UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

SAMINT-MILI 2011
Master's Thesis 30 credits
June 2020

Understanding the design and delivery of customer experience from multiple perspectives

A case study within luxury travel industry

Gurruraj Anantharramu
Pascal David Kaiser

Master's Programme in Industrial Management and Innovation

Masterprogram i industriell ledning och innovation

UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Faculty of Science and Technology

Visiting address:
Ångströmlaboratoriet
Lägerhyddsvägen 1
House 4, Level 0

Postal address:
Box 536
751 21 Uppsala

Telephone:
+46 (0)18 – 471 30 03

Telefax:
+46 (0)18 – 471 30 00

Web page:
http://www.teknik.uu.se/student-en/

Abstract

Understanding the design and delivery of customer experience from multiple perspectives - A case study within luxury travel industry

Gurruraj Anantharramu and Pascal David Kaiser

Staging experiences and providing optimal customer experience has become the new battlefield within the marketing segment, since the introduction of experience economy. The modern customer has multiple devices, channels and touchpoints to interact with the organization and with rapidly changing digital technology, where the product or service information are available online 24/7, he/ she is in-charge of his/ her own experiences. This multitude of options pose great challenges for the organization to understand customer needs, expectations, and behavior, and predict and manage customer experience. Despite numerous studies and streams of literature, several authors, scholars, and practitioners have developed fragmented frameworks and models that partially addresses this multidimensional construct of customer experience. Furthermore, things get complicated when these fragmented constructs are used by the luxury travel industry to design, develop, and manage customer experience.

Therefore, in order to address this broad concept and provide the organization with a holistic framework that can be leveraged for providing customer experience, we conducted a qualitative multi-case study, that included 14 semi-structured interviews from various actors within the supply-chain of the luxury travel industry. Using thematic analysis, the rich empirical data from the interviews were analyzed and transformed into sub-themes and themes. Keeping these themes as the foundation, we propose an integrated conceptual model that captures a firm integrating customer and co-creation perspectives to provide customer experience. This integrated model consists of five building blocks, Organizational Factors, Design, Delivery and Management of customer experience, Co-Creation, Customer Experience Insights / Metrics and Moderating Factors, that coupled together should influence customer experience. Using this conceptual model, we analyzed how different actors within the supply-chain provide customer experience. Subsequently, we also develop a customer journey map (from a customer perspective) consisting of customer needs, channels, and touchpoints to understand the critical touchpoint that act as the primary contributors for providing customer experience. And finally, we highlight the driving factors and barriers for providing customer experience within luxury travel industry.

Keywords: Experience Economy, Customer Experience, Customer Journey, Touchpoints, Co-creation, Customer, Luxury Travel Industry, Supply-Chain

Supervisor: Carl-Oscar Lawaczeck
Subject reader: David Sköld
Examiner: Åse Linné
SAMINT-MILI 2011
Printed by: Uppsala Universitet

Popular science summary

In today's context, in order for an organization to survive, differentiate themselves and compete within the marketplace, having an innovative product or service that is available at a low price or one-size-fit-all store catering for all type of customers will not suffice. The evolving technology, growing changes in e-commerce, immersive brick-and-mortar stores, availability of internet and smartphones are all transforming the way a customer interacts with an organization's product or service. With the product or service information, features, imager, specifications, quality care details, prices, etc., readily available online, customers have the flexibility to compare, discuss and provide feedback. Furthermore, with the customer being more informed, aware and knowledgeable, they are empowered to create their own experience and have a dialog with the organization with the expectation that the latter is already aware of their personalized needs. This complex dynamic of the consumer market, constantly changing needs, expectations and behaviors of the customer and the multiple options that they have at their disposal creates a challenge for the organization to predict and manage customer experience throughout the complete purchase cycle.

In order for an organization to address this challenge, they first should understand their target audience, their customer needs, wants and expectations, their complete shopping experience, i.e., from searching of product or service to buying and consuming to post-service of a product or service and, the channels that the customer use to interact with the organization. Complementing this, the organization also should align its organization strategy, business model, value-proposition, organization culture, leadership, employee, internal processes and technology to meet customer requirements and design, deliver and manage customer experience throughout the purchase cycle. An integrated, holistic model that includes the perspective of the customer, the organization and how they both can collaboratively create value and experience is needed to address the above challenges. However, currently, organizations are using fragment models as tools to assess their current state of customer experience.

As a part of this study, we are proposing this integrated conceptual model for the customer experience that encompasses the different components an organization needs to understand and align along with other variables into five different building blocks, i.e., Organizational Factors, Design, Delivery and Management of customer experience, Co-Creation, Customer Experience Insights/ Metrics and Moderating Factors. An organization should consider these building blocks for providing a seamless, personalized experience throughout the customer journey. In order to arrive at this integrated model, we leveraged the insights from various actors within the luxury travel segment, understood how each actor provides customer experience and what critical touchpoints influence customer experience. Just because we have used the luxury travel segment to understand this phenomenon, it does not mean that this model is designed and customized to cater to a particular industry. It is a comprehensive integrated conceptual model that can be used as an assessment tool and a source of inspiration by an organization in any segment to develop a cohesive organization strategy that is customer-centric and design, deliver and manage CX that will increase customer loyalty and engagement.

Foreword

This master thesis was performed as the final step for accomplishing the Master Program in Industrial Management and Innovation at Uppsala University, Sweden in co-operation with OceanSky AB during spring 2020. The authors of this thesis functioned in a collaborative mode, where the work throughout the different stages within the thesis was equally distributed between the authors. All the sections and chapters in the document were reviewed individually and feedback / comments were implemented based on mutual discussion and agreement.

We want to take this opportunity to express our gratitude and appreciation to all those who have guided and supported us throughout the complete research process.

Firstly, a special thanks to OceanSky AB CEO, Carl-Oscar Lawaczeck and his team for their knowledge, insights, valuable network and experience. Without their guidance and willingness to share their network, getting contacts and connections within the luxury travel industry to be a part of our research would have been close to impossible. We would also like to thank all the participants from various luxury travel companies who were a part of our interviews for their time, valuable insights and interesting discussions that contributed to our study.

Secondly, we would like to thank all the professors within the MILI department, in particular, a special thanks and mention to our subject reader David Sköld, who gave us great insights, thought-provoking impulses, constructive criticism, freedom and guided us throughout the thesis.

Finally, a shout out to our family and friends for providing constant support in every phase of the thesis, especially during the tough times.

Gurruraj Anantharramu & Pascal David Kaiser

Uppsala, 06th June 2020

Content

List of Figures

List of Tables

Abbreviations

4P's	Product, Price, Place and Promotion
AB	Aktiebolag (Swedish for Joint-stock company)
AI	Artificial Intelligence
B2B	Business to Business
B2C	Business to Customer
CAGR	Compound Annual Growth Rate
CEF	Customer Experience Framework
CEM	Customer Experience Management
CEO	Chief executive officer
CES	Customer Effort Score
CLV	Customer Lifetime Value
COO	Chief Operating Officer
COVID19	Corona Virus 2019
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
CX	Customer Experience
DMC	Destination Management Companies
EHL	Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne (Lausanne hotel school)
EXQ	Customer Experience Quality
FIT	Fully Independent Travelers
FOMO	Fear-Of-Missing-Out
GDP	Gross domestic product

HAV	Hybrid Air Vehicle Ltd.
HNW	High-Net Worth
HR	Human resource
IT	Information technology
KPIs	Key-Performance Indicators
MICE	Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions
MILI	Masterprogram i industriell ledning och innovation
NPS	Net-Promoter Score
OEM	Original Equipment Manufacturer
PA	Personal Assistant
PCE	Personal Consumption Expenditures
POMP	‘Product experience’, ‘Outcome focus’, ‘Moments-of-truth’ and ‘Peace-of-mind’
PR	Public Relation
RQ	Research Question
SEM	Strategic Experiential Module
TQM	Total Quality Management
UN	United Nation
USD	United States Dollar
VoC	Voice of Customer
VP	Vice President
WTTC	World Travel & Tourism Council

1. Introduction

This chapter provides a brief background for the research, introduction into the luxury travel industry and the actors involved within the supply-chain, followed by problematization. Considering these aspects, the purpose of research and research questions are defined. Finally, the section concludes with an outline for this thesis.

1.1. Background

According to the world economic forum (2019), “offline experience” and “personal consumption expenditures (PCE)” on experience related services (such as attending spectator events, visiting amusement parks, eating at restaurants, and travelling) has become the new level of personal satisfaction. 78% of the millennials choose to spend money on a desirable experience rather than material goods and, highly value experience and are willing to spend more money and time on them (ibid). Easy accessibility and availability of products and, commoditization have driven down the value of these objects. Researchers in Cornell University, Thomas Gilovich and Amit Kumar conclude that “experiential purchases, such as vacations, concerts and meals out, tend to bring consumers more enduring happiness than material purchases, such as high – end clothing, jewelry and electronic gadgets” (Yaffe, Moose and Marquardt, 2019). So, the experience cannot be sold independently to stage a memory, but, instead, it has to be coupled and complemented with services and goods. However, one cannot rule out the fact that material purchases still brings about a different kind of experience to an individual that is focused on attitudinal outcomes, i.e., excitement, surprise and the imagined delight that an object or material brings. Other researchers go on to add that experiences create a feeling of happiness, generates positive reinterpretation, part of one’s identity (a ‘fear of missing out’ - FOMO) and also foster social relationships and inclusions (Yaffe, Moose and Marquardt, 2019).

Pine and Gilmore (1998) were the first to coin the term “Experience Economy” and introduced this concepts more than two decades ago. The authors presented the fourth economic offering (the other three economic offerings being commodity, goods and services) that was mostly unrecognized when the concept was introduced. The authors go on to state that “experience is not an amorphous construct; it is as real an offering as any service, good, or commodity” (ibid). In the current situation, the world is saturated with similar products and services and in order for a business to differentiate itself from its competitors and generate value for the customers, there is a need to move away from just goods and services mentality (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). In addition to this, in today’s service economy, most businesses wrap experience around the services they offer and use the traditional marketing channels (, i.e., TV, radio, newspapers) to sell them. There is a need for businesses to transition from either selling goods and services to staging experience that is memorable in order to create tangible values that can be achieved by treating services as the stage, and goods as the props (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). Pine and Gilmore (2011), also highlight that experience economy concept has taken roots in other areas such as experiential marketing, customer experience management (CEM), and digital experience and, like goods and services, experiences also have their distinct qualities and characteristics. According to the authors, the experience can be categorized based on two dimensions, which are customer participation and connection. These dimensions can further be subdivided or sorted into four different categories, i.e., Entertainment, Esthetics, Educational and Escapist - referred as “The Four Realms of an Experience”. Many firms are trying to find solutions to address this new marketing paradigm, by creating products, services, or value propositions that stages memorable experiences around these four realms. The challenge that the firms are facing is to provide an optimal experience to their customers that will increase customer loyalty (more repeat customer), increase their willingness to pay and also provide a competitive advantage within the marketplace.

1.2. High-end luxury travel industry

The luxury travel industry is a small segment of the entire travel industry and "covers most desirable and premium experience in terms of luxurious accommodations, convenient transport facilities, and authentic travel experience" (Kadam and Deshmukh, 2019). The industry had a market size of $891 billion in 2018 and is expected to grow with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.9% up to $1,614 billion during the period from 2019 to 2026 (Kadam and Deshmukh, 2019). Overall only 0.9 % of all adults in 2019 belong to high net worth (HNW) individuals (, i.e., USD millionaires). The aggregate wealth of these HNW individuals has grown four-fold from 2000 to 2019, i.e., $39.6 trillion to $158.3 trillion, and their share of global wealth has increased from 39 % to 44 % over the same period (Lluberas and Shorrocks, 2019). Some of the unique products or services offered to the customers in this segment include, renting a private island, North Pole expedition using airships, trip to Antarctica using private jets, private adventures and leisure in Norway or World Tour using private planes.

The luxury travel industry offers many different experiences to people who can afford such costly trips. There are many reasons for making such an expensive journey and getting an outstanding experience might be the obvious one. Nevertheless, one could argue that a memorable experience can be gained without paying too much money as well, for example, encountering a tiger in the bushes and fearing death. However, customers within this segment value the 'normality' where the travelers want to be themselves and want to be in their comfort zone (Caballero, 2019).

Isadore Sharp, Founder, Chairman & CEO, Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts, states that "Luxury, by definition, means something that appears to be the best of whatever it represents. It is a word that raises people's expectations, whether talking about clothing for women or locations for people to live […] You pay for recognition. However, probably the most important thing it represents is delivery on the promise of the brand's name" (EHL, 2020). With the evolving needs of modern customers and the rise in global wealth, the traditional definition of luxury has been challenged. According to EHL (2020), world's No. 1 hospitality management school, a new definition of luxury travel has emerged, which they refer to as "5C's of luxury travel,", i.e., culture, cuisine, community, content and customization, a principle that engages customers physically and emotionally before, during and post the travel experience.

However, luxury traveling is no more associated with glamour, excess, opulence accommodation, or crystal chandelier. Carmen Caballero (2019), founder of Exotik Traveler, a luxury travel consultancy firm, states that premium tourists are increasingly asking for more sustainable ways of traveling, destinations (like hotels/ accommodations), and suppliers. A report from Euromonitor International (2018) mentions that with the increase in global wealth, consumers can financially afford luxury travel. While this does bring considerable benefits to the industry, it also puts increasing pressure on the local communities and natural habitats, thus coxing the industry to focus on sustainable luxury travel. Similar thoughts are echoed by Agoda (2019), a big online search engine for travel, where customers want to make more eco-friendly travel choices in the next decade.

Other micro-trends include increased personalization of trips in order to create unique experiences and emotions. Tourism 4.0 (Starc Peceny et al., 2019), a new paradigm, that unlocks innovation in tourism by leveraging the enabling technologies of Industry 4.0 such as AI, Big Data, Blockchain, Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality to transform the entire tourism sector. The concept is to establish a collaborative ecosystem of local authorities, local communities, government, and tour operators, where tourism experience is co-created both in the physical and digital world. The increasing interest in education throughout traveling indicates another trend, where travelers want to gain knowledge about the planet, other culture's experiences, and discover the history of places and cultures.

In order to make luxury travel experience reality to the customers, the industry relies on many stakeholders to stage the experience. Song et al. (2013), provides a typology of actors involved within the tourism industry, which he refers to as nodes within the tourism value chain, who are collaborating, co-creating and co-delivering value to the customers while generating profits. These actors within the value chain are categorized into four levels, i.e., planner or designer of basic tourism products (may be operated by the government), supplier of these tourism products and services, tourism intermediaries, and finally, the customers or tourists.

Keeping Song et al. typology as the foundation and based on our research and understanding, we draw our supply chain network for the luxury travel industry that consists of several key players (see Figure 1 below). Tourism board and government organization, which set regulations for other players within the industry. A product owner or service owner, offering several products or service proposition in the form of a flight or an airship or adventure to a certain location or offering hotels and restaurants. A tour operator or cruise operator, design itineraries, offering either the whole or partial journey, liaising with suppliers and product owners. A travel agent is selling luxury experiences, ensuring that the customers go to the right places and use the right services. A travel designer, a new breed of travel consultants who maintain deep personal relationships with the customers, take care of the customer's complete travel portfolio curates and develop unique experience end-to-end. Furthermore, destination management companies (DMCs), that specializes in offering tours and logistics for a particular destination. DMCs generally sell their services to other actors within the supply chain and, finally, the customer or tourist, an important actor within the whole value chain, where the rest of the actors try to meet his/ her needs and wants.

Outside of the supply chain, supporting these actors are the travel associations, clubs, or memberships, where the actors can leverage these platforms to build networks and partnerships and collaborate with other actors within the supply-chain.

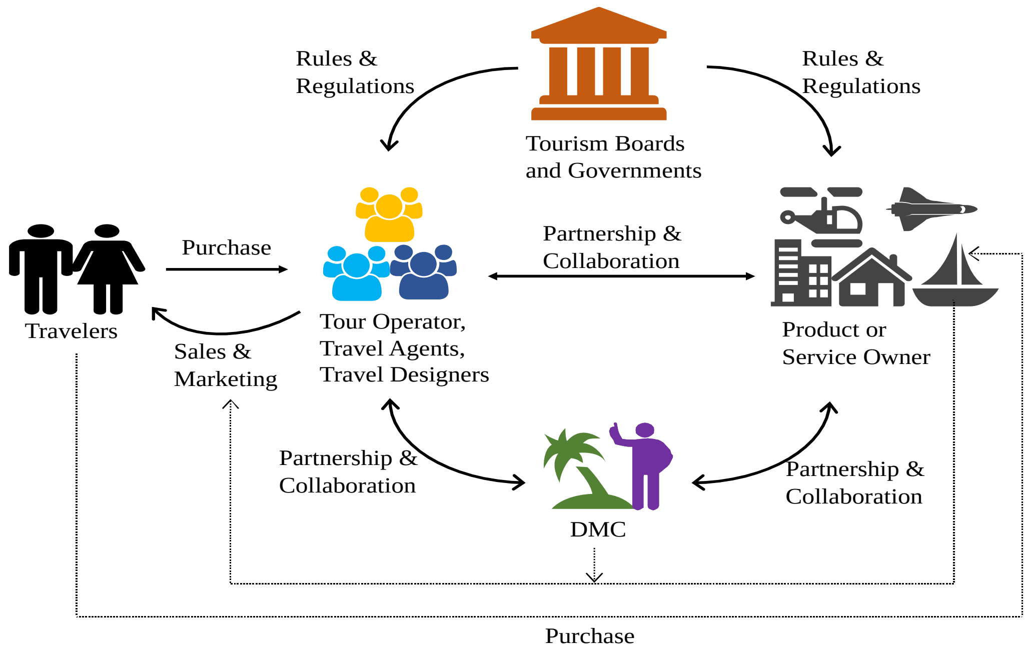


Figure 1: Supply-chain of the luxury travel industry

While different actors within the value chain co-create and co-deliver use-value to the customer, conflicts between these actors may result in a negative effect on customer experience (CX), reduced profit margins, and also disrupted the sustainability of the luxury travel industry. Furthermore, this complex value chain poses other challenges to the product/ service owners and DMCs, raises questions such as, how can other remaining actors ensure that the luxury product or service offering experience is seamless designed and delivered to their customer? How can the actors ensure that they reduce uncertainty in CX delivery and provide a personalized experience that is memorable? What kind of governance level or model can the product/ service owners and DMCs adopt for their partner networks and the level of influence they can have on them? All these questions need to be addressed throughout the customer journey in order to provide a robust and memorable CX.

