

Travelux: An Interaction-based Brand Relationship Scale for the Luxury Travelers

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Received: Jun 2020 | Accepted: May 2021

DOI: 10.5937/turizam26-26762

Abstract

Luxury consumption is on the rise over the last two decades. This brings challenge for the luxury brand marketers to sustain with the aspirational quotient of the luxury consumers. The inherent perception associated with the luxury consumption, namely narrow-band of consumers having ability to pay premium price, has given way to mass luxury consumption, thereby diminishing the price sensitivity of the segment. This luxury paradox calls for a fresh look into the equations that influence and control the relationship between the consumers and luxury brands. This study aims to develop a brand relationship instrument, namely, Travelux, with specific reference to the travel, tourism and hospitality industry. The cross-sectional study was conducted in three major tourism destinations of India, namely, Rajasthan, Kerala and Goa. The initial scale items for the instrument were obtained by collating past studies and conducting a focus group exercise. The instrument was empirically tested to identify the relationship factors. Findings revealed that the Travelux Brand Relationship can be mounted on four factors (dimensions), namely, immersive experience, ethno-cultural acculturation, passion & excitement and self congruence. The validated scale was further tested for possible deviations with new group of respondents. The measurement invariance did not reveal significant difference between the baseline model and the tested model. Travelux will provide a framework for the luxury-travel brand marketers to develop specific brand designs and brand communications based on the identified relationship factors. Future research may be conducted to expand the scope of the instrument to embed behavioural and attitudinal issues of the travelers.

Keywords: luxury, traveler, brand, relationship, scale

Introduction

The luxury industry, in general, has been witnessing a sustainable growth trend and is expected to remain in a booming state over the next few years. Primarily this growth has been attributed to the Millennials, likely to represent approximately 45% of the global luxury products market by 2025 (Shin et al., 2017) with a projected share-of-wallet of approximately \$65 billion

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per year. The Amadeus Report (2016) data measuring outbound flights found that the growth in luxury travel exceeded overall travel from 2011-2015 with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 4.5% (4.2% for overall travel). The demand for travel has remained constant despite testing economic times, and the luxury market has remained resilient. Over the next 10 years, the growth rate in outbound luxury trips is projected at 6.2%, almost a third greater than overall travel (4.8%). However, the luxury marketers are re-evaluating the swings in consumer preferences and aspirational drives towards luxury brands (Kapferer, Laurent, 2016) and are re-strategising their brand initiatives by embedding 'sense-of-exclusivity' and 'perceived co-creation of value'. Simultaneously, the luxury marketers are addressing the evolving and shifting challenges of sustainability by franchising a brand-balance effort to propagate sustainable luxury. These shifts require an augmented branding effort by the luxury product and service marketers to create cultural capital for the luxury consumers who have evolved from an aspirational entity to an experiential-self, seeking self-actualisation rather than prestige.

Luxury travel experience demands striking the right balance between respecting their desire for independence and lack of intrusive service, which may shift at different points along the trip cycle. Enhancing their trip by checking in to offer additional elements or assistance might be appreciated. The sweet spot is the ultimate representation of modern luxury. Marketers need to make a balance between the 'high-touch' (human interaction oriented) and 'low-touch' (prefer technology intervention). While designing and branding luxury travel services the marketers need to explore the emerging traveler segments, popularly acronymed as 'luxury traveler tribes'. The luxury service positioning and branding (with justifiable differentiators, attributes and associations) hovers over the six identified 'luxury traveler tribes' or segments, namely, ethical travelers, cultural purists, social capital seekers, simplicity searchers, obligation meeters and reward hunters. The creation of luxury brands is theoretically grounded on the hierarchy of luxury travel needs, which is an offshoot to Maslow's need hierarchy. The needs spanned from the 'trusted travel guardian' (lowest-order need) to the VIP privacy and security level (highest-order need). The frequency with which travelers experience luxury travel not only influences their perceptions but also presents different levels of difficulty for offering an end-to-end luxury experience.

The emerging luxury-brand segments demand expanded form of brand communication to stimulate 'urge-to-experience'. Simultaneously, they search for platform to share sensory-hedonism. This brings the social-networks into the framework. The initial inhibitions and reluctance of luxury brands to use social networks, based on apprehensions of image dilution (Pentina et al., 2018; Lee, Watkins, 2016; Seo, Buchanan-Oliver, 2015) gradually gave way to the extreme dynamism of the social-network platforms. Oliveira and Fernandes (2020) made a detailed study on 243 luxury brand followers on Instagram platform and tested the model of Linda Hollebeek (2014) for drivers of brand engagement and validate the same. The study identified 'Brand Self-Expressiveness' as a distinct and specific luxury brand driver. The relational aspects of luxury brands are strongly grounded on senso-hedonism which also forms inputs for brand assemblages.

The segmental variation, in tourism industry, are proliferative in terms of attributional orientations, as the markets are segregated into personalized & private vacations, adventure & safari, cruise expedition, micro-group journey, celebration & special events and culinary travel & shopping. Multiattribute segmentation or geo-clustering also requires a careful understanding of product / service positioning using potent differentiators, which, subsequently transcribes into brand elements. Therefore, a standardised branding technique will not communicate the inherent heterogeneity of the industry and may fail to evoke a sense-of-preference. A

luxury travel brand may be mounted on dual dimensions having both exploitative and exploratory features by exploiting ambidextrous branding techniques. Luxury service brands demand more personalization and therefore the marketers engaged in travel and allied services need to mine travelers' psyche to have a deeper understanding about the values that they ascribe to a luxury brand. Perceived uniqueness (Vigneron, Johnson, 2004) and exclusivity are positively related to attitudes, intention and choice of luxury or prestige brands (Chen, Peng, 2014; Ko et al., 2017; Miller, Mills, 2012; Shukla, 2012).

