brands to embrace a more comprehensive and distinct approach, for which an understanding of managerial viewpoints is required.

COVID-19 has resulted in a paradigm shift in consumer behaviour (Gordon-Wilson, 2022; Rayburn et al., 2022) in the tourism and hospitality sector (Sharma et al., 2021). In the post-pandemic period, hospitality will undergo some gradual and significant changes, and several are indeed noticeable. Now, to entice and captivate their guests, luxury hotels will need more than just cognitive enticement. They need to ensure the highest level of hygiene and safety within the façade of the hotel premises. Guests would look for a safe hotel experience, with intense room cleaning, rapid testing for COVID-19 for guests, employees in protective gear, complete automated processes with reduced contact points, to name a few. Furthermore, due to a sharp fall in demand, the pricing of hotels would also face a challenge. Thus, the post-pandemic period would open up a plethora of research opportunities.

As studying luxury experience is gaining ground among researchers (Holmqvist, Ruiz et al., 2020), studying hotel brand experience is a new field of study which would require more research attention on its different facets. Marketers are encountering the challenge of discovering the areas in which customer experience supports creating exclusive, memorable, and pleasurable experiences, hence innovative and unconventional ways of interacting with customers will become an even more significant part of luxury communication. Although these aspects pose interesting research possibilities, the findings of our study also seem to validate the significant influence of the antecedents and outcomes of customers' luxury hotel experience.

## Conclusion

The main goal of this study was to explore the factors influencing luxury hotels' guests' experiences resulting in achieving guests' revisiting intention and positive WOM communication. By integrating the cognitive behavioural effect into the luxury consumer experience framework this study makes a theoretical contribution to the advancement and knowledge of this concept. The findings revealed that consumers look for a VIP experience at luxury hotels and admire the ambiance and environment that luxury hotels offer, which means that hotels can enrich guests' experience by delivering unforgettable experiences across the facets of visuals and personal touch. Further, the study also indicates the role of convenience and other sensory attributes like hedonism and escapism in creating a luxury experience. It should be observed that since luxury hoteliers are playing in an unprecedented competitive environment, sensory benefits should be orchestrated at all customers' points of contact. Our analysis included the probability of guests' revisit intention. As

customers' reviews and ratings boost a hotel's reputation, luxury hoteliers are constantly aspiring to create delightful and joyous experiences for their guests. Moreover, the emphasis was on cognitive motivation cues by proposing insights from guests that add value and assist hoteliers in designing competitive strategies. To sum up, guests' experience is still a less explored research field in the hospitality field.

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