Millennials choosing to spend money on experience and fast-paced growth of HNW individuals are transforming the luxury travel industry. Furthermore, with roles and functions of several actors within the industry overlapping and distinction between the actors getting blurred. For example, a product owner is also providing adventures and acting as DMC or product owner, also playing a role of a tour operator. The challenges that all the actors within the value chain are faced with are achieving customer intimacy, passion, commitment, and building long-term brand loyalty with their target groups. In this master thesis, we look at different actors in the supply-chain and their companies within the luxury travel industry offering adventurous travel. These companies provide luxury travel experience or adventures, offering a unique experience to customers, which raises particular interest from industry as well as an academic perspective. A thorough process or constructor framework needs to be developed and adopted by an organization in order to design, deliver, and manage CX throughout the different touchpoints within the customer journey. This leads us to the next part, where we further highlight the problems within the academia that is addressed in the section problem statement.

1.3. Problem Statement

There have been several authors and researchers who have looked at CX both from qualitative and quantitative methods. Even though there are models, frameworks, or constructs on CX which evolved over a period, they all seem to be fragmented and provide a limited picture. We certainly see a gap within the literature where there is no integrated model, framework, or construct that includes design, delivery, and management of CX from different perspectives, i.e., firm, customer, and co-creation. Furthermore, things get complicated if we are trying to leverage these fragmented theories to understand and explore CX within the luxury travel industry. Also, as outlined in the background, customers within the luxury travel industry have transformed the perception from being excess and opulent to new directions of more sustainable travels, experiences, and eco-friendly options. This emerging trend, coupled with technological innovation and increased exposure of information on the various digital platforms that can be tapped by influencers, may also pose a challenge to product owners or tour operators or other actors involved within the luxury travel industry. Unless the actors in the supply-chain understand their customer needs, wants and expectations and also align their organization's strategy, business models, and value-proposition towards being more customer-centric. It is difficult for the actors to provide an experience that is unique, personalized, and memorable, with a sense of exclusivity and indulgence that helps in building customer brand loyalty.

As a part of the master thesis, we intend to review and address the above challenges posed to the luxury travel industry by drawing insights from several companies operating in this segment. These companies that represent one of the actors within the supply-chain provide high-end experiential luxury travel and adventures that are customized and personalized to each customer. While the products and services offered by these companies are unique and high-valued (from a monetary standpoint), it is interesting to understand how they position themselves within the market, communicate with their target customers, and stimulate and lure their customer by selling an imagination or adventure that is novel. Furthermore, as these business propositions are not available through channels such as TripAdvisor, Bookings.com or any other mass market intermediaries (due to their high monetary value). And the customers within the luxury travel segment always looking for something unique, authentic, sustainable and tailor-made experiences, traditional marketing approaches or techniques (such as 4P's or print, broadcasting, direct email or telemarketing) cannot be leveraged to target these customer groups, convert leads into opportunities, increase sales, revenue and market footprint. An alternative approach or method is needed to lure customers and provide memorable CX throughout the customer journey starting from the first touchpoint (, i.e., pre-purchase) until their return from the journey and beyond. We want to understand and explore these alternative approaches and critical touchpoints within the journey and how this will impact customer outcomes or the decision-making process.

1.4. Research Purpose

According to the world travel & tourism council (WTTC) in 2018, the total contribution of travel and tourism to global GDP was USD 8811bn (TURNER and JUS, 2019). Based on our analysis (by leveraging data from WTTC and Kadam and Deshmukh, 2019 on the luxury travel industry), we understand that the luxury travel segment contributed 10% to the total contribution. As this industry is very small, complex, and niche, there is a need for a deeper understanding of how different actors within the value-chain provide CX. The subjective nature of luxury and blurred boundary lines between the travel and hospitality industry (Athwal and Athwal, 2017), it becomes imperative for the actors within the luxury travel industry to define a luxury traveler and who belongs to this segment. Furthermore, with the society evolving and more wealth available for certain individuals to spend, it is crucial to identify the target audience (by creating a persona), their behavioral patterns, needs, wants, and expectations. And also, identify or layout strategies that actors within the luxury segment can use to target these specific groups by engaging with them at every touchpoint within the customer journey, ensuring a personalized CX are provided at each of these touchpoints. While the luxury travel industry actors are aware of these nuances, developing a CX strategy that can seamlessly integrate with the marketing strategy seems to be problematic and challenging (Homburg, Jozić and Kuehnl, 2017, p.398).

Today's customer has multiple devices, channels, and touchpoints to connect with the firm, and with social media and technological changes, he/ she probably knows more about the product/ service offering even before it is offered to him. Designing and delivering CX becomes a challenge, and there have been several studies and strands of research in the past that have focused on CX. They can be classified into three streams; 1) research focused on consumer buying behavior through the journey, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and customer engagement, 2) process outcomes such as satisfaction, service quality and their measurement, and 3) customer-centricity in the sense how firms manage CX internal and externally with other stakeholders (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016)

Despite several pieces of literature on CX, researchers and scholars are finding it difficult to define, conceptualize, understand the consequence, and drivers of this broad aspect of CX (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Our intention as a part of this master thesis is to build an integrated CX model (that is currently fragmented) that encompasses different perspectives/ views of CX. Such as from a firm, customer, and co-creation and juxtapose it to the luxury travel industry so that the actors within the luxury travel industry can use it as a tool to assess their CX strategy. In this process of creating an integrated model, we also try to understand and map the complete customer journey process along with several touchpoints for the case study companies, identify critical touchpoints and how these touchpoints influence CX and outcomes.

1.5. Research Questions

Based on this premises outlined above, following are the research questions that we intend to address.

RQ1: How should a firm integrate customer and co-creation perspectives to generate an integrated CX model? Furthermore, how are the components in the integrated model used by the luxury travel industry to design, deliver, and curate CX?

RQ2: What touchpoints or a mix of touchpoints act as the primary contributors of CX within the customer journey for a luxury travel industry?

RQ3: What are the driving factors and barriers for providing CX within the luxury travel industry?

To answer the research questions, the study took place as a multi-case-study where several companies operating within the luxury travel segment (details of these companies can be found in Appendix 1: Case company summary) were interviewed to understand how they operate within this experiential travel segment and provide CX. The rich empirical data obtained from these interviews were converted into abstract level themes. Keeping these themes as a foundation and supplementing with literature on CX, we addressed our first research question, by proposing an integrated conceptual CX model that encompasses different perspectives an organization should consider while designing, delivering and managing CX. Furthermore, leveraging this model, we analyzed how different actors within the supply-chain provide CX and also suggested areas of improvements. In addressing our second research question, we developed a customer journey map from a customer perspective and mapped channels and touchpoints to customer needs. This mapping provides a blue-print for an organization in identifying the critical touchpoints in every phase throughout the customer journey. And finally, a mind-map was also developed based on the response from all the actors to identify the driving factors and barriers for providing CX within luxury travel segment.

1.6. Thesis Structure

Our thesis consists of seven chapters, and the contents of each chapter are illustrated below:

Chapter 1 - Introduction: Provides a brief background for the research, introduction into the luxury travel industry, and the actors involved within the supply chain, followed by problematization, research purpose, and research questions.

Chapter 2 - Theoretical Framework: Starts with a brief introduction to CX, history, and root of CX, followed by the contribution of different research streams to CX, different theoretical frameworks/ models/ constructs on CX, and their evaluations.

Chapter 3 - Methodology: Elaborates on the research method, strategy, and design conducted in this study along with reflection on the methods that include quality criteria such as validity, reliability, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 - Empirical Data: We present the data collected by interviewing key persons within the case companies, interviewee quotes that best represent overall statements, and information from secondary sources.

Chapter 5 - Analysis : A within-case and cross-case analysis of the empirical data is performed to gain familiarity with the data, identify common/divergent patterns or themes that emerge from each of the cases to generate initial theory or construct.

Chapter 6 - Discussion: Key findings from the analysis will be leveraged to addresses our research questions. Academic contributions and limitations of the thesis, followed by suggestions on managerial recommendation, ethical consideration, and future studies are also discussed.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion: Provides a summary of the study undertaken for this master thesis.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, we start by providing a brief introduction to CX, a definition of CX, and how it has evolved over some time. We start with the history and root of CX and how different research streams have contributed to CX. Following on from this, we have accounted for different theoretical frameworks or models or constructs that have been developed by various researchers over some time in order to understand CX and customer experience management. Finally, we have evaluated these frameworks, models, constructs, and the gap within them has been highlighted that we intend to address as a part of this thesis.

2.1. Introduction to Customer Experience

Roughly over the last decade, the term disruption has become synonymous with innovation, where businesses have leveraged these disruptive technological innovations to transform and change their business model, thus creating new trends, demands, and expectations. According to a survey conducted by Gartner (2019), Customer Experience (CX) was one of the top three strategies to invest within the marketing and service sector and to implement an effective enterprise-wide customer experience management strategy. The leaders within the marketing domain are inspiring their employees to empathize with the customer and enhance customer interactions. Furthermore, with CX becoming the new battlefield within the marketing segment, we have seen multiple firms creating new positions such as chief customer officer, chief experience officer, or VP for CX in order to create and manage CX. Growing changes in e-commerce, internet connectivity and availability of smartphones have transformed the customer expectations, where products or services that are available to shop 24/7 are just a click away. Customers use multiple channels and mediums to connect with an organization or firm, resulting in a complex customer journey. Moreover, as all the product or service information, specification, images, prices are all readily available online, social media interactions and peer-to-peer sharing CX and feedback, are all creating opportunities and challenges to the organization. Customer behavior such as showrooming and webrooming, pose a different level of challenge, where one retailing channel is used for planning, consideration and searching and another channel for making the actual purchases (Flavián, Gurrea and Orús, 2020). All these multiple options that the modern customer has at his disposal make it difficult for an organization to predict, control, and manage customer behavior and experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Customers are more informed now than in the past, they are in charge of their experience and expect the organizations to know their individual personalized needs. Immediate resolution of issues was a thing in the past as the expectation now is to have an uptime even during the downtime, in a sense proactively address current and potential future issues or needs that may arise now.

2.2. Customer Experience defined

According to Verhoef et al. (2009), historically, CX was not considered as a separate paradigm. Instead, it was a part of marketing, retailing, and service management literature. However, scholars and practitioners did agree the CX involves multidimensional construct and conceptualizing and generating a tool that can measure all the actors and determinants is going to be problematic. Some notable definitions of CX are as follows:

Schmitt (1999) states that “experiences occur as a result of encountering, undergoing, or living through things. Experiences provide sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational values that replace functional values”.

Gentile, Spiller, and Noci (2007) consider the definition of CX as an evolution of the relationship between company and customer and conceptualize CX as a multidimensional structure composed of different elementary components. The authors state that,

> "the customer experience originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organization, which provoke a reaction. This experience is strictly personal and implies the customer's involvement at different levels. Its evaluation depends on the comparison between a customer's expectations and the stimuli coming from the interaction with the company and its offering in correspondence of the different moments of contact or touchpoints".

Meyer and Schwager (2007) state that CX includes every aspect of what a company offers, i.e., product, services features, advertising, packaging, quality of customer care. In addition to this, CX is also an internal and subjective response of the customer to when they come in direct (occurs while purchasing or using the product or availing a service) or indirect (advertisement, word-of-mouth, news reports, reviews etc…) contact with the company.

Verhoef et al. (2009) defines CX as "holistic in nature and involves the customer's cognitive, affective, emotional, social, and physical responses to the retailer." The authors further add that CX is a total experience that is gained during the journey of several touchpoints along with the pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase situations. These experiences are created by factors that are controlled by the retailer and also elements outside of the retailer's control.

Palmer (2010, p.197) provides an account that given the diversity of CX, it is difficult to provide a unified definition. The author starts by saying that experience from a marketing context has a long history and quotes Abbott (1955 cited in Holbrook (2006, p. 40))

> "…What people really desire are not products, but satisfying experiences. Experiences are attained through activities. In order that activities may be carried out, physical objects for the services of human beings are usually needed. Here lies the connecting link between men's inner world and the outer world of economic activity. People want products because they want the experience which they hope the products will render".

Gartner (2020) defines CX as the "customer's perceptions and related feelings caused by the one-off and cumulative effect of interactions with a supplier's employees, systems, channels, or products."

While there are several definitions and construct to understand CX, few characteristics are common in all these definitions. Firstly, the dimension of contact and touchpoints between the customer and the company. Secondly, the experience is personal, and it engages a customer at different level, i.e.,, physical, rational, emotional, sensorial, and spiritual, in order to create a holistic experience (Schmitt, 1999).

From all these different definitions, we can say that at the core, the CX comes down to how customers feel about interacting with a brand. It is about providing a valuable, useable, and enjoyable experience to every customer, every device, across different touchpoints within a customer journey. CX is about fulfilling expectations set by a firm/ organization and the promise that they make to fulfill as a brand.

2.3. The evolution of customer experience

From the definition of CX, we understand that this is a complex multidimensional construct integrating multiple concepts within marketing literature. In order for us to understand and appreciate how the CX construct has evolved, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) have traced it back in history and state that this concept of CX has evolved over some time starting from the 1960s.

We have summarized the important aspects of this article identifying and recognizing different concepts that contribute towards CX.

2.3.1. Customer buying behavior process model

Various integrated models evolved during the 1960s focusing on the customer decision process, and their buying behaviors (B2C), i.e., from recognizing the needs/ wants to product purchase to evaluation of purchased products (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). On the B2B side, several researchers have discussed the buying behavior of business customers and the role of the buying team. These early customers buying behavior models acted as a foundation for CX, where in today's context, it is referred to as "customer decision journey or customer purchase journey" (ibid).

2.3.2. Customer satisfaction and loyalty

A concept that emerged in the 1970s was used to measure and monitor the reaction of individual customer perception and attitude of experience towards what a firm offers (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Researchers have developed several models or frameworks that can be used to measure customer satisfaction, and one that is popularly used in today's context is the net-promoter score (NPS). Customer satisfaction acts as another building block towards understanding and measuring CX.

2.3.3. Service quality

During the 1980s, there was a shift in marketing from product to service, i.e., firms recognized that selling products/ goods were not enough to gain competitive advantage. Instead, they had to include the elements of the service offering in their proposition that included customer interactions and other intangible service-related activities (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Measuring this quality of service become essential, and the SERVQUAL model of measurement gained importance during this time. While there has been much criticism on the SERVQUAL model, Service quality did contribute to CX in understanding the context in which experiences can arise, insights on journey mapping, and measurement of CX.

2.3.4. Relationship management

During the 1990s, both B2B and B2C focused on developing a strong relationship with their customers. Several models and theories, such as "transaction-cost theory," constructs that include trust, commitment, switching cost, relationships quality etc…were developed in order to understand the different facets of the customer relationship. Thus, contributing to the development of CX by including emotions and perception within the experience.

2.3.5. Customer relationship management (CRM)

While the relationship management focused on building long-term relationships with customers, the CRM concept that evolved during the 2000s focused on extracting customer lifetime value (CLV) (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Several researchers highlighted that just building a long-term customer relationship is not the end-goal, and this would not be enough to maintain profitability. There is a need for a firm to review customer acquisition and retention in order to extract CLV, thus creating value for its shareholders. Multiple studies have been conducted to look at these themes, and several CRM models have been developed to address the value creation for both shareholders and customers.

2.3.6. Customer centricity and customer focus

Customer centricity and focus being used as a strategy where firm/ organization align their products/ services in order to cater to the needs and demands of their most valuable customer (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Rather than targeting a mass market the aim is to increase revenue and create a long-term financial value for those customers. Several concepts were developed, proposed and debated throughout 2000s-to-2010s and many manager tools were developed such as “buying or customer persona”, “Jobs-to-be-done”. These tools and models have enabled organizations to be more flexible in understanding the interdisciplinary and cross-functional coordination that is necessary to design, deliver and manage CX.

2.3.7. Customer engagement

Customer engagement focuses post consumption, customer attitude, behavior and value extraction (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Several researches and studies have recognized the role of customers in generating experience that goes beyond purchase in the form of co-creation. The customer becomes an active co-producer or co-destroyer of value and social influence through word-of-mouth and customer referrals. With the digital and social media revolution, customer engagement has become very important and these tools have empowered customer to either engage in a positive or negative way with the firm.

2.4. Theoretical frameworks or models or constructs on CX and CEM

We believe that in order to appreciate the broad and distinct concept of CX, it was necessary for us to highlight the root and history of how CX has evolved over some time leveraging conceptual elements from other customer focused processes or models. Now when we try to look at CX from the lens of luxury travel industry, Firstly, it becomes important that all the actors within the supply chain understand that there are multiple pieces involved when we talk about CX. Secondly, all these different pieces have to be integrated seamlessly in order to stage an experience throughout the customer journey, to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Following are some of the theoretical frameworks or models developed by researchers to address this complex topic by looking at components, linkages, driver and moderators of CX and how these factors influences a customer throughout the customer journey.