With the growing practice of data-driven consumer profiling based on psychographics, luxury brands are attempting a more customer-centric engagement strategy to stimulate intense loyalty and ensure lifetime customer value. Branding luxury travel is a much more fluid concept, depending on the context surrounding the individual traveler's circumstances.

Theories governing luxury branding span across a wide range of approaches. Tynan et al (2010) emphasized on the 'phenomenological' nature of the value co-creation of the luxury brands. Theories revealing consumers' attitude towards luxury brands were also studied and three major clusters were identified, namely, the elitist, the democratic and the distant (Dubois et al., 2005) with varying degrees of consumption motives. Luxury consumption, in travel, tourism and hospitality, is evolving and spanning out to incorporate larger section of psycho-geo-demographic cross-sections.

The objective of this study is to develop a typical brand relationship scale specifically for the travel, tourist and hospitality industry, namely, TravelLux. TravelLux will essentially target to capture the underlying factors and their intensity to explain the relationship shared by the travelers and the luxury-travel brands they prefer to remain associated with. Further, the study will also embark on understanding the evolution of luxury consumption by collating adequate number of appropriate literature. The study takes into consideration the inherent criticalities and complexities associated with the service industry.

Literature review

Blackston (1993, 1995) identified dual dimensionality in the basic brand scaffold (a) the objective brand (the consensual set of associations and personal characteristics that form the brand image); and, (b) the subjective brand or brand attitude (the individual perceptions and beliefs about what the "brand feels" about an individual). The objective brand gets propagated through conventional marketing communications. Luxury brands communicate using strong luxury metaphors and such approaches hinder consumer-brand relationships (Kim, Ko, 2012). In contrast, subjective brands evoke interactions with multiple touch-points, namely, with brand communities, internal customers; retailers etc. and stimulate relationship with brands. Subjective brands stimulate preemptive and symbiotic relationship between consumers and brands based on perceived social value and quality (Tynan et al., 2010) and creation of brand meaning (Kastanakis, Balabanis, 2012). Roper et al. (2013) highlighted the 'interpretivist' perspective to explain the construction and internalization of luxury value creation. The contemporary theory governing luxury branding rejects the age-old managerial view of a brand which looks to 'translate the brand-identity into a perceivable brand-image' (Schroeder, 2009) and adopts a polysemic approach that focuses on contextuality and establish a brand on strong cultural footing (Seo, Buchanan-Oliver, 2015; Bengtsson et al., 2010). Theories propagating frameworks for luxury branding have considered a number of inputs over time, namely, luxury disposition behaviour (Lee, 2013), ethno-cultural infusion (Liao, Wang, 2009), utilitarian benefits

and symbolic meanings (Sung et al., 2015), value co-creation (Tynan et al., 2010), culture-driven brand personification metaphors/ motifs (Aguirre-Rodriguez, 2014), aesthetics and ideologies (Townsend, Sood, 2012, Chitturi et al., 2010), emotions of exclusivity and superiority (Dion, Arnould, 2011) etc. Becker et al. (2018) proposed the BECKER model of luxury branding which essentially focuses on synchronising luxury product qualities with consumer psyche and forwarded the concept of proxy-quality. Proxy-quality, associated with perceived value-driven luxury, is likely to promote equity judgments, socioemotional justice and help in calibrating the relationship between a consumer and a luxury brand.

A number of research initiatives focused on explaining the dynamic and complex relationship between consumers and luxury brands by identifying a common hedonic alignment of taste of luxury consumers (including luxury travelers) – the world of art. Schroeder (2005) observed that branded content intersects the world of art in many ways and may be critical in modulating the relationship. Schroeder's (2005) observations reinforced the arguments put forward by Dubois and Duquesne (1993) that art and culture has been a natural extension of luxury consumption and essentially integrates in the scaffold of luxury brands. The structural proximity of luxury brands with the world of art offers a metaphorical bridge to relate consumers (with luxury consumption mindset) with luxury brands (Joy et al., 2012). That art and culture can be a joiner in consumer-luxury brands have also been studied extensively by Koronaki et al. (2017), whereby, they found

that art-based initiatives as a relationship-strengthening tool transcends geographical barriers. Contextually, luxury consumption in travel, tourism and hospitality industry has been governed by travel motives and the aspiration to experience the unexperienced. Artification of travel brands therefore embarks on philanthropic and experimental collaboration (Baumgarth et al., 2014; Kapferer, 2014) for luxury embeddedness. Luxury brands, therefore, were viewed to possess ethno-cultural meanings (Wilcox et al., 2009) targeted to gratify the inherent social appetite of consumers (Bian, Forsythe, 2012; Kim, Ko, 2012). Subject to the context, consumers can attribute luxury meaning to service brands (eg. travel, tourism and hospitality) and experiences of consuming the same that do not correspond to the traditional notion of luxury based on price. Price and exclusivity were often correlated when it came to luxury consumption (Kapferer, Laurent, 2016), however paradoxically price was not found to be deterministic of luxury in comparison to exclusivity (Kastanakis, Balabanis, 2012). Luxury consumption and developing a relationship with the luxury brands have assumed a conceptual shift for the consumers from 'having-to-being' to 'owning-to-experiencing' (Cristini et al., 2017).

While decoding the puzzle of consumer-brand relationship in the context of luxury consumption, number of research works focused on brand experiences (Chun et al., 2017; Payne et al., 2009) which captured the cognitions of the consumers evoked by a bundle of brand stimuli (brand design, brand identity, brand communication and brand associations) (Brakus et al., 2009). Experiential traveling contributes in building brand-images (destination brands; travel brands; accommodation brands; dining brands; shopping brands etc.) which are transposed into a relationship over time (Baksi, 2016; Baksi, 2015). The travel and tourism industry offers a unique challenge for the marketers to build up a brand proposition as the service offers of the industry pools assorted number of services from a network of standalone industries (eg. hotels; restaurants; logistics, retails; tour-arrangers; travel-guides etc.). An overall experience of a trip, therefore, becomes critical in determining the projected brand-traveler (consumer) relationship. Experiential nature of luxury travelling prompted the researchers to explore the possibilities of brand co-creation in the process of developing a symbiotic and synergistic relationship between the traveler (consumer) and the luxury brands. Prahalad and Ramaswamy

(2004) observed that the co-creation process was an evolving one and assigned meanings to the brands as consumers interact with the same (Vargo, Lush, 2004). While interacting with brands, consumers may induce creation of brand-identity (Da Silveria et al., 2013), may co-create brand meaning (Payne et al., 2009) and may serve as a source of brand value (Merz et al., 2018).

Conceptualising TravelLux Instrument

The neo-luxury consumption is endowed with symbolism and subjectivity and lures consumers to a make-belief aspirational space. This proximity between consumers and a luxury proposition goes beyond the product/ service concept on offer. The transaction becomes more intimate and unique in the context of branded contents. The neo-luxury consumption places consumers as value co-creators (Tynan et al., 2010) and in the process of value co-creation consumers relive the luxury experience (Merz et al., 2018). The immersive experience that consumers derive from the value co-creation process of a luxury brand is often recognised as individual creation that embeds a sense of exclusivity, excellence, novelty and creativity in the brand configuration (Cristini et al., 2017). A pool of researchers also attempted to deploy the social identification theory to explain the consumers' inherent desire to construct their social identity based on commonality of luxury brand attributes (Berrozpe et al., 2018). Brandao and Rodrigues (2019) found that consumer involvement played the antecedent role in consumer-brand engagement resulting in self-brand connection in the context of luxury brand consumption and endorsement over social networks. Luxury consumption, being symbolic and metaphorical, was used to explain the complexity of interactions, perceived image and aspirational experiences governing consumer-luxury brand relationship (Kaufman et al., 2016). A few research initiatives also used consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) in explaining sustainable relationships between brands and consumers (Liu et al., 2017; Huang, Cai, 2015). However, studies on the impact of CBBE on luxury service brands remained limited, though, there were evidence to suggest that brand equity comprehensively impacts consumers' intentions to choose brands (Lu et al., 2015); image perception (Han et al., 2015) and brand trust (Han et al., 2015). The hedonic nature of luxury consumption demands that the relationship between luxury brands with its consumers should capture the complexity of intimacy (Nobre and Simoes, 2019). While developing a measurement construct for quantifying relationship between luxury travel brands and the travelers, the fundamental notions of consumer-brand relationship deciphering quality of relationship (Fournier, 1998), strength of relationship (Aaker et al., 2004) and degree of inter-personal relationship (Fletcher et al., 1999) should not be ignored. Personification of brands (Aaker et al., 2004) targeted an evocation of identity system (Aron et al., 2000) that created self-connection of consumers with the brands. According to Aaker et al (2004) brand personality differentiates 'sincere brands' (propagates trust-based relationships) from 'excitement brands' (propagates feeling-based relationships). The ideals of intimate relationships are measured by: (i) intimacy-loyalty (trust-based logical relationship) and (ii) passion (feeling-based socioemotional relationship). Fletcher et al. (1999) explained romanticism in brand-consumer relationship on the basis of dominant passion.

Despite the proliferating research on theories and frameworks governing luxury branding, there are gaps in the contemporary research in developing a measurement construct to quantify the traveler-luxury brand relationship in the context of tourism and hospitality sector. The luxury concept in travel sector emerges from luxury-specific experiences, which are

likely to form the scaffold of luxury travel brands. However, these experiences in shaping traveler-luxury brand relationship remains largely unexplored. Literature also remains inconclusive about the process by which travelers' ascribe meaning to luxury brands as marketing of the same demands construction of invigorating brand narratives (Beverland, 2004; Kapferer, 2006). One of the major shortcomings of the emerging theories pertaining to branding luxury services which includes a bouquet of personalized services, namely beauty salons, spas, private travel services (eg. private jets, cruises, yacht etc.), tour-operatives, event designing etc. is its predominant focus on either corporate or consumer-based brand equity. Luxury brands are not limited to value-added assets churned out of service firms, they also possess socio-cultural, ideological, and political identities that infuse consumption with meaning (Holt et al., 2004; Schroeder, 2009). Therefore, to understand service luxury brands comprehensively, researchers require insights into the culture and ideologies that encapsulate their consumption, in addition to branding concepts, such as strategy, equity, and value (Schroeder, 2009). The architecture, associations and identity creation of luxury travel brands are apprehended to embrace socio and ethno-cultural symbols as metaphors.

The study proposes TravelLux as an instrument to measure the intensity of traveler-luxury brand relationship in the context of luxury travel. TravelLux thematically incorporates subjective and cognitive aspects of luxury consumption comprising of socio-individual facets (Vickers, Renand, 2003) to capture the essence of traveler-luxury brand relationship based on metaphorical expressions (Fog et al., 2010), ethno-cultural manifestations (Baksi, 2016; Baksi, 2015) and brand meaning (Nobre, Simoes, 2019). A similar kind of research initiative was taken up by Nobre and Simoes (2019) where the researchers conceptualised a luxury brand in the context of pure product-market, namely, NewLux, by pooling the features of some renowned global luxury brands to examine the consumers' affinity with it. This study mounted TravelLux for the more complicated service market (travel, tourism and hospitality) with complex behavioural issues involved to address intangible and heterogeneous transactions. Therefore, in a way, the study expanded the realm of luxury consumption and forayed into the psychosomatic bonding between travelers and luxury-travel brands. The TravelLux instrument intended to map the perceived socioemotional benefits of the travelers and hence, used the established scale items dimensionalized into: intimacy-loyalty and passion (Fletcher et al., 1999) and commitment and self connection (Aaker et al., 2004). While commitment represented the behavioural bonds (Fournier, 1998), self connection explained the manner in which travelers' personal identity relates with luxury consumption. Intimacy loyalty depicted travelers' cognitive beliefs (Fournier, 1998) and passion embodied degree of excitement in the relationship. Apart from the scale items which were already studied empirically, this study considered the variables studied by Nobre and Simoes (2019); de Kerviller and Rodriguez (2019); Liu et al. (2017) and Atwal and Williams (2009). Appropriate items to fit the Indian landscape of luxury-travel consumption were also scaled.