First, we start with looking a Schmitt (1999), where the author talks about moving from traditional marketing to experiential marketing and provides a framework for experiential marketing. According to the author, the traditional marketing is made up of four key-characteristics –*consumer* as a rational decision-maker, *focus* on functional features and benefits, *product category and competition* is narrowly defined, and *methods and tools* used are analytical, quantitative and verbal. In contrast to this, a new approach, so called the new experiential marketing framework was proposed in 1999. The goal with this new model was, to create a holistic experience for the customer which integrates individual experiences into a “Holistic Gestalt”. In this model the customer is rational but also an emotional animal. The focus is on CX and the applied methods and tools are diverse. Schmitt further goes on to define five strategic experiential modules (SEMs) which a marketer can create for customers. These modules are sensory experiences (SENSE); affective experiences (FEEL); creative cognitive experiences (THINK); physical experiences, behaviors and lifestyles (ACT); and social-identity experiences that result from relating to a reference group or culture (RELATE).

From Schmitt (1999), we move to Verhoef et al.’s (2009) conceptual model of CX creation (Figure 2). Verhoef et al. provides determinants and moderators to CX and in addition also offers a customer experience management strategy that primarily focuses on developing and designing an optimal CX from a provider's perspective. The model includes, eight determinants they are, social environment (reference groups, co-destruction, service personnel), service interface (service person, technology, customization), retail atmosphere (design, temperature, music), assortment (variety, uniqueness, quality), price (include loyalty programs, promotions), CX in alternative channels, i.e., experience in one channel (e.g. store) may affect the experience in another channel (e.g. internet) and Retail brands, that include interaction between retail brands and customer and, how CX is delivered in the process. Two dynamic component of past customer experience influencing current customer experience and finally, the presence of moderators such as situational and consumer moderators. The situational moderators include, the type of store (discount vs full service), channel (physical store or internet), location (city center or a mall), culture, season (holiday or festivities), economic condition (recession or expansion) and competitive intensity. The consumer moderators include factors such as socio-demographics and consumer attitudes (price sensitivity, innovativeness). Both these moderators to be considered while assessing how the determinants, (, i.e., eight determinants) effect CX.

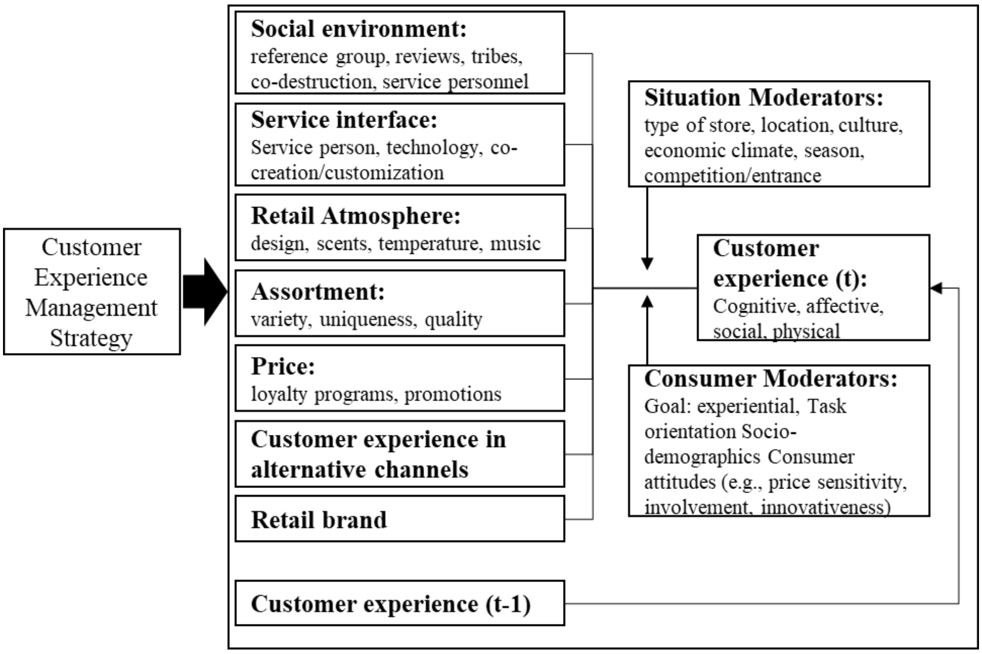


Figure 2: Conceptual model of CX creation (Verhoef et al., 2009)

Leveraging Verhoef et al.'s (2009) conceptual model of CX that focused on providing optimal CX from a service provider's perspective, Nasution et al. (2014) developed a customer experience framework (CEF) where the service interactions was viewed from the point of view of the customer (Figure 3). The framework is based on the CX definition that, CX is a journey where the customer undergoes and acquires responses and awareness throughout the purchase cycle from various touchpoints provided by the organization. The circular framework consisting of five interacting layers, starting from the inner most layer moving outwards, i.e., 1) customer values, needs and wants, 2) experiential marketing strategy, 3) customer experience stages, 4) accumulated customer experience, and 5) customer behavior changes (the outer most layer). Customer values and needs are the central core of CEF, where the company must provide product or services that satisfies customer needs. Understanding these values and needs will help the company in developing a marketing strategy, which is the 2nd layer. Companies need to develop experiential marketing strategy that excites the customer at different touchpoints within the customer journey in order to provide a satisfactory CX. The incentives can be a mix of traditional marketing concepts (like the 4P's) or modern marketing mix (Nasution et al., 2014, p.258). Companies can maximize the potential of attracting customers to a product or service by providing customers a physical or emotional experience that they can relate or remember. This takes us to the next two stages, i.e., customer experience and accumulated customer experience. CX can be provided through different channels or contacts, i.e., physical store or online shop and direct or indirect contact through intermediaries. These interactions will result in CX and they can be divided into three categories: pre-consumption, consumption and post-consumption of product or services. The accumulated customer experience layer is where the combination of these experience during the consumption process are formed and also informs the company about whether or not they become repeat/ loyal customers. The experience accumulated from the previous phase ultimately impact customer's future behavior, patterns and attitude and this is depicted in the final layer, i.e., customer behavior changes. As you can see from Figure 3 below, moderating variables are kept outside the framework, that is similar to that of model suggested by Verhoef et al. (2009). Furthermore, CEF can also be used as a tool by the managers within the company to assess both positive and negative CX to the product/ service offerings provided by the company.

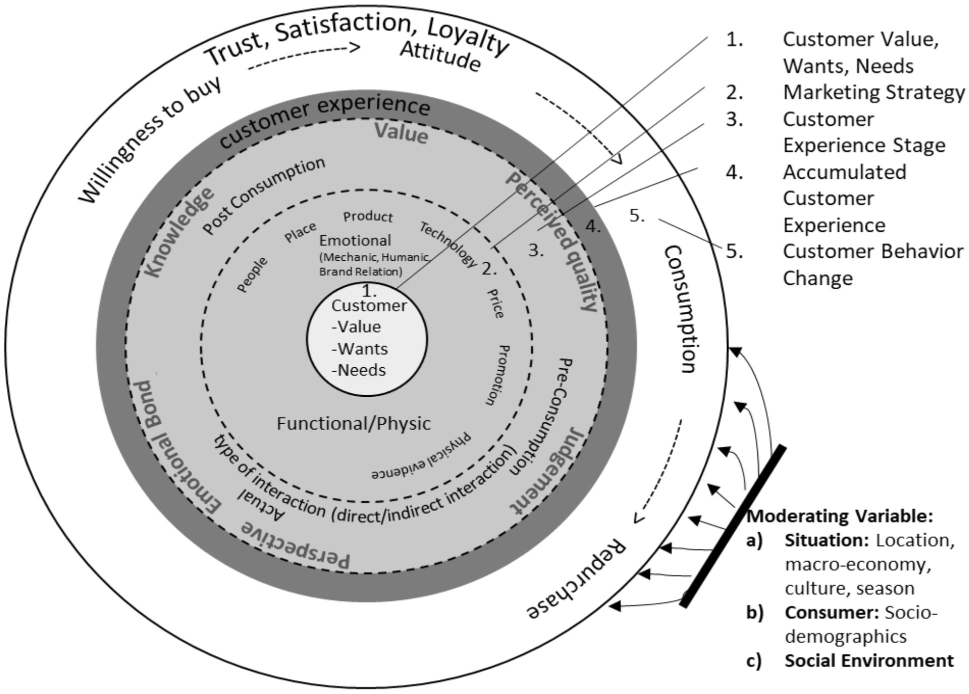


Figure 3: Customer experience framework – From customers point of view (Nasution et al., 2014)

Combings concepts of CEF proposed by Nasution et al., concepts of CX, customer journey and customer experience management, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) proposed a theoretical process model for understanding CX throughout the customer journey (Figure 4). The process model conceptualizes CX as a customer journey that a firm provides through its multiple touchpoints during the purchase cycle. The model goes on to state that the CX is an iterative and dynamic process and the experience process flows from pre-purchase (that includes search of products or services) to purchase to post-purchase. Experience from the past and external influences also have an impact on the current experience, which then cements the future experience or expectation.

During this overall process within the customer journey and touchpoint, firm's control is very limited and highlights four categories of touchpoints within the customer journey. They are, brand-owned, partner-owned, customer-owned and social/ external. The strength or importance of each of the touchpoints in different phases of the purchase cycle may vary based on the product or services provided by the company. Once the firm understands the most critical touchpoints for each customer, they can determine how to influence these touchpoints to provide better CX (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

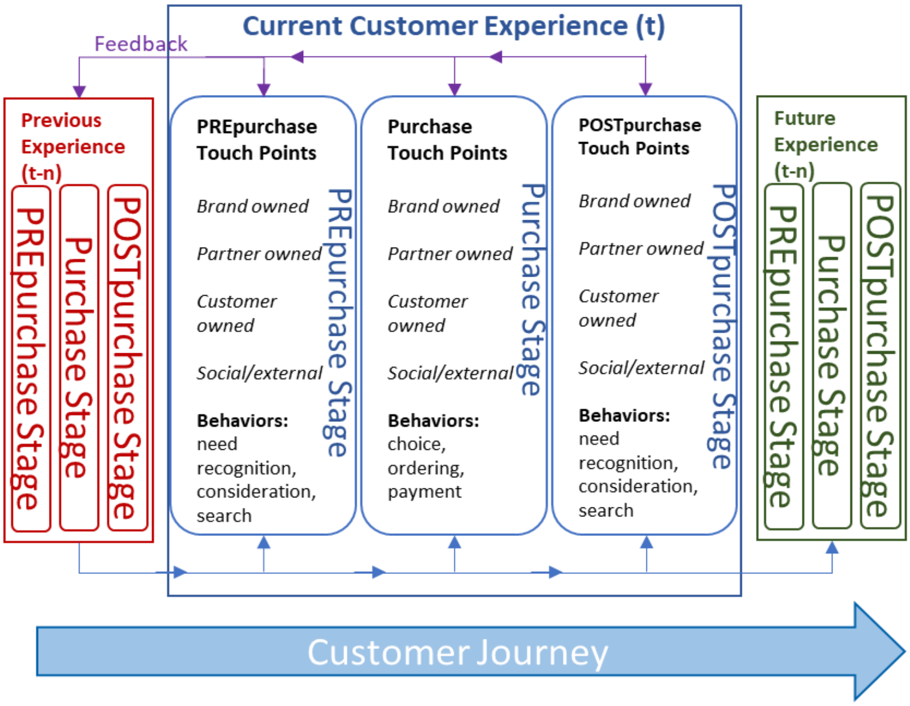


Figure 4: CX throughout the customer journey (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016)

Moving from how firm can provide CX throughout the customer journey, Richard Mosley (2007) proposed a theory that focused on brand, culture and CX. He performed a study on how brand-led cultural change impacted CX. As a part of this study, developed frameworks such as integrated service brand model and employer brand experience framework that can be leveraged by an organization to aligning employee's brand experience to the customer brand experience, thus providing a common platform for marketing and HR to promote employer brand management internally and externally.

While there were several fragmented models to qualitative measure CX, quantitative measurement always posed a problem (Maklan and Klaus, 2011). Maklan and Klaus (2011) in their article "Customer experience: Are we measuring the right things?" draw to a conclusion that firms were measuring CX using measures or criteria's that firms set up to evaluate product and service offering. These measures were linked to the notion of service quality that originated from total quality management (TQM) and argued that marketers needed to update their measurement scale to include the progression of CX offerings that firms are providing to their customer, i.e., move away from measuring service quality to developing a more robust measure for CX. Maklan and Klaus developed a customer experience quality (EXQ) scale (Figure 5) that explained loyalty, word-of-mouth recommendation and satisfaction, which was an addition to the existing service quality measurement. The EXQ scale consists of 19 attributes that are categorized into four dimensions referred to as POMP: ‘Product experience’, ‘Outcome focus’, ‘Moments-of-truth’ and ‘Peace-of-mind’.

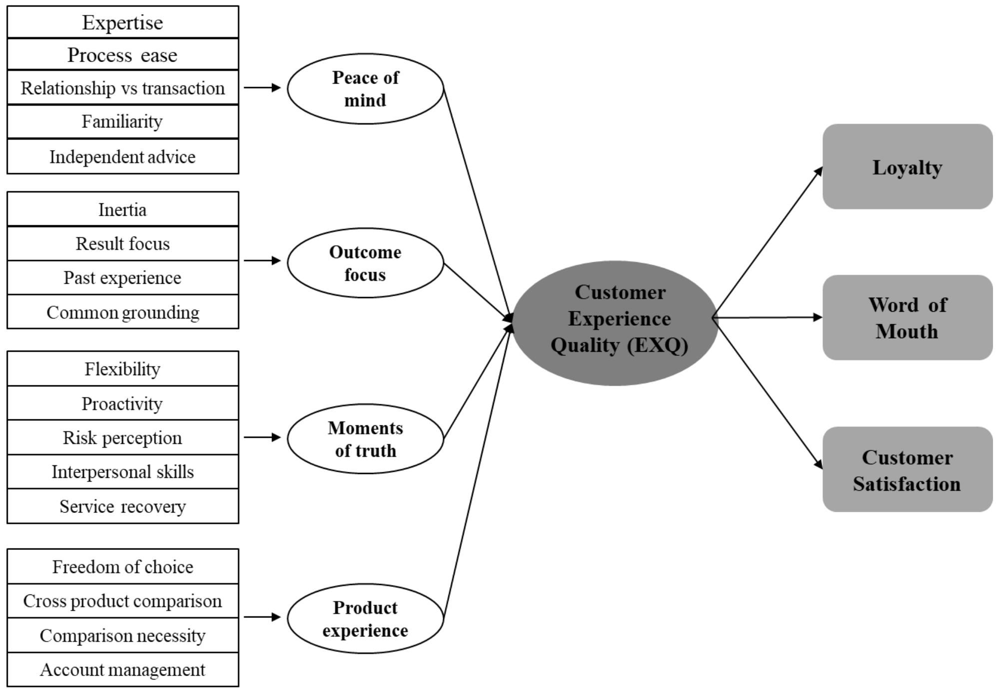


Figure 5: Customer experience quality (EXQ) scale (Maklan and Klaus, 2011)

So far, we have seen theoretical frameworks on CX from a firm’s point of view and customer’s point of view. Now, let’s look at how CX is co-created/ co-constructed.

The traditional marketing approach is product-centric and/ or company-centric, where the customer has no or little influence on the product. The value of a product or service is therefore limited for a customer and does not sustain long-term growth. Companies need to cope with the commoditization and other circumstances (like globalization, deregulation, outsourcing, and the mergers of industries and technologies) to differentiate themselves from the competition. In addition, the companies cannot determine a customer’s desired experience priori. Therefore, companies need to leverage the use of “co-creation experience” as the basis for creating value and involving customers actively in customer-company interactions (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

The co-creation concept proposed by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003) is defined as “the experience of a specific consumer, at a specific point in time and location, in the context of a specific event”. In comparison to the product/ company centric approach, co-creation experience is unique for each customer and is an interaction between the company and the customer. Consequently, a company is neither responsible nor has control on how a customer uses or consumes its products or services. But, instead, co-creation is rather generated through the individual’s purposeful interaction of each consumer with “a network of companies and consumer communities that enable personalized experience” (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003, p.14).

As the individual and his interactions define both, the experience and the value derived from it, Prahalad and Ramaswamy built a construct around co-creation which they refer to as the “Experience Space”, as depicted in Figure 6. In this experience space, the individual consumer is at the center of the activity and is surrounded by the events, which cause a co-creation experience, the context in space and time, the involvement of the customers and the personal meaning for each individual derived from the other components (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003, p.14).

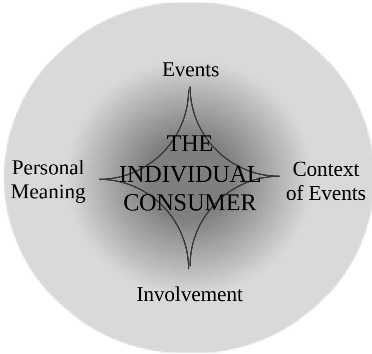


Figure 6: Experience Space (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003)

Several examples can be drawn using co-creation in order to provide meaningful experiences and with-it value. IKEA's furniture for example is designed in one way, but people started to build new furnishing objects out of it and share it with their community. The same story happens with the Lego bricks, where the company demonstrates the usage of these bricks in certain ways, but, the consumer extrapolates this and builds multiple unimaginable possibilities, thus providing a different experience.

From co-creation, let's turn our focus on customer relationships and how marketers and researchers' term CEM as the new CRM. As, outlined in the introduction to CX, the concept of CRM focuses on reviewing customer's acquisition and retention strategy in order to extract customer lifetime value (CLV), thus, in the process creating value for shareholders.

Multiple studies have been conducted to look at these themes and several CRM models have been developed to address the value creation for both shareholders and customers. Over time many studies have been made and different views evolved, which makes it difficult to draw a generalized definition of CRM. Payne and Frow (2005), developed a conceptual framework for CRM that helped broaden the understanding of CRM and its role in improving value to the customer and shareholder. In the process of defining this framework, the author also explored several definitions of CRM and suggested three perspectives in which CRM can be defined, they are, 1) CRM as implementation of technology solution project (defining CRM narrowly and tactically), 2) CRM as implementation of integrated customer-oriented technology solution (defining it as wide-ranging technology solution) and 3) CRM as a holistic strategy to manage customer relationship to create shareholder value (defining broad and strategic, customer-centric). The author also warns that the main reason for failure of CRM initiatives within an organization is viewing CRM as a technology initiative.

While CRM unites relationship marketing strategy with IT strategy to create profits and long-term relationship with customers and shareholders (Payne and Frow, 2005, p.168), this does pose a problem. CRM only tracks and distributes, what a company knows about a customer after there has been an interaction. But that will not give the whole picture of what a customer is experiencing throughout the interaction with the company (Payne and Frow, 2005). This is where the concept of customer experience management (CEM) comes into play. It encompasses everything what CRM does but also provides a complete picture of CX through the journey. The idea here was to capture and distribute (within the company) immediately what a customer thinks about the interaction with the company (through various touchpoints). The benefit from the CEM model is to locate gaps between expectations (from a customer perspective) and experiences (which the company provides) and then try to fill them with service and offerings (Meyer and Schwager, 2007).

Homburg et al. (2017) leveraged the resource-based view and service-dominant logic concepts and proposed a CEM framework that can be used for implementation of an evolving marketing concept. Furthermore, the authors identified that there is a research gap in conceptualizing, generalizing and demarcating CEM from other marketing management concepts (Figure 7) and highlighted that “CX is one piece of actionable object of CEM”. In order to address the gap, they adopted an exploratory grounded theory approach to review the existing literature in the field of marketing management, CX and CEM and arrived at a theoretical framework for CEM. According to the authors, this framework can be used as a firm-wide management approach that addresses three main categories, i.e., a firm’s 1) cultural mindset, 2) strategic direction and 3) capabilities, towards CX in order to achieve competitive advantage, sustain long term customer loyalty and long-term growth of the firm.

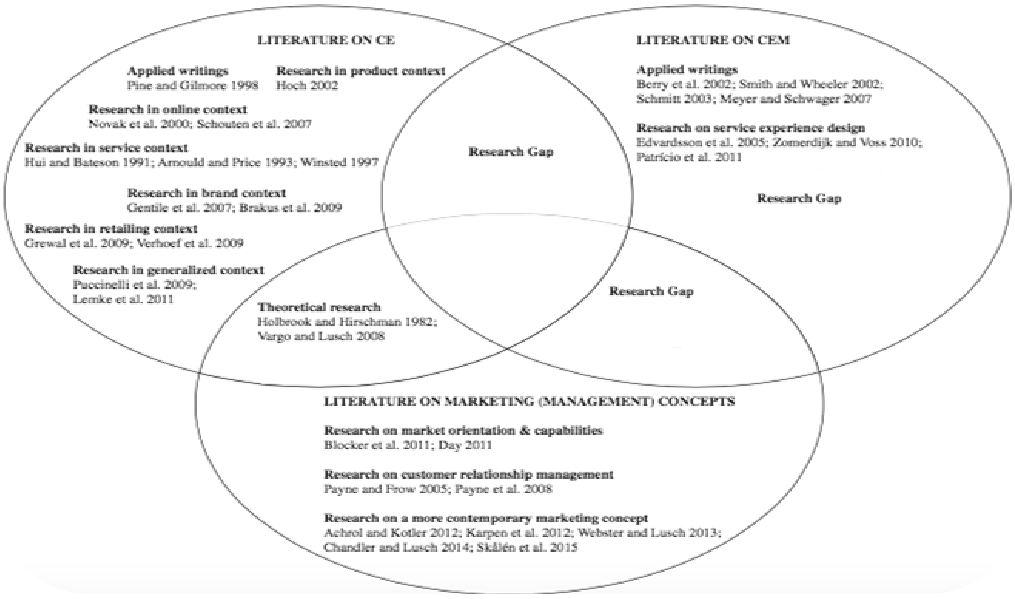


Figure 7: Literature on CE, CEM and Marketing concepts and gap in CEM (Homburg, Jozić and Kuehnl, 2017)

2.5. Challenges in CX and issues with models or frameworks or constructs

From the framework, models and constructs above, we understand that the marketing research and practice has undergone a transformational change where the focus has shifted from 1) creating consumer products that moves fast (commoditization) to 2) building customer relationships by providing quality services (services) to 3) creating a memorable customer experience (mass customization) (Maklan and Klaus, 2011; Pine and Gilmore, 2011).

Marketing Science Institute (2020), in their report for 2018 – 2020 highlight that understanding customer and obtaining customer insight is top research priority. The report further goes on to highlight that customer and firms interact through multiple channels, screens and devices, across numerous touchpoints (, i.e., first touch to purchase and beyond) over a period of time. Due to the complexity and increased number of touchpoints within the customer journey, a positive CX will result in improved performance across various touchpoints, which in-turn increases customer loyalty and satisfaction and finally results in better bottom-line performance of the company. While leading firms understand that they are in the CX business and they have to invest in order to transform their organizational practices to customer-centric business. But, this adoption has been slow and they have troubles in capturing and implementing CX (McKinsey, 2019).

On the academia front, several scholars or authors have provided various definitions and interpretations of customer experiences, but, there is no unified precise definition, construct and measure for CX. Instead, everybody agrees that CX is a multidimensional construct that involves customer's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social response to a firm that's offering experience during the entire customer journey , i.e., pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase (Verhoef et al., 2009; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Nasution et al., 2014; Homburg, Jozić and Kuehnl, 2017). This broad spectrum of CX does pose a challenge to marketers, scholars and practitioners, thus hindering clarity and understanding of this topic. In the following text we have outlined both critical arguments from several authors and our observations on the frameworks, models and constructs.

Palmer (2010, p.198) in his article states that one of the challenges to develop a CX construct is "to integrate a typically diverse array of stimuli in order to assess the tradeoffs that are entailed in creating value for consumers". The author goes on to say that these stimuli are generally interactive and the way they are structed and combined is important in defining the CX. Moreover, the customers level of involvement, emotions and interpersonal factors should also be considered while building this construct. Palmer (2010) also highlights that as experience is shaped up by differences between individuals, over some time under variety of specific situational circumstances, the challenges in developing a CX construct is not just limited to developing a measurement scale for CX that can be used widely, but, it is also related to measuring these differences in experience under various contexts. This irregular pattern of the CX brings us to the second problem in creation and measurement of CX, "non-linearity". Non-linearity means that a same set of stimuli may have a fluctuating effect between individuals, and this varies depending on the whole host of situational moderating factors. Given that experience is complex, irregular and non-linear in a way that it considers different contextual differences, developing an optimal level of experience pose our third problem. This further gets complicated when a repeated exposure of same experience may lead to so called "learned response", i.e., an experience that was novel during the first purchase, does not have the same novelty factor/ value and wears-off significantly with a repeat customer on subsequent purchases.

The challenges that Palmer has highlighted resonates very well with what we have been trying to say about staging experience and this gets complicated especially within the luxury travel segment, as price in no more the differentiating factor. The customers in this segment are looking for something unique and authentic that they haven't experienced before. The challenges that the actors encounter within this segment is to deliver novel, personalized experience throughout the customer journey at multiple touchpoint, starting from how they engage customers to the new proposition to deliver what's promised to them and finally also maintaining that connection post the journey.

Nasution et al. (2014), in their article do criticize on the customer experience management strategy developed by Verhoef et al. (2009), by stating that the model/ strategy produced by the latter is one-sided as CX is a multi-dimensional construct and it also ignores the post-consumption experience within the customer journey, which is necessary for customer loyalty and advocacy.

We agree that CEF developed by Nasution et al. is an extension of CEM strategy with customer needs and wants to act as the foundation for the CEF strategy. Furthermore, the CEF also considers all three phases of customer journey touchpoints while assessing the CX. But, this strategy only provides a customer's view of CX and the impact of moderating variables such as situation, macro economy, social environment is applied only on outermost layer, i.e., customer behavioral changes, implying that these moderating variables only impact customer behavioral changes and has no impact/ limited impact on CX at every stage within the CEF model. A more detailed list of moderating variables, their impact and influence on CX is missing in this strategy.

When we look at the process model outlined by Lemon and Verhoef (2016), at the first look, it seems that the model is linear and only considering certain aspects of the customer journey, i.e., previous-experience, current-experience and future-experience, but, does not provide a holistic picture that is needed for a CEM strategy that includes all three perspectives, i.e., firms, customer and co-creation, to create experience. This framework fails to explain within the three-phases of consumption, how current CX acts as a feedback to previous experience. The opposite of this statement makes sense from a customer perspective, i.e., previous experiences influencing the current CX. Moreover, the article also does not throw light on how previous experience influence the future experience of the customer without going through the current phase of customer journey. Finally, the effect of moderating factors or variables, i.e., both situational and customer moderators such as socio-demographics, social environment, culture etc.… and its impact on the CX throughout the journey seems to be excluded from the model.

As the construct and understanding of CX is complicated and multi-dimensional, the models or frameworks developed to understand and capture CX and CEM seems to be fragmented and incomplete. This notion is also supported by Homburg et al. (2017), where the authors reviewed literature around CX, CEM and marketing concepts to arrive at theoretical framework of CEM using the grounded theory concept. This CEM framework in our view, does ignore the contingency factors such as the moderating variables and it also partially addresses the integrated picture of CX that include all three perspectives, i.e., firm, customer and co-creation, as the framework is derived empirically from an understanding that is biased, considering only a firm's perspective.

One common theme that stands out from our literature review is that, even though the stream of marketing and experienced economy has been researched for a long time now, researchers and practitioners are still grappling with the concept of staging and transforming experience to their customers. These concepts get more complicated when they are leveraged to assess CX within the luxury travel industry. There are several actors, channels and touchpoints within the luxury segment eco-system that can influence (positive or negative) CX. The current models, frameworks and constructs discussed above provide only one-sided view on addressing this phenomenon. Thus, going back to our research questions, where we first propose a need for an integrated CX model that can be leveraged by the actors within the luxury industry to understand the CX behavior and design, develop and manage CX and complementing this, also identifying critical touchpoints that exists throughout the customer journey and their influence on CX.

3. Methodology

This chapter elaborates on the research method, strategy and design conducted in this study. As the aim of this thesis is to understand and explore different components and attributes that contribute to CX throughout the customer journey within luxury travel industry, we start with providing a rationale behind research strategy undertaken for this study. Then move on to provide an account of research design, that include a case study approach within the value-chain for the luxury travel industry along with an interview execution strategy and a plan to address the research questions. Beside reviewing scientific articles, data was collected by interviewing different actors within the value-chain through a semi-structured interview approach. The interviews were recorded, data transcribed and analyzed by generating themes that were leveraged to identify patterns within the data set to answer our research questions. In the end of this chapter we have provided our reflection on the methods, that include quality criteria such as validity, reliability and ethical considerations.

3.1. Research Strategy

The main objective of this study is to the analyze CX throughout the customer journey within luxury travel industry and understand the factors, barrier and challenges for providing CX. Furthermore, since the terms luxury and experience are dependent on individual and subjective in nature, we believe that an exploratory, qualitative research approach suits for this study very well. According to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019, p.35), qualitative research strategy is focused on words and imagery, as opposed to quantitative research that is focused on quantification of data. The former research strategy emphasis on understanding the "social world" and "human behavior" by investigating interpretation of individuals who are part of the research and view social reality as a constantly shifting paradigm that keeps evolving (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p.35). This holds true in the area of travel and tourism, where trends within the industry and customers, constantly influence the meaning, value and perspective of travel. So, we believe that a constructivism or constructivist theory and interpretivism or interpretivist theory fits in this context very well.

As a part of this study, we understand that the existing frameworks or models for providing CX are fragmented and does not provide a holistic picture. Our aim is to propose an integrated CX model or framework that can be used by practitioners to assess and align their organizational capabilities to design, deliver and manage CX. As the emphasis is placed on generation of new theory or construct (in this case an integrated CX model) coming out of a research, i.e., observations, insights and patterns from the empirical data leveraged to drive theory generation (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019), our study takes an inductive approach. Furthermore, as highlighted by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), a researcher when adopting an inductive approach, starts with a well-defined study proposition and research question(s), but, does not start with existing theories or conceptual frameworks. Literature is used to help avoid repetition of work, refine the study proposition and objective further and gain newer insights that was not covered within the existing study (ibid).

3.2. Research Design

A proficient literature review on existing theories, academic models and framework on CX and CEM coupled with luxury travel industry insights from secondary sources such as travel company websites, articles from industry experts and press (such as Amadeus, Forbes, EHL etc…), articles from trade shows and luxury travel designer community (such as Pure Life

Experience, Traveller Made etc…) acted as a foundation for this study. The existing models or constructs on CX and CEM are fragmented and there are no integrated models or frameworks, that can be used to analyze the CX from a company's perspective, customer's perspective and co-creation between both parties. A holistic approach is needed in order to further develop this service, that companies can leverage to differentiate themselves from their competitors and provide an experience that is memorable to their customers. As a result, one of the aims of this thesis is to develop this integrated framework or model or construct that can be leveraged by companies to design a unique and seamless CX within the luxury travel industry.

When conducting a qualitative research there are multiple options for research study design (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p.48), but, as our study proposition is to explore and understand CX within luxury travel industry, we intend to gather detailed set of data and insights from various actors within the supply-chain of luxury travel industry at a given point of time, so a multi-case study approach provides us that flexibility to collect varied empirical evidences and this approach suits very well for our study. Leveraging Song et al. (2013) typology as a foundation to identify different actors within the value-chain, for this case study we considered product or service owner, tour operator or cruise operator, travel agent, travel designers or consultants and DMC. In order to gather insights for these actors several interviews were conducted. Based on the data obtained, we have performed an in-case and cross-case analysis to identify recurring and opposing patterns.

We have excluded customer or traveler insights from our case study due to couple of reasons. One, the fact that there is another research group within Masterprogram i Industriell Ledning och Innovation (MILI-Program) who are also working within luxury travel industry, but, with a different study proposition focusing on generating insights on customer needs, wants and desires. Second, the timing of both researches (, i.e., the customer group and ours) is such that the studies are conducted simultaneously. This poses a challenge for us to include customer insights from the other group, due to time constraints in finishing our study/ research.

The Table 1 summarizes the different sources that will be leveraged within this study to answer the research questions. The first question is divided into two parts, where the first part of the question is about proposing an integrated CX model which encompasses firms, customer and co-creation perspective and second part of the question is about understanding how the actors within the luxury travel provide CX by leveraging this integrated CX model. Both parts of the first question will be addressed by the literature review and partially by data collected via interviews. The second and third research question relates touchpoints within the customer journey that act as primary contributors of CX and, factors and barriers in providing CX within luxury travel industry. These two questions will be addressed by data collected via interviews and other sources.

Research Question	**Interviews**	**Literature Review**	**Other sources such as Websites, Articles from industry experts**
RQ1	**X**	**X**	
RQ2	**X**		**X**
RQ3	**X**		**X**

Table 1: Research questions addressed by different sources of data

3.2.1. Case Study

To explore and understand the complex multidimensional aspects of CX, specifically within luxury travel industry, we have adopted a case study approach to generate insights from various actors within this industry. As highlighted by Eisenhardt (1989), case study is one of the research strategy that focuses on understanding the dynamics of single situation. Furthermore, case studies are rich and allows a researcher to understand the complex social setting, by maintaining a "holistic" and "real-world perspective" in which the phenomenon occurs (Yin, 2014, p.68; Eisenhardt, 1989). When the research questions are exploratory in nature and focuses on "what", "how" and "why" questions on a specific topic, a case study approach is most suitable research method (Yin, 2014, p.82), as is the case in our study, where the study proposition is to understand the CX within luxury travel industry.

Patton (2014, p.395), illustrates in his book that there are variety of approaches in defining a case that enables the researcher to define what the case is within the given context. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), compares a case to distinct laboratory experiments that stands on its own as an "analytical unit". Yin (2014, p.140), provides a general guideline on definition of a case or the "unit of analysis", where the author states that in order to define a case, firstly, it should be related to the way you define your research question and secondly, a study proposition needs to be identified. Keeping all these different theories and constructs of a case as a base for this study, we have decided to apply a multi-case study approach to perform this research. This approach matches well with our research questions, that are exploratory in nature addressing the "what" and "how" questions within the study and a study proposition that is related to understanding CX within luxury travel industry. Furthermore, as there are multiple actors in the value-chain within the luxury travel industry who provide CX to their target groups and as the lines between these different actors are getting blurrier (that is based on literature and articles from experts within the industry), we decided to consider each actor's interpretation of CX as a "unit of analysis" or "a case". Thus, we decided to include the five actors (, i.e., product or service owner, tour operator or cruise operator, travel agent, travel designer or consultant and DMC) to perform our case study, gather data and generate insights. To take full advantage of this approach following case criteria were setup to ensure that we select the right companies which represent the different actors for our study.

- The company must operate within the luxury travel industry
- The company must provide a unique service and has superior knowledge in the segment that it operates, i.e., provide a service that stands-out for a specific experience and can be differentiated from mass market or other luxury travel providers
- The company must offer a bespoke proposition - In the sense, that the offers are tailor made for each customer or group of customers
- The company should at least be a part of renowned travel trade shows (such as Pure Life Experience or L.E/Miami) or member of a high-end experiential community (such as Virtuoso) or have won or nominated for awards (, i.e., Alimara Business Award).

To add to the above criteria, we have not limited ourselves from selecting companies that are seasoned in this segment, we have also included companies that are new to this segment but still adhering to the above criteria. Furthermore, we have also tried our best to ensure that the companies or interviewees are spread across different geographic location to capture CX from a culture and location context. Figure 8 on the following page depicts the multi-case study design considered for this study.