Methods and data

The study was bifurcated in two phases. The first phase focused on development of the TravelLux instrument and testing the same for internal reliability and dimensionality. The second phase of the study entailed validation of the scale.

The TravelLux scale was developed with scale items derived from the review of literature. Thematically the scale infused the essence (positioning, personality, projected identity etc.) of

twenty (20) luxury travel brands that travelers had opportunity to interact with during their luxury trips. The luxury travel brands were chosen from a wide range of luxury travel and hospitality services, namely accommodation (Leela Palace, Taj Faluknama, Oberoi Villas, Rambagh Palace, ITC); dining (Wasabi, Bukhara, Yuuka, Olive Qutub); travel accessories (Luis Vuitton, Globe Trotter); train safari (Palace-on-wheels. Maharaja Express); road travel (Olevia, Volvo B11R); airliner (Emirates, Etihad); tour operator (Luxoindia, Abercrombie and Kent) and spa and wellness (Park Hyatt). The respondents were asked to assess their relationships with the luxury travel brands that they had interacted with, on a set of behavioural and attitudinal patterns. The 'commitment' and the self-connection' constructs were adopted from Aaker et al (2004) and Nobre and Simoes (2019). The constructs of 'intimacy-loyalty' and 'passion' were adopted from the study of Fletcher et al. (1999), Nobre, and Simoes (2019). The study postulated 'art and culture' as a possible construct of consumer-brand relationship, specifically, in the context of luxury travel. However, this construct remained untested for luxury travel. The scale items for this construct were generated from the studies of Schroeder (2005), Joy et al. (2012), Koronaki (2017), Baumgarth et al. (2014) and Kapferer (2014). A seven point interval scale was used for the study.

The survey instrument also used elements of Brand Relationship Quality Scale (Ekinci et al., 2005) and the Customer Brand-Engagement Scale (Fung So et al., 2012; Hollebeek, 2009; Patterson et al., 2006; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Bijmolt et al., 2010) to make the measurement construct (TravelLux) more robust and to be externally validated. An initial Focus Group was used to cross-check the content validity and ambiguity of questions. The Focus Group was comprised of 10 members representing academia, research, travel and hospitality industry, traveler and other stakeholders. The final layout of the survey instrument was finalised with 25 scale items. The first phase of the study was carried out in three prominent tourist destinations of India, namely, Goa, Kerala and Rajasthan. The rationality for choosing these three destinations was that they had the highest number of foreign visitors during 2016-2019 and many of these visitors were likely to exhibit luxury consumption.

Following a hermeneutic phenomenology research design convenience sampling technique was deployed considering the experiential nature of the study, which targeted specific traveler group. With the support of appropriate field agency to administer the questionnaire and to conduct the survey, initially, 434 travelers were targeted based on initial conversation with them, which allowed the researcher to identify them as experienced and potential travelers engaged in luxury consumption. However, the final survey result yielded 267 legitimate responses. Non-response bias was tested by assessing the differences between early and late respondents with regard to the mean of all the variables (Armstrong, Overton, 1977). No significant differences were found between the two groups of respondents. This suggested that response bias was not a problem in the study. The sample was comprised of 66% male (178) and 34% female (89) with an average age of 49 years. The sample consisted of 148 overseas and 119 domestic tourists. The sample also predominantly had a high percentage of respondent having higher academic/ professional qualification (79% graduation and above).

The second phase of the study used the scale developed in the first phase of the study to test its discriminant validity. The TravelLux brand relationship questionnaire was developed by incorporating some of the globally renowned luxury-travel brands which are often consumed by overseas and domestic travelers, namely, Waldorf Astoria, Ritz Carlton, Globe trotter, Sofitel, Palace-on-Wheels, Maharaja Express, Royce New York, Skybags, Delsey, Rothschild Safaris, Swan Tours, Kensington Travels, Le Cirque (Leela Palace, New Delhi), Saffron (J W Marriott, Chandigarh), Viking Ocean Cruises, The Luxury Vrinda, Mandarin Oriental, GeoEx,

Luxoindia and Lipault – Paris. A new set of convenience sample was generated. To test the validity and the generalisability of the scale three new destinations were identified, namely, West Bengal, Odisha and Assam. The same process were deployed in identifying respondents and initially questionnaire was administered in 221 potential respondents. 109 response could be retrieved and were found to be legitimate to conduct the study with 221 Travelux brand relationships with the luxury-travel brands chosen for the 2nd phase of the study. The sample was comprised of 43 overseas and 66 domestic tourists. The final sample had 64 males (58%) and 45 females (42%) with an average age of 44 years. 49% of the sample were graduate and above.

Data analysis

Considering the objective of the study to develop a brand relationship scale in the context of luxury travel, the data analysis was segregated into two parts. The first part tested the internal consistency of the scale items and identifying the underlying factor structure by deploying Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and calculating the Cronbach’s alpha. The second part used Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for validation of the instrument.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) churned out five factors based on significant factor loading (factors loaded with > 0.650 were retained) which were named as ‘immersive experience’ (6 items); ‘ethno-cultural acculturation’ (4 items); ‘passion & excitement (4 items), and ‘self-congruence’ (4 items). The Cronbach’s alpha was found to be .897, indicating good reliability levels of the scale (Nunnally, 1978). The KMO value is .864 which indicated sample adequacy for the study. The Bartlett’s test of Sphericity exhibited significant value (chi-square = 909.817, df = 189, sig. = .000). This suggested that we may reject the null hypothesis that our correlation matrix is an identity matrix and will conclude that the variables are correlated highly enough to provide a reasonable basis for EFA. The total variance explained by the five factors was found to be 72.175% which was significant enough. Table 1 summarizes the results for EFA and Cronbach’s alpha.