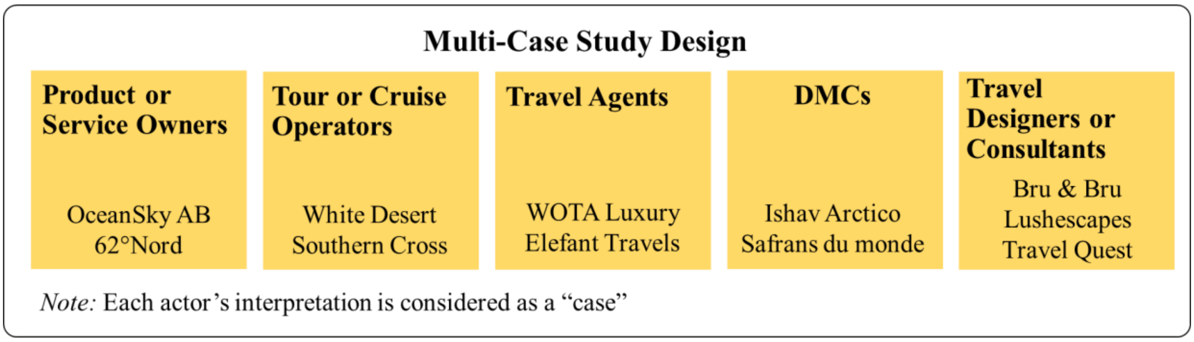


Figure 8: Multi-case study design

All further the details about the companies which are part of this case study are summarized Appendix 1.

3.3. Data collection

As we have designed our research strategy to follow an inductive approach and the study proposition is exploratory in nature, we believe that interviews can be used as a primary method to gather empirical data. For this study we have interviewed key persons, who are decision makers in the companies that they represent, and these companies fall into one of the five actors in the value-chain within the luxury travel industry. Furthermore, we do understand that relying on single data source as a medium for data collection may reduce the validity of our study (Yin, 2014), so, for this reason we have decided to include a secondary source of data in the form on scientific research articles, documentation and websites. We leveraged the triangulation principle to increase validity our study, by cross verifying our interviews with case company's website, news clips on the media and other articles by experts within the industry. Scientific research articles were used to understand the multidimensional construct of CX, concepts of staging experiences and experiential marketing. These research articles, along with data collected from the interviews and secondary sources were used as a foundation to develop an integrated CX model.

An overview of data collection process for this study is illustrated in Figure 9 below.

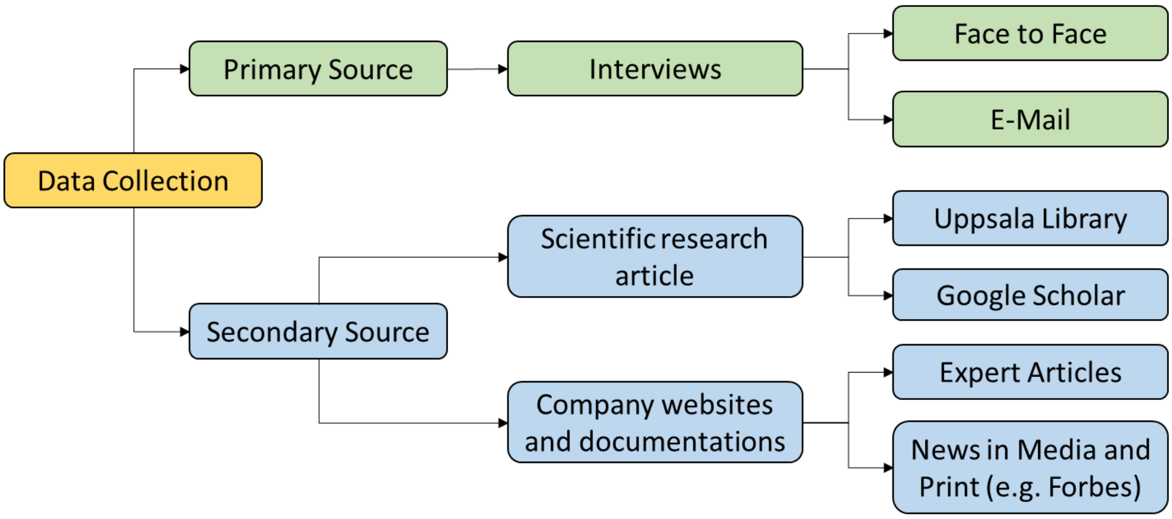


Figure 9: Overview of data collection process

3.3.1. Execution of case interviews

Interviews can used as a tool to collect rich empirical data and one of the crucial mechanism to obtain case study evidence (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2014). As an interviewer we had sufficient knowledge on theoretical perspective on the evolution of CX and different models and constructs that are in play within CX and CEM, but, we did lack in-depth knowledge on luxury travel industry, the value-chain and the operational aspects within this segment. So, in order to extract maximum information from the interviewee's and understand their perspective and patterns on functioning of luxury travel segment, we decided to go with the flexible semi-structured interview approach. Semi-structured interviews give the interviewer the option to go deeper into a topic without being hindered by structured questions and also enables the interviewer to capture reflections, behaviors and feedbacks that may not be covered or highlighted by a theoretical construct. According to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019, p.211), semi-structured interviews have a series of questions that are generally captured in an interview guide, which have a set order but can be varied in their sequence. The authors insist on the importance of constructing an interview guide, where the design of the guide (having questions such as introductory question, follow-up questions, direct questions etc.) can vary, but, this should function as a supporting document during the interview to ensure that all relevant aspects specific to a particular topic are covered.

In line with this, we created an interview guide (Appendix: Interview Guide) with some introductory questions and several direct and follow-up questions related to luxury travel industry and CX. Furthermore, the questions were well articulated by avoiding leading questions and ensured that they were open ended in order to generate greater insights on luxury travel industry and address our research questions and study proposition. The questions can be grouped into four sets. The first set of questions were to understand a firm's capabilities, differentiation factors, challenges during the initial days and barriers for new entrants within luxury segment. The second set of questions explored the different channels leveraged by a firm to reach their targeted customers group, customer journey, touchpoints within the journey and personalization within these touch points. The third set of questions were related to customer's value on the service and co-creation. The fourth set was to understand the driving factors and barrier for providing CX and current or future challenges within the luxury travel industry. Since some of the interviewee's were unavailable (as they were travelling) to participate in a face-to-face interview during our interview-collection phase, they decided to answer the questions by responding to our interview guide via email. Further follow-up on the answers provided were also discussed via emails.

Barring two interviews, namely Ana Bru and Ernesto Garcia-Dresbach (see Appendix 1 for details) all the rest of the interviews were conducted face-to-face using Skype and lasted for a duration of 40 to 70 minutes. In order to facilitate a smooth and seamless interview, we had predefined two roles during the interview, i.e., interviewer and observer. The interviewer would follow the interview guide and focus on keeping an active conversation. While the observer would pay very close attention to the answers and assist the interviewer with follow-up questions related to the study. All the face-to-face interviews were recorded, and these recorded interviews were later transcribed. Post interview, feedback and observations on the interview guide from each interviewee were solicited and relevant comments were incorporated within the interview guide to ensure that the questions were clearly understood and followed a logical order, thus making it an iterative process.

Since both interviewer and observer were new to luxury travel segment, we had to do some internal research (by leveraging relevant secondary sources of information on luxury travel industry from various forums, articles from experts and company websites) before starting this study. One can say that this limited in-depth knowledge did avoid interviewer's (or observer's) bias during the interview and throughout the study. So, to complement our limited knowledge within the industry, we decided to interview individuals who are highly knowledgeable in this segment, individuals who are CEOs, COO, Managing Directors, Presidents, Business Development Managers, Product Managers, Sales Representatives managing a specific location with more than ten years' experience to ensure that a diverse perspective on CX and the luxury travel industry is obtained.

All in all, a total of 24 individuals representing 20 different companies within the value-chain operating in the luxury travel segment were contacted to be a part of our study. Off this sample, 14 individuals representing 11 companies were interviewed. These interviews were conducted between 12-February'20 till 31-March'20, a period where a pandemic of novel virus called COVID19 had grappled the entire globe and luxury travel industry did feel the impact of this scourge. More information about the interviewees can be found in Appendix: Interviewees.

3.4. Data analysis

In general, qualitative data obtained through interview transcripts, ethnographic observations, visual images, organization documents etc. all generate large sets of rich, unstructured, complex data that are difficult to analyze, unlike the data from quantitative analysis that is based on analytical codification procedure (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p.518). So, while there is no straight-forward rule or pattern for analyzing qualitative data, there are several strategies, such as narrative analysis, thematic analysis etc., whereby we have decided to go with the thematic analysis for our study. Thematic analysis is a flexible interpretive process that can be used to analyze rich textual data and adapted to generate themes. The key characteristic of this process is to provide a systematic guideline for coding rich unstructured data and reflecting and examining the meaning of a social phenomenon using themes (Vaismoradi et al., 2016; Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019).

Gioia et al. (2013), claim that one of the main recurring concern for a qualitative researchers is "qualitative rigor" and in order to address this the authors developed a systematic approach to conduct and present inductive research. Within this approach, the authors state that during thematic analysis, innumerable terms, code and categories emerge as a part of 1st-order analysis during the early phase of analysis and researchers shouldn't refine these categories at this stage. The authors give an example by stating that, there could be as many as 50 to 100 categories generated from just ten interviews. As the research progresses, based on similarities and differences, these categories can further be reduced into "manageable numbers" and a "category label" or "phrasal descriptors" are assigned. Leveraging the researcher's knowledge, a more abstract level themes, dimensions and narratives are generated, which are referred as 2nd-order themes. These emerging themes from the 2nd-order analysis, acts as a foundation for concepts that will assist in deciphering the phenomenon under observation. The focus here is on concepts that do not have sufficient backing from existing literature or existing concepts that "leap out" due to the new contextual setting. These 2nd-order themes are further distilled into 2nd-order "aggregate dimensions" and finally, 1st-order themes, 2nd-order themes and "aggregate dimensions", forms the building blocks for "data structure", that can be leveraged to show a dynamic relationship of an emerging concept or theory in question.

We leveraged the above thematic analysis approach to convert data gathered from semi-structured interviews to generate new theories or concepts. The rich textual data from the semi-structured interviews provided by different actors representing the case companies were transcribed and analyzed line-by-line and the actual statements provided by the participants from the case companies were grouped based on relevance and meaning and, this formed our 1st-order. We identified the relationships within this rich textual data, grouped and refined the 1st-order data further, and with assistance of secondary sources, i.e., literature, we generated abstract level themes that can represent this 1st-order data, this forms our 2nd-order, which we refer to as sub-themes (total of 26 sub-themes were generated). And finally, these 2nd-order sub-themes were further regrouped, and formed our aggregate dimensions that we refer to as themes (a total of eight themes emerged). A point to note is that during this transformation of data from raw-data (, i.e., 1st-order data) to aggregate dimensions (, i.e., themes), we eliminated the narrative data that did not fit any of the 2nd order abstract level and we also did not include 2nd order sub-themes that weren't relevant in our theory generation. Refer to Appendix: Thematic Analysis for the thematic analysis.

3.5. Reflection of method

In conducting this study, as well as any other research, validity and reliability plays an important aspect that researchers should be concerned with, as it judges about the quality of the research. These elements also improve the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research. A researcher may be convinced that while designing a new study by identifying a problem, a single source evidence for example interviews may suffice his/ her research as a part of data collection strategy, but, this not recommended while doing case study research (Yin, 2014, p.368). In order to increase the strength of the case study research from a quality perspective, it is recommended to use multiple sources of evidence (ibid). In line with this, we corroborated case interviews data with other secondary sources such as company websites, articles or press releases from luxury travel experts. One may argue that theory building from a qualitative case study may result in a theory that is "narrow" and "idiosyncratic", but, this method also has certain important merits such as, it generates a theory that has the possibility of being novel, results emerging from the theory can be measured and finally, as the theory building process is linked with the evidence, emergent theory will be consistent with empirical data (Eisenhardt, 1989, p.547).

3.6. Validity and Reliability

According to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019), validity refers to integrity of conclusions that is generated from the research and from an interview perspective, Saunders et al. (2009), refer validity to the ability to measure what is intended to measure. Validity according to Yin (2014), is divided into three elements; construct validity, internal validity and external validity. Construct validity refers to identifying and developing sufficient operational set of measures that can be used to measure the concepts that are studied. Interviews were used as a primary source to gather deeper insights in CX within luxury travel industry. Various secondary source of data was also used to validate some of the interview data and further enhance our understanding on CX within customer journey along with different touchpoints. Using the triangulation approach, we were able to cross verify some set of data that we received from the interviews with our secondary sources such as articles from industry experts or company websites. Furthermore, we as researchers for this study exchanged and validated our findings and interview transcript data with each other to reduce bias and misrepresentation of facts.

Internal validity is a measure to verify how much of researcher's observation corresponds to the theoretical frame that they develop (Yin, 2014). In this study we have performed an in-case and cross-case analysis of the received data and developed an integrated model by leveraging this data and also existing literature on CX. External validity refers to the generalizability of the study's findings, irrespective of the kind of research method adopted for the study (ibid). Yin (2014) highlights that for generalizing findings from case study, researchers should generalize it at an analytical level or at an abstract level, which the author calls it as "analytical generalization", as opposed to "statistical generalization". The author further states that a case or multiple case should not be considered as a "sampling unit" because the sample size is too small and may not represent the larger population (ibid). Instead, researchers should consider a case or multiple case as an opportunity to dig deeper into theoretical construct or principles that spans beyond a single case and can be generalized at an abstract level at different settings (Yin, 2014, p.164). As our study proposition is to understand CX within luxury travel industry, we have considered each actor within the supply-chain (five actors considered for this study) as a "unit of analysis" or a "case". Companies representing these actors are selected based on certain case criteria (as defined in 3.2.1 Case Study) and key individuals within these companies are interviewed. Insights (either contrasting or matching) obtained from these interviews will support the study proposition and can be leveraged by practitioners in other industry setting to assess their organizations CX.

From validity, now let's turn our focus on how we have tried to achieve reliability for this study. Reliability refers to the extent to which data collection techniques or procedure can be repeated in order to yield consistent findings (Yin, 2014; Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). The objective is to ensure that data collection procedures are well documented so that either you or any other researcher can conduct the same case study by leveraging these documents and arrive at the same findings or conclusion as the initial case study, thus, minimizing errors and bias. Lack of standardization while performing interviews may lead to issues related to reliability, so, we have adopted a case study protocol where goals, objectives, details about the case study, interview questions are all documented within interview guide and shared with interviewee before-hand. Table 2 summaries the different quality test and case study tactics that we have leveraged at different phases within the study.

Test	**Case Study Tactics**	**Phase of research**
Construct Validity	• Multi-case study interviews • Various source of information such as scientific research articles, company websites, articles from industry experts within luxury travel, press releases • Triangulation using multiple sources of evidence	Data Collection
Internal Validity	• In-case and cross-case analysis – matching and opposing patterns • Comparing patterns and observations with theoretical framework	Data Analysis
External Validity	Use replication logic not sampling logic in multi-case study – case selected predicts similar results or contrasting results	Research Design
Reliability	Develop the following case study protocol by leveraging interview guide • Providing overview of case study, i.e., making clear to the participants the study mission, goals and reason for research and interviews	Data Collection

	• Contacting key interviewees for each case company with appropriate knowledge to discuss the subject of interest • Designing interview questions to broaden the understanding of the issues raised during the literature review • Sending the interview guide prior to the participants at the first stage of communication • Conducting interviews in an environment that makes the interviewee comfortable, assures them of privacy, confidentiality and also being non-judgmental at the answers	

Table 2: Quality test and case study tactics (table format inspired by (Yin, 2014))

3.7. Ethical considerations

According to Yin (2014, p.260), research that involves human "subjects", where individuals participate in a study or individuals on whom you may collect previous data, there is a specific need to protect these subjects from an ethical standpoint. A good case study researcher either during the design phase or at the start of the data collection phase, need to showcase that highest ethical standards are maintained by protecting the individual subjects, avoiding deception and misrepresentation of information. Furthermore, he refers to the guidelines provided by the National research council ("2003, pp. 23–28" - Yin, 2014, p.262) which states;

- Informed consent to be obtained from all participants who have agreed to be a part of the case study, by forewarning them of the nature of the case study
- Protecting participants from harm and deception
- Protecting participants privacy and confidentiality
- Protecting vulnerable groups such as children, if they are involved in the research
- Selecting participants in a fair and impartial manner, so that groups or individuals aren't unfairly included or excluded from the research

Our study also leveraged the above guidelines highlighted by the national research council while conducting semi-structured interviews with the participants. All the potential participants were contacted via email and within this email, an interview guide was also shared that provided further information on the nature of study, current problem, research questions, study proposition along with questions that we intend to ask the participants. Once the participants provided their consent to be a part of this study, interviews were conducted based on their availability and their preferred channel of communication. Before the start of the interview, privacy and confidentiality requirements such as recording of interviews, using their company names, their names in our study and using their quotes, were discussed and put forth to all the participants. All the participants in our study were very open in recording the sessions, they wanted us to use their names, quotes, company names in the study and requested us to give a copy of the thesis once its published. For the two participants who emailed us their responses, they provided their consent over an email to use their names and quotes within the study. With all the participants being open and we as researchers of this study providing full disclosure of the intent of the study, we totally eliminated the harm and deception for the participants. There were no vulnerable group involved within our study, so, this is not relevant here. And finally, participant's selection for our study was based on the criteria that we elaborated in 3.2.1 Case Study. As we are new to the luxury travel segment, getting contacts of individuals within the case company was difficult. So, we took assistance from Carl-Oscar and Melanie from OceanSky who did the initial introduction and post that we followed the guidelines that we outlined above to reach the participants and conduct interviews.

4. Empirical Data

In this chapter we present the data collected by interviewing key persons within the case companies who are decision makers for the company that they represent. Along with the data from semi-structured interviews, Interviewee quotes that best represents overall statements and information from secondary sources such as case company websites, articles from experts within the luxury travel industry and articles within print media are also included. As outlined in the Figure 8, each case company represents one of the actors in the value chain within luxury travel industry and for each case company, topics related to journey & business proposition are covered under the following "Empirics – Introduction" section. The specificities related to capabilities of the firm, customer journey, channels & touchpoints, factors & barrier for CX and challenges within luxury travel industry are covered under "Empirics – Case specific information".