Table 1. EFA results (Phase-I Study)

Scale items	Factors				AVE	CR
	Immersive Experience	Ethno-cultural Acculturation	Passion & Excitement	Self Congruence		
Luxury-travel brands explains my preferences in life (IE1)	0.899				.664	.921
When I interact with my luxury-travel brand, I forget everything else around me (IE2)	0.885					
Time flies when I am interacting with my luxury-travel brand of choice (IE3)	0.857					
I feel satisfied while interacting intensely with my luxury-travel brand (IE4)	0.811					
When interacting with my luxury-travel brand, it is difficult to detach myself (IE5)	0.794					
My luxury-travel brands galvanise mood-change pleasantly (IE6)	0.611					

Scale items	Factors				AVE	CR
	Immersive Experience	Ethno-cultural Acculturation	Passion & Excitement	Self Congruence		
I prefer my luxury-travel brands as they are reliable and consistent with my values. (ECA1)		0.934			.742	.919
I opt for particular luxury-travel brands which embed and reflect local culture, traditions, festivals and ethnicity (ECA2)		0.908				
I prefer my luxury-travel brands as they promote social interaction (ECA3)		0.881				
I prefer my luxury-travel brands as they aim to induce consciousness and change beliefs, attitudes and behaviors (ECA4)		0.705				
My relationship with my luxury-travel brand has been thrilling (PE1)			0.868		.658	.884
My relationship with my luxury-travel brand has been exciting (PE2)			0.864			
I am passionate about my luxury - travel brands (PE3)			0.787			
I spend a lot of my discretionary time thinking about my luxury-travel brands (PE4) this brand			0.718			
My luxury-travel brand says a lot about the kind of person I would like to be (SA1)				0.883	.602	.856
Association with my luxury-travel brands lets me be a part of a shared community of like-minded consumers (SA2)				0.826		
My luxury-travel brands fit well with my current stage/ status of life (SA3)				0.733		
My luxury-travel brands connect with the part of me that really makes me going (SA4)				0.641		
Determinant of correlation		0.008				
Total variance explained		67.673				
KMO		0.864				
Barlett's Test of Sphericity	Chi-square	909.817				
	df	189				
	Sig.	.000				
Cronbach's α		.897				
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.						
a. Rotation converged in 9 iterations.						

Full-information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) was used for Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The items were limited to load on its pre-specified factors and the factors were allowed to correlate freely. All 18 scale items were retained in CFA.

The goodness of fit indices are presented in Table-2. The chi-square for this model was 672.831 (df=191, p=0.00). The chi-square statistic is sensitive to sample size, therefore, the following fit indices were also considered: Normed Fit Index (NFI) (0.929), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) (0.976), Incremental Fit Index (IFI) (0.962), the Tucker-Lewis Fit Index (TLI) (0.971), RMSEA (< 0.04). All these indexes presented acceptable values. Convergent validity was established on the basis of standardized loadings (average loading was 0.772), composite reliability > 0.70 (Bagozzi, 1980) and average variance extracted > 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Evidence of discriminant validity is suggested by the fact that the constructs' inter-correlations estimates are significantly different from 1; and the shared variances between any two constructs (i.e., the square of their correlation) are lower than their extracted variances (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; MacKenzie et al., 2009). The standardised model was displayed in Figure-1.

Table 2. CFA results (Phase-I Study)

Chi-square	df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	IFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	AVE (for all 4 factors)	CR (for all 4 factors)
672.831	191	.959	.957	.929	.962	.976	.971	.031	> 0.50	> 0.70

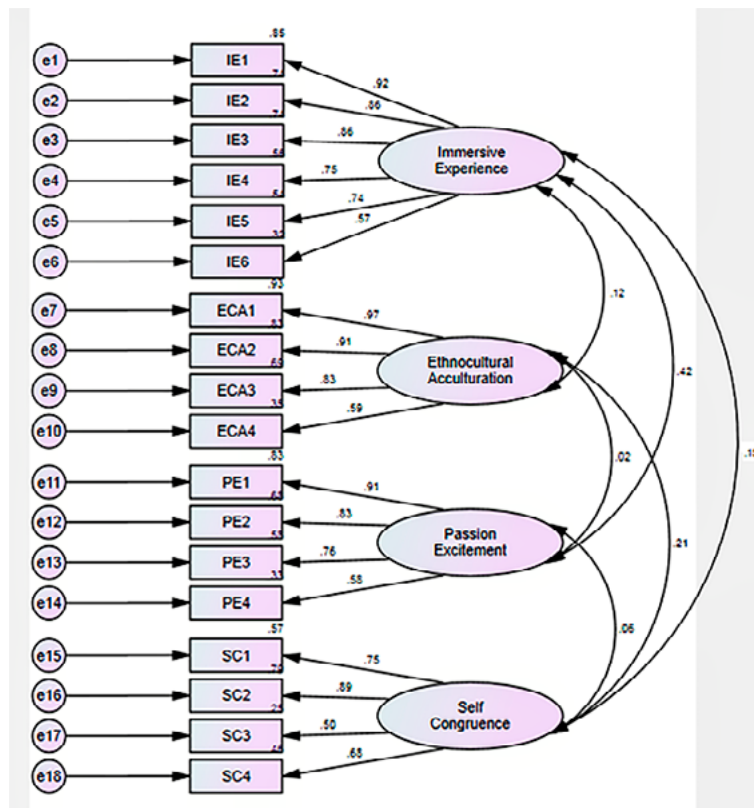


Figure 1. Standardised Model (First-order from Phase-I Study)

Fig. 1 depicts the standardized regression weights of each item on the respective construct. Results reflect the unidimensionality and internal consistency of the measures.

The TravelLux brand relationship instrument was tested for second-order factor to understand the performance of the instrument at a higher order level (Nobre and Simoes, 2019; Dabholkar et al., 1996). The measurement model (Figure-2) retained the four first-order factors with all the scale items having significant loading value. The goodness of fit indices are presented in Table-3. The chi-square for this model was 701.932 (df=201, p=0.00). The chi-square statistic is sensitive to sample size, therefore, the following fit indices were also considered: Goodness-of Fit Index (GFI) 0.943, Normed Fit Index (NFI) (0.933), Adjusted Goodness-of Fit Index (AGFI) 0.940, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) (0.969), Incremental Fit Index (IFI) (0.951), the Tucker-Lewis Fit Index (TLI) (0.962), RMSEA (< 0.04). All these indexes presented acceptable values. Immersive experience, the first-order factor, had a factor loading of .94 in the higher order model. Similarly, ethno-cultural acculturation scored .82, passion & excitement scored .91 and self-congruence had a factor loading of .85. The results indicated that the TravelLux brand relationship instrument might be represented with four dimensions, which are used by the travelers to explain their relationships with luxury-travel brands. The dimensions are indicative of hedonic relationship based on experience, acculturation, engaged passion, scope of excitement and self-congruence.

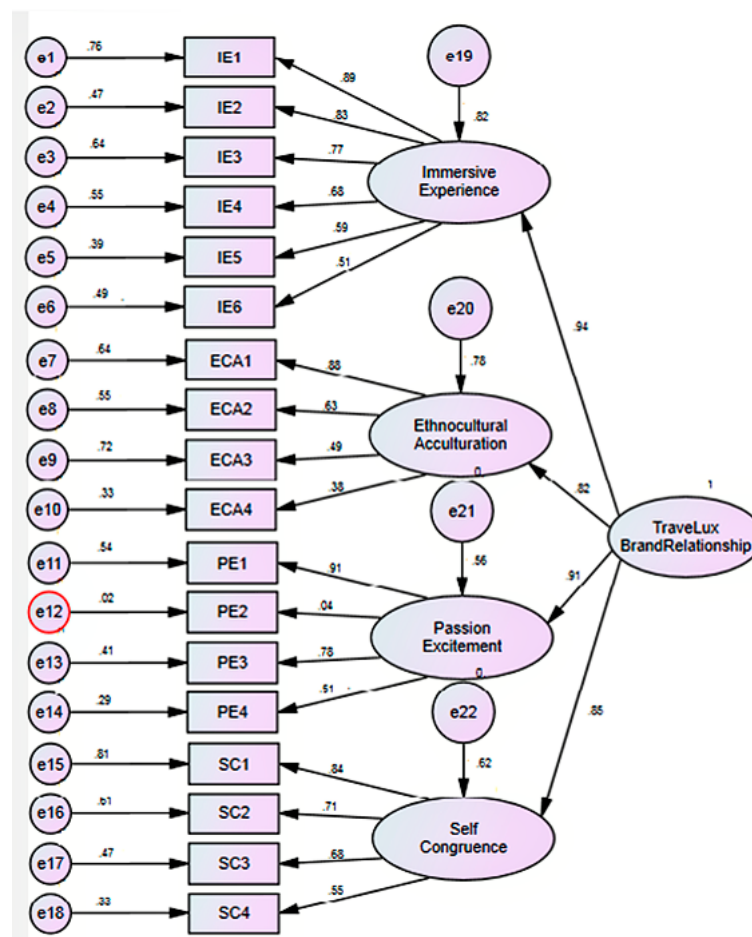


Figure 2. TravelLux Brand Relationship – Higher Order Model

Table 3. CFA results for second-order factors

Chi-square	df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	IFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	AVE (for all 4 factors)	CR (for all 4 factors)
701.932	201	.943	.940	.933	.951	.969	.962	.028	> 0.50	> 0.70

The second phase of the study used the validated scale to test it for a different sample group (109 respondents). The object was to assess the robustness of the scale in churning similar factor structure. The identified factor structure was used for the Travelux instrument for factor clustering. Principle Component Analysis (PCA) was used with orthogonal rotation (Varimax) and Kaiser Normalization. KMO result (.892) confirmed sample adequacy. The four-factor structure allowed significant loading for all the identified scale items with total variance explained as 68.91%. (Table-4). The internal consistency of the scale was established with a score of Cronbach’s alpha as .879 (Nunally, 1978).

Table 4. EFA results (Phase-II Study)

Scale items	Factors				AVE	CR
	Immersive Experience	Ethno-cultural Acculturation	Passion & Excitement	Self Congruence		
Luxury-travel brands explains my preferences in life (IE1)	0.854				.677	.926
When I interact with my luxury-travel brand, I forget everything else around me (IE2)	0.837					
Time flies when I am interacting with my luxury-travel brand of choice (IE3)	0.823					
I feel satisfied while interacting intensely with my luxury-travel brand (IE4)	0.819					
When interacting with my luxury-travel brand, it is difficult to detach myself (IE5)	0.817					
My luxury-travel brands galvanise mood-change pleasantly (IE6)	0.789					
I prefer my luxury-travel brands as they are reliable and consistent with my values. (ECA1)		0.893			.769	.930
I opt for particular luxury-travel brands which embed and reflect local culture, traditions, festivals and ethnicity (ECA2)		0.887				
I prefer my luxury-travel brands as they promote social interaction (ECA3)		0.873				
I prefer my luxury-travel brands as they aim to induce consciousness and change beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (ECA4)		0.856				

Scale items	Factors				AVE	CR
	Immersive Experience	Ethno-cultural Acculturation	Passion & Excitement	Self Congruence		
My relationship with my luxury-travel brand has been thrilling (PE1)			0.952		.814	.945
My relationship with my luxury-travel brand has been exciting (PE2)			0.919			
I am passionate about my luxury-travel brands (PE3)			0.892			
I spend a lot of my discretionary time thinking about my luxury-travel brands (PE4)			0.843			
My luxury-travel brand says a lot about the kind of person I would like to be (SA1)				0.908	.726	.913
Association with my luxury-travel brands lets me be a part of a shared community of like-minded consumers (SA2)				0.887		
My luxury-travel brands fit well with my current stage/ status of life (SA3)				0.811		
My luxury-travel brands connect with the part of me that really makes me going (SA4)				0.799		
Determinant of correlation			0.005			
Total variance explained			68.908			
KMO			0.892			
Barlett's Test of Sphericity	Chi-square	412.709				
	df	98				
	Sig.	.000				
Cronbach's α			.879			