4.1. Empirics – Introduction

As a part of this introduction, the idea here is to remind the reader about the different actors within the supply chain, actors we have considered for our study and how we have grouped them to collect our data. If we recall the supply-chain network that we outlined in 1.2 and visualized in Figure 1, tourism boards & government, product or service owner, tour operator, travel agents, travel designers or travel consultants, DMCs and travelers form the different actors in the supply-chain within luxury travel industry. Barring tourism boards & government and travelers we have considered the rest of the actors (five actors) for our study.

While the literature implies that travel designers or consultants were the new genre of travel agents within luxury travel industry, the empirical material generated through this study highlights that even though from an outlook and branding perspective they are two different entities, however, the role that they perform (, i.e., curating experiences) within the luxury travel segment is same. So, from a convenience standpoint, in order to show-case the data and perform analysis, we have combined the data collected for these two actors, which makes our total actors to four, i.e., Product owner, Tour operator, Travel agents (includes designer / consultants) and DMCs.

In the following section we have introduced all the four actors and provided a brief overview on their business proposition. For more details on the actor's journey and evolution into luxury travel segment, refer to Appendix: Journey and Business Proposition.

Post this introduction, we have done a deep-dive providing case specific data relevant for our study.

4.1.1. Business Proposition

Actor:	**Product or Service Owner**
Case company:	**OceanSky AB and 62°NORD**

OceanSky AB was founded in 2014 to introduce the lighter-than-air technology to aviation and usher in a new era of modern transportation using hybrid aircraft technology (OceanSky, 2020). According to OceanSky AB, their long-term strategy is to replace traditional air transportation with a clean and efficient hybrid aircraft that can carry a significant payload capacity and has low reliance on infrastructure to operate. OceanSky wants to address this long-term strategy through a short-term strategy, by entering the market as a product or service owner focusing on experiential travel. As a product or service owner, OceanSky Cruises (started in 2018, consisting of around 20 experienced individuals) focuses on high-end experiential and luxury travel with the aims to deliver unique experience to the high-end adventurous travelers while keeping sustainability at the heart of operations and strategy (,i.e., sustainable mobility) (OceanSky, 2020). OceanSky cruises in collaboration with Hybrid Air Vehicles Ltd. (HAV) and using HAV's revolutionary airship "Airlander 10" aims to be the first to offers an adventure expedition to the North Pole from Svalbard during spring 2023/ 2024.

62°NORD is a family owned venture offering bespoke travel experiences on the north west coast of Norway (62° Nord, 2020). It was during 2014 that 62°Nord embarked into the luxury segment, prior to that they were operating in a local region providing services such as hiring of boats, hotels to mass market, conferences etc. As a part of their transformation into the luxury segment, they have designed boutique luxury hotels, i.e., three hotels at the moment based in Ålesund in the northwest coast of Norway. These hotels are part of "Small Luxury Hotels of the World" as the first hotel in Norway and also became a member of the "National Geographic unique Lodges of the world" (62° Nord, 2020). Furthermore, they also have a sister company that has a network of dedicated boats, cars and helicopters to fully cater to the Norwegian experience.

Actor:	**Tour or Cruise Operator**
Case company:	**White Desert and Southern Cross**

White Desert, established in 2005, is a 5-star luxurious and ecological camp set up in one of the greatest wildernesses on earth, Antarctica (White Desert, 2020). Whichaway Camp is a camp like no other, the perfect base for Antarctic adventure, with state-of the art sleeping pods (7 in number) designed for two people, 5-star international cuisine and luxury interiors (Luxury Travel, 2013; White Desert, 2020). With only twelve guests on each departure, they have itineraries for pioneering travelers, ranging from eight nights, that combines the magnificent Emperor Penguins with a flight to the southernmost point on earth-the Geographic South Pole, to a 24 hours trip. White Desert has received huge accolades in the press (Forbes) for being the only company in the world to offer a Gulfstream private jet to access Antarctic (White Desert, 2020).

Southern Cross, setup in 2002, is a Virtuoso preferred tour operator specialized in tailor made journeys to worldwide destinations (Southern Cross, 2019). Virtuoso is an apex authority that provides a hallmark to the travel agencies from a quality stand-point (Virtuoso, 2020). Southern Cross, consisting of 26 professionals, has been a virtuoso preferred supplier since 2017 and as a B2B tour operator with offices in Barcelona and Madrid, they stress on experiential travel, where highly qualified team of individuals create bespoke journeys for both individuals, FITs (fully independent travelers), small groups and family (Southern Cross (LinkedIn), 2020).

Actor:	**Travel Designer, Consultants and Agencies**
Case company:	**Bru & Bru Exclusive Travel Designer, A Travel Quest - Immersive Journeys, WOTA Lifestyle - International Travel Service Co. LTD, Lushescapes and Elefant Travels**

Bru & Bru, founded 2004 in Barcelona, Spain, is a small crew of 7 travel designer, who design unique, once-in-a-lifetime trips and experiences (Bru & Bru, 2020a; Bru & Bru (LinkedIn), 2020). Their unique proposition is that they only recommend destinations which the designers of Bru & Bru have experienced it by themselves before suggesting it to their clients. In addition to this they also share the experiences on their website (until now there are 83 articles) so that customers can get a notion of what they can experience (Bru & Bru, 2020b). Over the years Bru & Bru has gained experience and knowledge and in addition they are partnering with communities like the Belmond Bellini Club (which encircles the globe, with hotels, rail journeys and river adventures on six continents), the Aman Resorts (a collection of unique and truly romantic luxury resorts across the globe), travel shows like Pure Life Experiences (since 2009) which give them a special position within the luxury travel industry and makes them known for providing bespoke experiences.

A Travel Quest, who started in the second half of 2019, is a company with travel designers within the luxury travel industry which is located in Mumbai, India. The company has its origins from A Travel Duet, India's first travel brand, designing highly personalized and luxurious experiential travel, exclusively for couples, which was founded in 2012 (Travel Quest, 2020). Their vision is to curate experiences, which are creatively shaped around people (Travel Quest, 2020).

WOTA Lifestyle, located in Taipei, Taiwan, offers distinctive privilege, open rates, and deluxe lifestyle experiences with their unrivalled networking connections in the Asia Pacific area to individuals, corporate and group clients (Wota Lifestyle, 2020a). Their inimitable expertise makes the best option for lifestyle management and concierge services which entails airport VIP services, operating of MICE events or special experiences like luxury yacht experience or hot air ballooning (Wota Lifestyle, 2020a). In 2017, two years after their foundation, they started to use a combination of offline and online advertising methods to attract customers. In order to attract more luxury customers and relate WOTA to luxury they have partnered up with luxurious brands like Louis Vuitton, Chanel or Givenchy and are members in luxury hotel communities like the Four Seasons Hotels or the Rosewood Elite from the Rosewood hotels (Wota Lifestyle, 2020b).

Lushescapes is a travel partner for already more than a decade, who offers a wide range of bespoke holiday options, so that the clients get the best travel experience (Lushescapes, 2020). According to them, they have created a niche market for themselves as a luxury travel company, that turns every holiday into a unique, enriching and memorable journey (Lushescapes, 2020). Starting the business in Delhi, India, it moved subsequently to Dubai and over the years it connected with travel communities to extend the network.

Elefant Travel, located in Madrid, Barcelona and Bogotá (Columbia), is a tailored travel agency, which develop trips about experiences and not about destinations. All designed itineraries resolves around personal interests, the occasion, the time of the year and the dream that lives within the client – simply put, a customer centric approach (Elefant Travel, 2020). The company, consisting of around 10 employees, which was founded by Gonzalo Gimeno started as a small agency in 2004 in the luxury travel industry segment and belongs today to the top travel designers in Spain.

Actor:	**Destination Management Company (DMC)**
Case company:	**Ishav Arctico Inc. (IA) and Safrans du monde**

Ishav Arctico, located in Madrid, Spain, is a small company consisting of 3 specialists offering unique trips within the Norwegian Arctic. This includes visiting the most spectacular areas of low, middle and high arctic territory, staying in the most authentic and original accommodation options around the arctic and experiencing unique moments, in a special and different way (Ishav Arctico, 2020). The company founder Javier Arjona started his career more than three decades ago as a guide in the north of Norway which served as the base for the company which can nowadays look back on more than 20 years of experience and a lot of knowledge about this arctic region and a strong network of local contacts.

Safrans Du Monde is a company specializing in customized travel, world tours and air cruises since 2003 and their travel and service proposition encompasses a perfect blend of personal dreams and the secret experiences (Safrans Du Monde, 2020). In order to provide these services, the company operates at multiple levels, i.e., acts as a travel agency, a tour operator and a DMC. Prior to Safrans du monde, the founder Guy Bigiaoui was operating within tailor-made world tours on private airplanes and this experience enabled him to open his own company.

4.2. Empirics – Case specific information

4.2.1. Actor: Product or Service Owner

Differentiating factors, Firm's capabilities, Competition and New Entrant

Few common themes have emerged from all the interviewees representing their respective case company for differentiating factors in providing a product or service proposition, they are uniqueness, trust, transparency and knowledge.

According to Aymeric, one of the important differentiating factor and strength of OceanSky is the unique flying experience using airships to travel to the North Pole and states that it is because of this uniqueness that they were able to sell the flight tickets. This uniqueness triggers the customers, as they want to be the first ones to do it. For Gro-Linn, trust and knowledge acts as differentiating factors for 62°Nord and she states that "…trust is an important factor and then it has also to do with understanding and really take it seriously what the clients want in a way to understand them, their psychology, you know, in what it means to be in the high-end segment and that is also a thing that is important. You have to understand people and you have to understand the different type of people. Because if you do that, that is also a part of the trust in the way". From a firm's capabilities standpoint, Carl-Oscar elaborates that when the whole world is a playground, a firm needs to build partnership with their supplier and network with right people with skills who can plug the holes, where a firm don't have assets or competences. For Gro-Linn, capabilities refer to firm's knowledge about the industry, training, education and motivation employees and, enough capital for the business can invest in activities such as travel shows, or fun trips and she states, "…knowledge and to educate everyone to be on the same page and motivating them to be and why we should be on this page is also an important factor. So, it's lots about training in a way that is important factors to operate in that kind of segment. And then you have to have the fund as well. If I cannot be out on the different shows and meet the agents. Or have the funds to invite them here and to show them what we can offer. Then we wouldn't have the possibility to meet the different agents in the first place".

Appendix 3 summarizes all the themes that emerged for differentiating factors and firm's capabilities to operate within luxury industry. Also, refer to Appendix: Product or Service Owner for summary of insights on competition and barriers for new entrants.

Channels and Channel Preferences

Aymeric, states that "the channel that a firm uses to target its customers depends on the market that they are operating in". He elaborates by quoting an example in Asia, especially China, people use a lot of social media, like WeChat. For 95 % of the time these luxury travelers have a secretary or a personal assistant (PA) who organizes the trip and these secretaries are in contact with the travel agents, as opposed to regions of the world where the guests can be contacted directly by travel agents. He also goes on to state that travel agents, visibility in the press, media and magazines, also play a role in reaching the luxury travelers. Gisle, has a same point of view as Aymeric and includes few other mediums such as exclusive customer events, references through word-of-mouth, eye catchy website and brochure can be leveraged to reach your target customers. Furthermore, he states that while there are these channels at disposal, the end game is to use these channels to provide exclusive and personalized experience and to make things exciting for the customers, include some element of risk in the sense of offering something reasonably safe, but filled with excitement, while communicating about the service or product offering. According to Carl-Oscar, personal network channel plays a very important role within luxury segment as your buying into a story elucidated by a travel agent and thereby creating a personal trust relationship between customer and agents. He also highlights that other channels such as MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions), internet or websites, direct sales, word-of-mouth or ambassadors and sales through direct invitation also plays a crucial role in luring the target group.

For OceanSky, 80 % of customers come through travel agents and 20 % are direct customers. And from a channel preference perspective, they feel ambassadorship is more efficient and effective, followed by travel agencies, direct channel of invitation, MICE, PR and social media. 62°Nord has around 50 % to 60 % customers (both agents and luxury traveler) who are using their website to directly book their product or service and they prefer direct booking through their website along with Instagram and other social media.

While all the interviewees states that a seamless experience can be created by having a good communication between partners (Agencies or Tour operators) within the supply-chain, but, creating this seamless experience can be a challenge. And they highlight the following challenges for creating a seamless experience, 1) Individuals within the supply chain has their own view and incentives, but, as product owners, they need to keep the cost down or at least keep it moderate (Carl-Oscar), 2) Need an educated person or agency that share the same passion as the product owner (Gisle), 3) Cannot control how travel agents communicate with their guests, which Melanie from OceanSky refers to as "Flüsterpost" (e.g. "Chinese Whispers") and 4) Agencies should experience what Product Owner provide to their customers because you will never understand something until you have experienced it by yourself (Gro-Linn).

Customer Journey and Touchpoints

"For OceanSky, it's not an online booking experience, where you will find the service or business proposition on bookings.com or trip-advisor, where an individual customer can click and book his trip. It needs a personal connect", says Aymeric. He further highlights that in China the luxury market is more mature now, customers know what they want, and they always have intermediaries like PA's or secretaries who work with travel agents. The customers do research by getting online, read all reviews about the destination, property and experience. Depending on where the customers are within the purchase cycle, you can influence them by inspiring with beautiful pictures in magazines or social media or having friends experience first-hand or using key opinion leaders experience. Word-of-mouth has a very strong influence in Asia and as it is the PA's or secretaries who sort their travel out, their voice also plays a strong role in influencing the customer. Gisle and Aymeric share the same view that Asia and Middle East has more hierarchal structures in comparison to West and Europe, which has less hierarchy, but all of them have gatekeepers in the form of PA's or secretaries. He further adds that as most of their clients come through agencies, OceanSky as product owners need to help their agencies by giving them tools and inspiration to talk about their trips. According to Melanie from

OceanSky, customer journeys and touchpoints dependent on the product that you intend to sell, and this varies based on culture as well. She further elaborates on this point by quoting an example, where she sells a product in the American market, they (Americans) decide and make payments within a few days after receiving the information or brochures as compared to the Europeans, where it takes months to negotiate and convince people to capture interest.

Both Gisle and Carl-Oscar raise a point about communication to their customer base pre- and post the journey and how do they make sure that the interest on their service proposition is alive and kicking. Gisle, states that high-end luxury travel fairs, dinner or cocktail parties, highly knowledgeable people invited as speaker can spark the interest. He further goes on to give an example of “Quintessentially travel”, where you need to have membership to be invited and they constantly keep supplying information even if you don’t have a hard ticket in hand. Carl-Oscar also agrees with the concept of events, training camps and platforms that can be leveraged to keep the project alive. He quotes an example of Virgin Galactic and states that for OceanSky, they could sell memorabilia’s and merchandise to make it clear that their trip is a reality. For Gro-Linn, the critical touchpoints within the journey are 1) the time taken from request for accommodation to confirmation of the accommodation. As this become tricky, especially when the customer takes a long time to confirm and 2) if you cannot organize adventures or planned activities due to weather, i.e., like cruise with the boat on the ocean, because it’s too rough, or cannot fly with the helicopter, rescheduling this and communicating becomes a challenge.

Co-Creation influence on CX

All the interviewees highlighted that in order to provide an experience that is memorable to their customers, co-creation with their partners is important. Gisle, takes this notion further and states that in order to provide a seamless co-creation, it is important to understand who plays what role in the co-creation. Aymeric gives couple of examples of positive co-creation where one guests experience has become a standard for others to follow, i.e., “…where a guest wanted to organize a private dinner on top of a historical building, this actually sets a tone and becomes a standardized experience for another guest to follow”. On another occasion, “…a guest wanted to go to a certain location [without any accommodation] and they literally paid to build a 5-bedroom lodge in Ecuador and this still exists and now it’s a running lodge used for other guests”. Carl-Oscar states that a negative co-creation can arise “when expectations are not fulfilled by either party”. He further goes on to add that in order for OceanSky to succeed and make sure that people do not see it (their business proposition) as an intrusive element (going to sensitive areas like North Pole), they need to create an understanding for the technology or the equipment, and what it can achieve on a larger scale. These kinds of issues can be resolved by educating customers.

Driving Factors and Barriers for CX

Aymeric states that driving factors can be anything, but, now within the luxury segment, it’s mostly driven by the guests who wants to do something that has never been done before. He further goes on to state that providing unique experience is getting harder for the travel agents due to online, social media and mass market. Here is what he says, “…the barrier would actually be online internet literally because it's really hard now for any educated travel agent to create something unique where it's only available to a few people because once it becomes trendy or has been seen on social media everybody wants to do it so and mass tourism is literally killing some destinations”. He says that while it is tricky to get the balance, a lot of customers are looking for “authenticity”, “going back to the roots”, “meeting the locals” and this has become the new luxury experience as it is impossible to put a price for such experiences. For Gisle, the physical environment and novelty acts as barriers, where he states that, “The barrier is the physical environment itself and you know actually pulling it off, being able to fly to North Pole and create and give them a good experience…I think the barriers is the novelty but, we have to use these novelties as part of the experience...So, I would love if we could co-create in that sense that the customers and agencies are feeling that you are contributing in solving a problem in the aviation”. Carl-Oscar states that transportation and providing logistics around having food prepared in the middle of nowhere are important barriers, he quotes, “…tour operators really have to think hard is how do we get these high net-worth individuals that does not want to come home with a broken leg to experience this adventures because it's not in the mall of Dubai you can experience that wild feeling, you need to go deep into Amazon or nature”. For Melanie, the barriers include, creating CX at a personal level when there is a group travel and sometime personalization can be expensive and customers are not ready to pay, so, a balance is needed in such situation. Gro-Linn states that while new technologies assist in sharing experience on social media, thus making it easier, the same social media can also act as a barrier for providing CX (due to higher customer expectations and needs). Appendix 5 summaries all the key points highlighted by all the interviewees. From a challenge’s perspective, one theme that resonated amongst all the interviewees was sustainability and for other themes refer to Appendix 8.