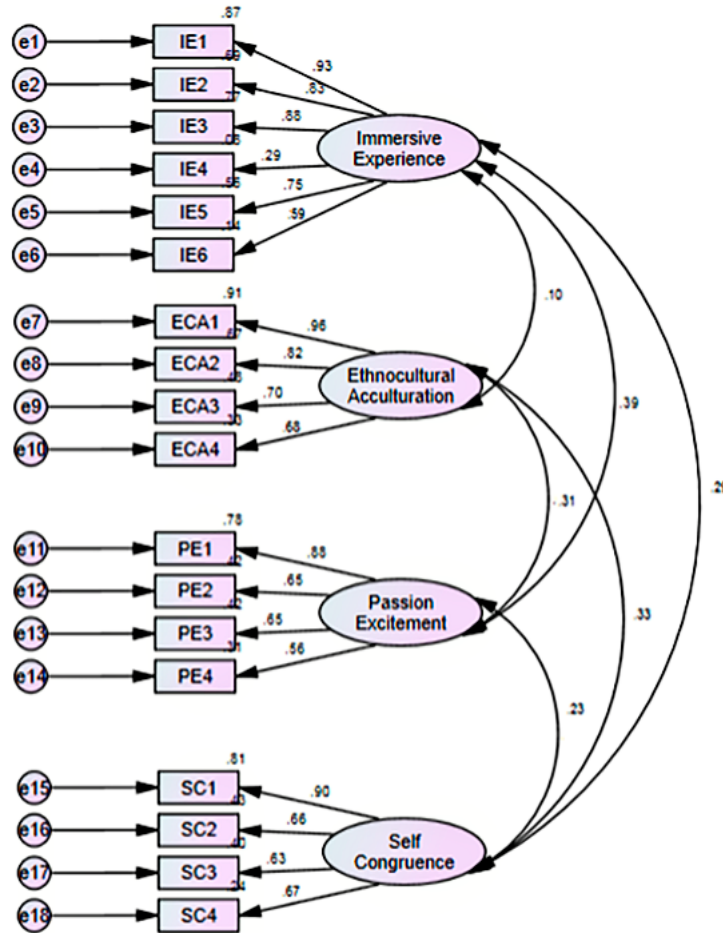
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 9 iterations.

PCA was followed by CFA. The first-order factors (4) were allowed to correlate freely. The goodness-of-fit indices were found to be acceptable (Table-5): Goodness-of Fit Index (GFI) 0.921, Adjusted Goodness-of Fit Index (AGFI) 0.918, Normed Fit Index (NFI) (0.934), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) (0.947), Incremental Fit Index (IFI) (0.943) and the Tucker-Lewis Fit Index (TLI) (0.923). The RMSEA value was found to be <.40 (0.37). The factor loadings for the four first-order factors established unidimensionality of the scale. Convergent validity was found as the average factor loading was >.700 while composite reliability > 0.70 (Bagozzi, 1980) and variance extracted > 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) were also found significant.

Table 5. CFA results for second-order factors

Chi-square	df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	IFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	AVE (for all 4 factors)	CR (for all 4 factors)
349.089	97	.921	.918	.934	.943	.947	.923	.037	> 0.50	> 0.70



Figur 3. Model-2 (Phase-II Study)

Evidence of discriminant validity was shown by constructs' inter-correlations estimates significantly different from 1 (Table-6); and the shared variances between any two constructs being lower than their extracted variances (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The last part of the study involved comparison of the base-line model (generated from the first phase of the study) with Model-2 (generated from the second phase of the study) with regard to invariance test and equality constraints. Therefore, both the sample groups must be analyzed simultaneously to obtain efficient estimates (Bentler, 2005; Joreskog and Sorbom, 1996a). The pattern of fixed and free parameters nonetheless remains consistent with the base-line model specification for each group.

Partial measurement invariance (Byrne et al., 1989) was deployed to address the issue of variability of measuring instrument across multiple groups. AMOS Graphics was used for the purpose. We compared the difference in the χ^2 between the two measurement models by testing the model with free parameters in each group against a fully constrained model. The unconstrained model (baseline model) was tested against the models obtained in Phase-I and Phase-II studies and the Chi square difference was found insignificant which allowed the researcher to reject the null hypothesis on invariance across the two samples ($\Delta\chi^2 = 43.29$, $p = .11$).

Table 6. Correlation results

Factors		Immersive Experience	Ethno-Cultural Acculturation	Passion & Excitement	Self Congruence
Immersive Experience	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
Ethno-Cultural Acculturation	Pearson Correlation	.522**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001			
Passion & Excitement	Pearson Correlation	.442**	.232**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.001		
Self Congruence	Pearson Correlation	.316**	.578**	.523**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); N=109

Conclusion

The study focused on unravelling the mystery and myth associated with luxury-travel and its continuous evolvement into an accessible mode of travel and experience. Travelers (tourists) are perceiving luxury travel as an aspirational experience encapsulated within the realm of emotional exclusivity and embedded uniqueness. The frequency and the gamut of interaction between traveler and luxury travel brands have increased as the luxury travel brands continue to be affordable and accessible. The dynamism of tourist relationship with luxury travel brands, therefore, require re-exploration. The existing body of literature postulates luxury consumption in the context of travel motives (Nobre and Simoes, 2019; Brandao and Rodrigues, 2019; Berrozpe et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2017; Kaufman et al., 2016; Huang and Cai, 2015 etc.). A few studies were attempted to link consumer-based brand equity with the consumption of luxury brands (Lu et al., 2015; Han et al., 2015 etc.) but remained inconclusive in the context of travel, tourism and hospitality industry. The study conducted by Nobre and Simoes (2019) conceptualized a NewLux Brand Relationship construct which primarily addressed the dimensions of relationship between the consumers and luxury brands offered by the fashion, accessory and durable industry. This study, therefore, can be considered as an expansion of the neo-luxury consumption practice with reference to the service industry, arguably, more complex behaviourally. The major contribution of this study relates to the development of the TravelLux brand relationship instrument conceptualized to capture the notions of luxury consumption with respect to the travel, tourism and hospitality industry. While designing the instrument the researcher took into consideration the conventional theory of consumer-brand relationship (Fournier, 1998, Fletcher et al., 1999), brand-relationship quality (Aaker et al., 2004) and luxury brand relationship (Heine, Phan, 2011).

The study reinforced the theory of subjective & hedonic consumption associated with experiential traveling (Bian and Forsythe, 2012; Kapferer, 2014 and Vickers and Renand, 2003) and the self-connection with the luxury-travel brand. The study revealed subjective nature of luxury consumption as ethno-cultural symbolism was found to be emerged as brand meaning and the acculturation process emphasized on brand affinity. The hedonic manifestations

were noted as travelers expressed their passion and excitement to be associated with the luxury-travel brands, which, they believed, reflected their inherent urge to enter into a relationship on the basis of perceived utility-thrill and perceived snob value. The self-connection nature of the instrument connected the bouquet of perceived socioemotional gratification, self-identification and self-actualization as the gelling agent that governed the travelers with the luxury-travel brands. The study revealed a four dimensional construct for the Travelux instrument, namely, 'immersive experience', 'ethno-cultural acculturation', 'passion & excitement' and 'self congruence'.

Immersive experience entails the uninhibited cognitive attachment of the traveler with the luxury-travel brands. The intense relationship between the traveler (consumer) and the luxury-travel brands was reflected in the scale items ('Time flies when I am interacting with my luxury-travel brand of choice'; 'When interacting with my luxury-travel brand, it is difficult to detach myself' and 'My luxury-travel brands galvanise mood-change pleasantly') and emphasized the nature aspirational values that drive this relationship. Cultural symbolism had been empirically identified to impart brand meaning (Torelli et al., 2012) and conceptualised as perceived consensus about the degree to which the brand symbolizes the abstract image of a certain cultural group. The construct of ethno-cultural acculturation captured the concept of cultural symbolism and the inherent intent of traveler, with motive of luxury consumption, to adopt and remained submerged in the brand's cultural and ethnic fabric. The absorption of ethno-cultural essence as 'traveler - luxury-brand linkage' was reflected in the scale items ('I opt for particular luxury-travel brands which embed and reflect local culture, traditions, festivals and ethnicity' and 'I prefer my luxury-travel brands as they aim to induce consciousness and change beliefs, attitudes and behaviours'). Luxury consumption reflected the cultural and ethnic assimilation and enrichment through the travel brands. Passion instills excitement when it comes to luxury consumption in the context of travel behaviour ('My relationship with my luxury-travel brand has been exciting' and "I am passionate about my luxury-travel brands'). The findings supported the aspect of mass-consumed luxury brands possessing the ability to induce passion and excitement in the interactive process with the consumer (Nobre, 2015; Nobre, Simoes, 2019). The retained passion & excitement scale items links luxury travel to the more aspirational experience and subjective evocation that luxury-travel brands might propagate.

Hence, in the new-luxury context, building brand identities needs to expand beyond the traditional characteristics of luxury products. Brands must be perceived as a trustworthy partner able of keeping passionate, enthusiastic and challenging relationships with consumers, thus providing them with enriching affective experiences. The dimension of self congruence reflected the theory that posited that consumers responded more positively to brands that were aligned with their global of self-concept (Sirgy, 1982), thus predicting consumers' attitudes and purchase intention (Aaker, 1999; Hong, Zinkhan, 1995). Retained scale items, namely, 'Association with my luxury-travel brands lets me be a part of a shared community of like-minded consumers', conveyed the meaning of self-expression, while items, namely, 'My luxury-travel brand says a lot about the kind of person I would like to be' and 'My luxury-travel brands fit well with my current stage/ status of life' underlined the aspirational self of the travelers that desired to connected with their luxury-travel brands. This highlighted the process of value co-creation (Merz et al., 2018) on the basis of perceived brand value (Payne et al., 2009). The consumption of luxury-travel products, thus, were not a bundle of tangible benefits embedded in the intangible abstraction, but, an overall reflection of aspirational urge of travelers manifested through attitudes and behaviours.

The findings of the study further re-established the transition of luxury concept based on product attributes and perceived social images to an aspirational immersive experience banked on intimate and intensive subjective encounters. The travel, tourism and hospitality sector, being an integral part of service markets, might just provide the ideal kind of platform to experiment with luxury-travel brands with scope for personalization to infuse greater sense of self congruence.

The study has implications for the brand designers and the brand marketers too. In the travel, tourism and hospitality market the emergence of 'experience designers' convey the emphasis that goes to brand creation. Contemporary luxury-travel brands have widened its scope of consumption but the perennial essence of cultural symbolism, self-reflection, aristocracy and elitism have remained embedded. The TravelLux Brand Relationship instrument offers a framework for the brand managers to assess the nature and intensity of relationship between traveler and luxury brands. This instrument will also assist in conceptualizing brand differentiators and design brand communications. The scale can also identify the specific brand connectors, namely, cultural symbolism, immersive experience, psycho-somatic behaviours, brand meaning, etc., given the nature of travel and tourism products to be marketed.

The study was limited to three specific tourist destinations of India and was cross-sectional in nature. Non-probabilistic sampling technique was used to capture the experiential nature of the study. Therefore, the study cannot be generalized over a wider geographical and socio-demographical spread. Consumer-brand relationships are expected to evolve over time and hence the dimensional re-orientations are required.

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