4.2.2. Actor: Tour or Cruise Operator

Differentiating Factors, Firm’s capabilities, Competition and New Entrant

As eloquently put across by Gareth, White Desert is not just any luxury safari operator. It’s a niche property, in a niche region and niche industry. He further states that White Desert is uniquely placed within the value-chain, as it is both a product owner and a tour operator. Here is what he says “Yeah, so we're in a unique situation where we are both because in the normal world, you would engage with the DMC in Antarctica, but, the DMC in Antarctica don't exist. So, from a sales perspective, you deal with all the agents and what they look to do is they look to take care of the whole experience. They can't do that with us because we run that experience, we also run the logistics, we run everything. So, we are a tour operator, but, we are adding all the logistics of it as a product as well”.

On firms’ capabilities, Gareth points out three aspects, flexibility, tenacity and determination to meet your vision. He quotes, “…You need to have relatively long kind of return horizons, because you can't get your money back straight away. And if I think of the industry as a whole, the pure luxury of it, you can't look at a 10-year return and income, it's way longer than that. Because, if you're going to be skimping, wanting returns in five years, then you're going to be skimping on inputs going in and you can't afford to do that to create luxury”. For Ernesto (interviewee from Southern Cross) having a perfect team, experienced, well-travelled and highly motivated professionals with a customer- and service-oriented attitude is the first and most important capabilities a firm should possess because, after all, travel is part of the hospitality industry.

Refer to Appendix: Tour or Cruise Operator for the summary of insights on competition and barriers for new entrants.

Channels and Channel Preferences

For Gareth, it’s difficult to define a specific channel that can be used to target luxury customer, purely because of the fact that everyone’s product within luxury by virtue is super unique and by the same virtue their customers are also different, and everyone markets their product or service in a different way. He quotes, "…The reality is, you speak to every single person in luxury and they'll say, Oh, you need to do X, Y and Z. The thing with luxury is that if we're going to define a market by that is that X, Y, Z there is no solution for it". For White Desert, he says, they focus on two main channels, 1) Focus on strong PR marketing strategy where we need to get access to the world's wealthiest people who can afford our trips. To do that it is not a case of paying for advertising. It is a case of getting your story in front of people so, a big part is selecting the right publications where you need your stories to be told. 2) Referrals from the clients who have traveled before. He further highlights a very interesting point about customer life time value, where he says that majority of luxury tourism you can have repeat businesses, but, a trip to Antarctica is a one-time value, where the customer pays a lot of money and do everything they can within the time period (one-time trip). He quotes, "…So of course we can develop more to the trip, but the fact, that our trips are expensive, people generally do it once".

With regards to the channel preference, Gareth states that as White Desert is super unique, they have a very strong PR space and for that reason approximately 50 % are direct customers and 50% come through agents. Ernesto states that Southern Cross, being a B2B tour operator, sell only through fully licensed travel agents, i.e., offline and all the sales come from that channel. But, also adds that online tools are continuously perfected but are still far from being able to customize elaborate journeys to high-end travelers.

Customer Journey and Touchpoints

According to Gareth, the customer journey begins with customer contacting White Desert through their websites, for which they return the call. Then it is a case of back and forth questions, answers, questions, answers, maybe a phone call. Once the customer signs-up terms and conditions, makes a payment or deposit payment, they then get handed over to the guest relation team. The guest relation team start the process of getting them ready for an Antarctic trip, which means kit, insurance and hotel bookings, dietaries, what you generally expect from a kind of high-end accommodation process. White Desert team has a safety briefing a day before the travel and then they (team) travel to Cape Town. We host a safety briefing, that is where we meet the customers for the first, before travelling to Antarctica.

Ernesto states that as their primary customers are travel agents, the agents contact Southern Cross by phone or email to request a tailor-made quotation. If this quotation ends up in an effective reservation, we are then repeatedly in touch with travel agents before, during and after the trip. He also adds that, usually they don't get in touch with the final traveler, it's their suppliers who touch base with them on either their or the agent's behalf (refer to appendix on personalization within customer journey). According Ernesto, following are the critical touch points, Arrival point at each destination, Departure points from each destination, whenever flights are involved (either domestic, regional, or transoceanic) and before and after expedition cruises.

Co-Creation influence on CX

Gareth acknowledges the fact that co-creations happens a lot within experiential travel segment and White Desert is very much part of this co-creation. He states that they offer a blank canvas to their customers and what they really need to do is bring their creativity and that definitely happens. He quotes, "What's interesting about being a product like White Desert is that we can offer that blank canvas [..] because a big part of it is people like to be the first, you know, doing something unique. We're lucky in the fact that there are lots of mountains in Antarctica that haven't ever been climbed". Ernesto states that co-creation in travel is tricky and quotes that, "what one particular traveler would like to introduce in their journey is not necessarily good for another traveler".

Driving Factors and Barriers for CX

Antarctica is shrouded with mysteries and is one of the roughest places on earth and customers are spending a lot of money to get an experience in this place, so, it becomes important for White Desert to set the right expectations and make sure that the customer feel at ease and trust them, says Gareth. He quotes, "…Antarctica is shrouded in this mystery from explorers of old and it is the highest windiest, driest, coldest place on earth. And our role is to ultimately offer them comforts and luxury in a place that was probably one of the most unforgiving spaces on the planet". He further adds that it is their job to mitigate customer's anxiety before they travel. On the barrier front, Gareth states communication as the biggest bottle neck in providing CX. Communication from the client, as they are too busy with their lifestyle and stressful world that they do not prioritize travel. Communication between agents and traveler, where a poor communication due to lack of knowledge can result in bad CX. He quotes, "…the poor communication between the agent and the end user if it's coming through an agent, because the agent ends up doing a second guessing the clients and in asking things that the client actually does not want to know".

From a challenge perspective, Ernesto highlights three challenges, appealing to new generation of travelers, sustainability and diminishing professional interest in becoming a travel agent and for Gareth, environment and human diseases coupled with overpopulation and mass consumerism pose biggest challenges to luxury industry. Refer to Appendix: Tour or Cruise Operator for further detail on this.

4.2.3. Actor: Travel Designer, Consultants and Agencies

Differentiating factors and Firm's capabilities

Offering unique experiences or trips to the clients seems to be the common notion that all the interviewees agree on and they further elaborate that the customers can only get these benefits because of the partnership that the travel designers or agents have built with other suppliers. Another differentiating factor beside offering unique experiences is the service that are offered to the customers. Minute details such as, "a number of surprises that are organized, small gestures or when the clients are walking in the corridor of the hotel, and the staff knows them by name, that makes the difference!" also influence CX, says Nishant. Gonzalo further adds on to the service concept by stating that, "...(if) you really want to design your own product, you have to know what you're talking about. And you really have to understand that this business is about client service and adding value in every single little step of the ladder with little details." All interviewees elaborated, that they are passionate about traveling which helps to get valuable insights and let them speak enthusiastically about destinations.

All interviewees agree that a company needs to build trust with suppliers and customers. Kwan elaborates this further by stating that, "…(they) use customer events to really connect with the clients, so that the clients can build more trust to us [WOTA Travel]." Ana says that the designers "take care of every single detail and the clients can just enjoy, […] that's how we achieve credibility and confidence to clients." Abhishek states that "it's all about gaining that confidence and trust through being completely open and more or less transparent." The right relationships and an intertwined network are also essential in order to provide unique, personalized experiences, maintain a good communication and mitigate the risk of wrong expectations. Kwan states, that "networking in this industry is quite important". Abhishek also agrees and says that they “have a solid network of suppliers” and Nishant is convinced, that “the right partnerships make a big difference”. Gonzalo explains that his company “invests much money in training the team and sending them abroad, visiting people, visiting countries and opening up the network”. Furthermore, all the interviewees agree that in order to provide a seamless service, collaboration with DMC and suppliers is also important. Ana states that “we can be confident, that our providers are the best, because we know them in person.” Kwan explains, that WOTA also “connect(s) with local DMC's or hotels to ensure a smooth journey.” According to Abhishek “there are establishments, consortiums which are bodies who rate these suppliers” and they collaborate with experts in each area. He states, “we have multiple suppliers and multiple vendors, to not put everything on one person and in order to have an expert for each and every service”. Similar notion is echoed by Gonzalo and he states, “…have developed an amazing network of people around the world in every single country over the past 15 years. We know the best guides, so, access is key.”

Another differentiating factor is the knowledge the designers have in order to assist their clients during the travel design and delivery process. All interviewees agree that a company needs a thorough understanding, and firsthand experience about the destination. Ana explains that she does “site inspections” whereas Abhishek state that he has “traveled to 60+ countries until today” and Gonzalo says that he has “been to 82 countries”. The training and knowledge about clients and destinations is also important. Nishant explains, that it is important, to “train the staff at the operations and sales level” and Abhishek says, that “you need to be proactive and you need to always think one step ahead, [in order to provide] a value addition in service and knowledge”. Multilingual staff is another advantage as Gonzalo elaborates, that his team in the office “speak from three to five languages” and that “everybody needs to be a very good communicator and have a high degree of empathy”.

All the different themes, which have been generated from the conducted interviews, have been clustered and can be found in the Appendix 10**.**

Channels and Channel Preferences

In order to get publicity Travel Quest, organize several marketing campaigns and WOTA also organizes events, where they invite previous clients and members to connect with luxury brands. Kwan states, that “branding is very important [and you need] a company, whose name is being talked about.” Social media is also helping in achieving this publicity. All the interviewees state, that they have their own websites, Facebook pages and accounts on Instagram. LinkedIn is also used to connect with entrepreneurs (Nishant). On the other hand, Abhishek has an opposing view on social media and states that, “social media does not work in our industry in terms of business generation. I don’t think that social media plays an important role, you just do that to be active, to make sure that you are present on social media”. He goes on to add that, in order to target customers, they are active on Instagram and states that, “we are very much active on Instagram, as it is our no. one channel, because it is all about imagery, it is all about fascinating places”. From a marketing perspective Ana says that the posts and stories are a kind of journals to share their experience together with pictures in a personal way. She states, “clients follow our posts and stories on our website and feel inspired by that to choose their own upcoming trips”. In order to get publicity Elefant Travel invites journalists to accompany their inspection trips and write about the journeys. Gonzalo says, that “the whole core of business communication is, that knowledge becomes asset and that is what differentiates us.” The most important channel for Ana is referral, she states, “the majority of our new customers come by recommendation.” Nishant also states, that they get customers through word-of-mouth as they “getting to know new customers through our old customers”. Gonzalo shares the same view on word-of-mouth as other interviewees and states that, “the best salesperson ever is a client.”

All interviewees communicate with the clients via various channels, which are , i.e., emails, telephone, WhatsApp groups (to connect throughout the journey) or a direct face-to-face interaction during the initial planning phase.

Nishant states that customers like “being invited for something that is exclusive, therefore important, and which can be seen as a status symbol”. Gonzalo has a different view on marketing and says that, “We don't do the bling bling marketing, with all the luxury suites and the business on the planes and the visual money, we're about authenticity, what you see is what you get”. Abhishek prefers customer reaching out to them and states that, “we don’t have a push strategy, we have a pull strategy, we don’t ever contact the customer, we do not promote anything into their face.” The distribution of where the agencies get their clients varies. Elefant Travel has around 80 % face-to-face customers and 20 % digital customers. Bru & Bru has around 70 % repeat customers, 20 % through recommendations and 10 % are direct customers who come to their office. Ana Bru states, that she “prefers a few, but good clients instead of having a lot of clients”. WOTA Travel and Travel Quest generate around 60 % of their business through online appearance (, i.e., website, social media) and 40 % from social events or through word-of-mouth.

Customer Journey and Touchpoints

The customer journey within the luxury travel industry from a firm’s perspective follows a path, where the agencies meet the clients, profiles them, design a customized itinerary and propose it to the clients, make amendments based on feedback, and once the clients confirm it, books all components. The Agencies are always in contact with the clients, before the travel, on the travel and after the travel.

Four interviewees elaborated, that they have some sort of information collection with the clients prior designing the trip. This might be either a questionnaire with certain specifics (Nishant) or several meetings with the clients or the assistances to try make them more confident (Kwan). Abhishek says, that “we usually get enquires from our clientele and they tell us what they want to do or sometimes they tell us this is the window to travel this year, what are the suggestions?”. Gonzalo takes a different approach than others where he prefers to have the first meeting at the client’s homes, to get to know them on a personal level and states, “That first interview, is key for us, and usually it lasts a couple of hours, it's sitting together and go through questions, we try to understand the type of family”.

Then the personalized itinerary is designed and proposed to the clients. Kwan says, that “we point out every single timeline for them, like when they are doing something and what they're doing”. Abhishek states, that once the concept is done, “a presentation is made for the clients, so they get an overview of what they get out of this get-away or holiday.” Gonzalo says that, “we send the first draft to the clients via email as a pdf, but it looks like a travel magazine”. The interviewees explain their offer to the clients and receive feedback, on which basis the trip is revised. Abhishek says, that after the feedback, “we improve those concept notes further on and then we finalize the program with (the clients)”. Gonzalo states that, “usually after the third revision, the trip is sold. […] And then we print a personalized book for them, it's a hardcover program, it's beautiful”. Furthermore, every interviewee agreed that the design phase (mentioned above) takes time and is dependent on the duration of the trip.

According to Kwan, the journey starts from pre-purchase phase. He states, “the whole Journey is starting even before they (the clients) reach the destination. And once they reach the side, we make sure that the service and the people from our service can treat them seamlessly”. Ana states that during the travel they follow up with both, the clients, and the suppliers at the destination. All interviewees state that they offer a 24/7 support to the clients in case something goes wrong. Abhishek explains that they “use WhatsApp-groups for each client and have the operations and the salesperson within the group to update the client about each detail on ground and ensure, that it is seamless.”

With regards to collecting feedback, every case company had a different approach. Nishant states that people (customers) do not have the time for feedback. Kwan and Abhishek take feedback by sharing questionnaires and Ana and Gonzalo state that their designers have a long personal (or on phone) conversations with the client to gain feedback.

All interviewees state that they do not really have any measures or tools set in place to measure customer loyalty, but Ana states that they have customer retention because they offer a good service. For Nishant measurement is via reference, she states, “every time we have had satisfied customers, we have always had references”. For Abhishek loyalty is regular engagement and he states, “they are engaging with us on a regular manner or regular basis, it is maybe not about business but maybe on other touch points”. Gonzalo believes that having that personal connection creates loyalty and explains that, “our client loyalty is so high because we go to their homes and when you have somebody in your house, the psychological barrier that you have in a buying and selling environment goes away.”

Co-Creation influence on CX

The interviewees did not elaborate a lot about co-creation where customers get engaged. But we can see from the interviewees, that co-creation is practiced. Ana explains that they design trips collaboratively and she states that, “design the trip together with (the clients), according to their preferences […] When you work together (client and designer), the trip will be perfect”. Kwan says, that if you co-create it is “easy to really spread out the good vibes to other customers and we don't need to put much effort into marketing”. According to Abhishek, co-creation is to “enhance the brand. It's just about recreating magic each and every time you are doing a holiday or organizing a program”. Examples given by the interviewees that has negative influence on CX, “hotel (that) is not offering what they should, even though it’s a five-star hotel. That makes it cruel and terrible for the luxury traveler, especially for the frequent traveler” (Kwan). Abhishek elaborated, that “there are instances where the clients are stuck in the middle of nowhere for example, Sub-Saharan Africa because of weather or flight cancellations and they are stuck in the network (airport) which does not even have a lounge and we're talking about multi-millionaires […] Things like these happen and then you get a challenge and you convert a challenge into an opportunity”.

Driving Factors and Barriers for CX

According to Abhishek the personal touch and the innovation that they bring through their products drives the CX. For Gonzalo it’s all about authenticity and relationship and he states that, “(Elefant Travel) is not about selling everything at whatever cost. It’s the authenticity and how it all comes down to having relationships with real people”. For Ana is about making customer feel special and unique. She states, “…(itineraries) designed individually, bespoke and totally tailormade make them feel special and unique”.

For Nishant, barriers for the CX arises through miscommunication and Kwan states that, "the travel itself due to its unpredictable nature" creates a barrier. Abhishek also agrees that communication is key and states that, "(he) does not speak with the Personal Assistants (PAs) or secretary, he speaks with the customer directly. There's a lot of dilution of information that happens between the PA and the client". For Gonzalo managing expectations of the customers and quality is a barrier, he states, "(as) we are selling a promise, that we cannot prove…(and) If somebody does not deliver the service, the whole chain suffers. So quality control is key". Furthermore, Gonzalo states that the process of profiling and hiring employees can also be a barrier for CX. He states, "this business is about people, it's not about destinations or products […] everything revolves around one person!"

4.2.4. Actor: Destination Management Company (DMC)

Differentiating factors and Firm's capabilities

Both companies provide unique, special and hand-crafted experiences to their customers. Guy states that "it never happens that two clients bought the same trip from me". Javier on the other hand states that "you must provide a very special experience to the clients" and further adds that everyone in the luxury industry need to provide something different, "all exhibitors (at PURE LIFE Experience travel show) need to offer something special". Both interviewees state throughout the interview several times, that a good network and human relations are essential to start a business and work in this segment. Javier refers for example that "it is very important knowing the right people" and to have "a good relationship with the suppliers". Another very important factor for a company is to build trust to the customers and suppliers. Trust can be for example based on expertise. – "A client has to trust that we have the experience and the network and the ability of creating what we wrote on the paper", states Guy. A firm further needs to be organized in a good manner states Javier, meaning that contacts need to be sorted, information management is working, and the demanded service is provided. Other capabilities a firm within this segment needs to have is a passion for traveling, creativity and sensibility which Guy describes as "ears to listen, eyes to see and good sense of human relationships". Both interviewees agree on the approach, that they need to slip into the customers role and then imagine how to design the experience and how to exceed the customers expectation for the trip.

All the different themes, which have been generated from the conducted interviews, have been clustered and can be found in the Appendix 11.

Channels and Channel Preferences

Within this industry it is very important to present the company and communicate on several channels in order to reach the target customers. These could be through PRs, advertisements, networking, trade shows, visits of travel agencies, appointments with clients, emailing or paper mailing. Both case companies attend travel shows and communities to increase their network and partnership. These shows, and the communities also offer all actors within the value chain of luxury travel a stage to present themselves to the international market. Another channel that is used is public relation (PR) where Safrans Du Monde has many press relations. They have an office in Paris, which helps them to publish many press releases which are then echoed on TV, radio, newspapers or on internet. Javier explains on the similar lines, that it is easy to do commercial actions and reach clients in Spain, as his office is located in Madrid. Social media was not mentioned in specific by either DMCs. In order to share the experience with the customers (Travel Agencies in this instance), Ishav Arctico is doing briefings and presentations with nice pictures to explain about the arctic to make people fall in love with it. Newsletters are also an instrument, to keep agencies updated. Fun trips, where the DMC’s or suppliers are inviting agencies on a trip are seldomly used by Ishav Arctico because they need to bear the expenses of the trip for the agencies without any assured reward. Word-of-mouth is another channel that works for both companies and they regard this very important due to the loyal, return customers. Once customers have made good experiences and have been satisfied with the service, they spread the word to friends or colleagues. The following statement from Guy underlines the importance of these loyal customers which can be compared like a close relationship: “Internet is for us only a window, so we don't sell anything on the internet.” Safrans Du Monde has a distribution of around 50 % B2B and 50 % B2C customers and from the B2C customers around 60-70 % are repeat customers, which shows that there is a high customer loyalty for the service they provide. With regards to the channel preference Guy states, that loyal, repeat customer are the number one client followed by customers attracted through PR-work.

Customer Journey and Touchpoints

In general, the customer journey within the luxury travel industry from a firm’s perspective follows an approach, where the firms start collecting information from the clients, design a customized itinerary and propose it to the clients, make amendments based on feedback, and once the clients confirm it, books all components.

The traveler initially contacts a travel agency or designer and shares his desire, needs, ideas and demands. The DMC’s provide either presentations or other information to the travel agencies and designers to brief them and give them appropriate insights. The travel designer contacts their DMC’s, product owner and supplier and exchanges the essential customer information. Safrans Du Monde for example provides a word-document with the net-rate so that the agency only needs to add a mark-up and hand it over to the client. That document is then crafted especially for the client considering his specifics, his profile, his taste, and his previous experiences etc. Both companies try to gather as many insights as possible from the agencies or directly from the client (in B2C scenario) to “try to understand the client’s expectations in terms of how he imagines his trip” (Guy). Information can be in the form of e.g. number of travelers, active or non-active travelers decided based on adventures they opt for, number of days they would like to be traveling, dates of travel, start destination and demands on accommodation. Further questions such as, kind of inclusive trips, flights, hotels, transfers and experiences like excursions, helicopter tours, private camping and budget limit, will also be requested to provide a better quote. The Budget is important and according to Guy clients “expect you (the company) to give them the right price for what you propose, and they check everything. […] It may be very high but it's still very important and they discuss about it”. Once that step is accomplished the trip will be crafted and designed in accordance with the information given by the clients coupled with knowledge and creativity of Safrans Du Monde designer. This hand-crafted process takes a couple days, depending on the duration of the trip. The designers will discuss this itinerary with the clients, incorporate the feedbacks and on confirmation, proceed to payment and execution. In the case of Ishav Arctico they will send out the proposal to the agency who will add their benefits (e.g. flights, insurances etc…) and presents it to the client. Once the client confirms, Ishav Arctico checks the availability with their suppliers, book pending services and asks the agency for a 30 % deposit and eight weeks prior the trip for the remaining 70 %. On the actual journey both companies provide a 24-hour concierge service, so that the clients can call 24/7. In case of complaints Guy states that “we deal with the complaint and sometimes we give a refund or some compensation if needed, every case is different."

Both interviewees state that the clients give their feedback to the travel agencies and sometimes they hand it forward to the DMC. In case of a bad feedback "they (the travel agency) are going to tell us for sure" states Javier. Safrans du Monde is reaching out to the travel agencies and ask the agencies how the clients liked the trips and in case of direct B2C customers they reach out to each client after the trip via telephone. Both interviewees also agree that it is important to have trust along the value chain. A travel agency needs to trust the DMC and they need to trust their supplier. While the DMC needs to show that they "understood, what the travel agency wants and what makes them happy" (Guy), the suppliers need to understand, "that they must provide private VIP service" (Javier), and that "the first moment of everything (e.g. meeting the chauffeur or entering the hotel) is critical" (Guy).

Co-Creation influence on CX

Both interviewees were not fully aware of this expression but mentioned a few points which refer to the realms of co-creation. A factor that makes the travels unique is, that the trips are made on a private basis, so that there is time and space for the customers to co-create along the value creation. Guy always challenges his suppliers where he demands something out of the box and creative. He states, "I will probably refuse 90 % [of the supplier's ideas], so come up with something you (the supplier) never did and you have never thought about, and I never thought about either". He gave an example where a couple who were doing a world tour in Australia, he sent a paparazzi looking for them and taking pictures at all places. At the end of the day he was offering an album to the couple with their pictures. Since then, Guy says, he has seen that quite a few times.

Driving Factors and Barriers for CX

Many touchpoints contribute to the perceived customer experience. One barrier for Javier is the seamless communication of his passion and emotion in designing experience for customer through Ishav Arctico through to the travel agents and then to the final customers. He quotes, "How can I be sure that the information that I gave to the travel agency is going to arrive to the final client?". For Guy, he wants his customer to recognize them for the experience they provide and curate. He quotes, "the idea is always to speak not really about our image but about the experience we want the clients to identify with and to show him that we have a certain way of making it sure".

Both interviewees agree that an experience needs to awake emotions. Javier explains that "we have the responsibility to create a little theatre" and Guy states that "they (customers) should feel comfortable, they should feel wow, they should feel that they are doing something incredible that others don't do or that they are privileged […] and they just have to feel it very naturally".

5. Analysis

In this section the analysis of the empirical data is performed, and the findings of the analysis are presented. Each case (, i.e., each actor) is analyzed individually as a stand-alone entity to gain familiarity with the data and the unique patterns or themes that emerges from each of these cases is leveraged to generate initial theory or construct – this is what we call within-case analysis. Applying the same guiding principles that were applied to within-case analysis, a cross-case analysis is performed where two or more cases are compared for common or divergent patterns or themes. As a part of cross-case analysis, we have grouped dimensions or themes/ sub-themes that are similar, grouped opposing themes between the different cases and finally, selected pairs of cases and analyzed similarities and differences between these pairs.

5.1. Within-case and Cross-case analysis

Each actor in the value-chain within luxury travel industry is considered as a case and leveraging the thematic analysis approach, each case is analyzed to identify unique themes that contribute to the CX from a firm, customer and co-creation perspectives. Outlined below are the eight themes and their sub-themes that were generated from within-case and cross-case analysis.

Factors or elements within the organization that contribute to organization's or firm's ability to deliver CX are:

- Organization strategy and approach – Sub-themes include, Organization vision, mission and goal, Business Model, Value Proposition, Organization's Customer-Centric approach
- Firm's capabilities, engagement, and training – Sub-themes include, Capabilities, Product or Service awareness, Training program to develop employee's knowledge, skill, and attitude
- Information management – Sub-theme includes, Technology influence on CX

Factors or elements that needs to be considered from a customer standpoint in order to design, deliver and manage CX:

- Customer Journey, channels, and touchpoints – Sub-themes include, Marketing Channels, Customer Journey and Touchpoint orientation, Connectivity of touchpoints
- Target customer group and service expectations – Sub-themes include, Customer groups and their expectations
- CX insights/ metrics – Sub-theme includes, Measurement of CX

Factors or elements that needs to be considered from a co-creation standpoint to deliver CX

- Co-creation – Sub-themes include, Experience Personalization, Experience Network, Co-constructing Experience

And finally,

- The moderating factors that affects organization's or firm's product or service delivery, customer's expectations and external factors that impacts luxury travel industry and delivery of CX

It is worth to note that not all case data generated all the above themes. Some case(s) contributed heavily to one or multiple themes, while other case(s) covered all the themes. In the following sections, important findings related to these themes will be addressed for every actor, i.e., case. Refer to Appendix: Thematic Analysis for detailed thematic analysis of the empirical data.

5.2. Within-case Analysis

5.2.1. Actor: Product or Service Owner

In order to understand how product owners (also refers to service owners for companies providing services) provide CX, the empirical data collected from OceanSky AB and 62°Nord were categorized into sub-themes and abstract level themes. Important insights on organization's perception of CX, organization's perception of customer expectations and co-creation influence on CX are analyzed under the five main themes; organization strategy & culture, firm's capabilities, engagement & training, channels & touchpoints, target customer groups & service expectations and co-creation. These themes are discussed below.

Organization strategy and approach

The effectuation of a certain strategy is contingent on customer-centricity, customer engagement, capabilities an organization possesses and developed, and inter-organizational relations it can utilize or mobilize (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Complementing this perspective, Meyer and Schwager (2007) suggest that in order for a brand to be successful in providing CX, an organization needs to embed their value proposition in every feature of the product or service they offer. The authors further go on to add that the greatest barrier for customer centricity is the lack of customer-centric organizational culture. In order to successfully implement a customer-centric strategy and operating model, a firm should have a culture that is aligned with the team, their top leadership and employees. Drawing upon this strategy and operating model, one can perceive that the conditions for providing luxury tourism experiences are quite similar to the perspectives provided above. Based on the empirical data collected from both OceanSky AB and 62°Nord, we understand that while both case companies offer different product or services within the luxury travel industry, as product owners their business model and value proposition is centered around keeping customer at the heart of their operations. In order to meet customer demands, the product owners have an internal team that is small, but highly knowledgeable and effective where each individual in the team performs multiple roles. With regards to organization culture and leadership, due to limited empirical data, it is difficult to comments on how these factors influence organization strategy and operating model.

62°Nord is an organization that has developed certain capabilities in the area of mass tourism but has re-oriented themselves towards the luxury segments that specializes in Norwegian experience (both stay and adventures). In the process of this transformation, they had to evolve their business model and value proposition, by being flexible in understanding customer needs and wants, partnering with experience travel agents, transforming their complete system and process and, educating and training their staff and suppliers to move away from the mind-set of product-centric and mass tourism market to customer-centric and luxury tourism market, catering to every smallest details of their customers. From the empirical data it can also be perceived that their existing capabilities in the form of assets and local networking acted as a foundation to transition to luxury segment.

OceanSky AB, providing a different business proposition than 62°Nord, has taken a different approach to enter luxury segment. Their capabilities foremost reside in operating aircrafts for transportation and their long-term strategy is to provide an alternative to fossil-fueled aircraft transportation through a short-term strategy that targets the premium segment of high-end experiential travel or tourism. From a perspective of the short-term strategy, OceanSky intends to change the concept of high-end tourism by providing customers with unique experiences, where they can explore nature and wildness by travelling in an airship. This whole service that OceanSky has designed and developed is centered around catering to customer needs, wants and expectations, allowing flexibility for customization and personalization at each step of the service. For competences or capabilities that OceanSky lacks, they make it up by collaborating and partnering with reputed supplier or communities. Furthermore, as highlighted in the empirical data, the short-term strategy comes with its own challenges such as novelty in concept, technology that customer and communities don't understand, futurist project that both agents and customer don't want to commit to and newly established company without track-record of handling difficult customers. One can also perceive that the success of the long-term strategy is contingent on how OceanSky plans address their current challenges, manage their external supplier and supply-chain network and complete their first flight with no-incidents. And also leverage value, fund, experience, industry traction and repertoire from the luxury travel segment (, i.e., their short-term strategy).

Firm's capabilities, engagement, and training

Based on the empirical data collected from both case companies we understand that as a product owner, three components act as a foundation for a company to operate within luxury travel segment. They are, personal track record and experience in operating and providing CX, unique offering and business proposition that is different from competitors and, financial backing to secure assets and technology.

Richard Mosley (2007) suggested that, there are two dimensions of complexities that a service provider need to be worried about in delivering consistent brand experience, they are operational and interpersonal. These two complexity dimensions can be managed by a service provider by providing adequate training, automating tasks, performing measurement and quality control, and understanding emotional dimensions of service experience. In order for service providers to achieve satisfied and delighted customer and in the long-term customer loyalty, a balance needs to be maintained between these two dimensions. This theoretical construct can be drawn upon to analyze how product owner's address these two complexities dimensions and how they tie to the foundational components highlighted from our empirical data.

OceanSky is an outsider to the luxury travel community with no personal track record or history of providing luxury travel experience. In addition to this they are currently looking for external investments to secure assets. The only factor that is working for OceanSky, differentiating them from the market is their unique business proposition and their vision. In order to address the operational and interpersonal complexities, they have strategically decided to partner and collaborate with individuals or supplier companies (such as travel agents, DMCs, OEM etc.) that has vast experience, knowledge, passion, reputation, marketing channel and network within luxury segment.

62°Nord also echoes the strategy of partnership and collaboration with individual(s) or suppliers who share their passion in providing CX to their customers. Even though 62°Nord started their journey with resources and assets, the transformation from mass market tourism to the luxury segment can be perceived as a way of unlearning and learning new ways of providing CX for luxury travelers. Furthermore, as a part of learning curve, they had to educate and train their internal staff, local guides and their existing suppliers about CX within luxury segment and also partner with newer supplier (in the form of travel agent or DMCs) who are already well established this segment and have knowledge to meet customer expectations and needs.

These findings of partnership and collaboration of product owners to provide CX can also be related to the customer experience ecosystem suggested by Tax, McCutcheon, and Wilkinson (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The authors highlight that a service delivery network consists of multiple actors in the form of customers, partners or communities or collaborators and, firms and each of these actors perform a specific role within the network that influences CX. From the empirical context one can understand that this is precisely what the case companies have done to overcome some of their operational and interpersonal complexities. Furthermore, this partnership and collaboration has also in a way tried to address the foundational gap of personal track record and experience in providing CX that the case companies lacked in operating within the luxury travel segment.

Customer Journey, channels, and touchpoints

From a multichannel perspective, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) suggest that customer preference and channel usage varies based on the stage of purchase cycle and this is further influenced by customer's behavior and their characteristics. The authors also suggest that there is a strong evidence of customer searching on one channel and purchasing on another (referring to the concept of "showrooming" and "webrooming") and channel choices are affected due to lock-in effect, cross channel synergies and channel inertia. This multichannel perspective does not fit within the luxury travel segment because the products or services within this industry are not sold on platforms like TripAdvisor or Bookings.com. These products or services are high-value that costs thousands of dollars for a single trip, the customer, a high-net worth traveler needs someone whom they can trust and rely on to transform their imagination and dream into reality. As we understand from the empirical data, both the case companies have limited or no experience in operating within this luxury travel segment, to overcome this challenge and meet customer requirement, they partner with travel agents, a personal network channel, who have been working with these kinds of customer for decades, building personal relationships and trust. Furthermore, even though both the case companies use several other channels such as MICE, word-of-mouth, direct sales, social media, PR to spread awareness and lure customers, from a customer perspective, the purchase channel of the business proposition that product owners provide can be accessed either through travel agents or directly via product owners company website. While the strategy on channel preference to attract customers depends on the product and this strategy may vary from one product or service owner to another, we get the perception that, the customers prefers to use the same channel that he or she has used to book the previous trip for subsequent trips, unless they have had a bad experience in their previous trip. This locking on to channel may be attributed to the element of trust and reliance on the channel due to the fact that customers are spending a lot of money for a single trip and they believe that the chosen channel can fulfil their expectations and needs.

With regards to the touchpoints, as we understand from the empirical data, in order to design, develop and curate an experience for a customer, there are multiple actors providing various touchpoints throughout the customer journey and product owners are just one piece within that whole personalized journey. For example, if the customer comes via an agent, during the pre-purchase phase both customers and agents co-construct to transform their vision into reality, post that agents are involved in setting-up everything for the customer and during the travel its either the DMC or product owners and sometime customer who co-create an experience with other actors and, post-travel its again the agent. One can also understand from the case context that, while product owners need to identify their critical touchpoints between themselves, agents and customer, having a good communication across all touchpoint and delivering a seamless experience by all the actors within the customer journey spells the difference between customer delight or customer dissatisfaction. These findings can be associated with the touchpoint categories suggested by Lemon and Verhoef (2016). The authors highlighted four different categories of touchpoints that each customer come in contact, which they may or may not interact during the customer journey. They are brand-owned, partner-owned, customer-owned, and social/ external touchpoints and effectiveness and importance of these touchpoints may vary in each stage of the customer journey. In order to measure the effectiveness of the touchpoints and to identify the critical touchpoint, the authors suggest using an "attribution model" or "path-to-purchase model" that has gained importance in online environments. When we look at measurement technique to identify critical touchpoint from a luxury segment perspective, product owners in general highlight that the complete experience that they provide to their customer from start to finish act as critical touchpoints. And they currently do not have a separate measurement technique or model to measure each of the touchpoints within the customer journey. If a customer is unhappy at any phase along the customer journey, that issue is highlighted, fixed as soon as possible during that phase or compensated either at the subsequent phase or at the end of trip depending on the seriousness of the issue.

Target customer group and service expectations

Pine and Gilmore (2011) suggested that greater economic value can be created if a firm understands this "individual customer". Firms should not consider economic success of the organization and individual's well-being as an either/ or trade-off. The authors also suggested that companies are able to achieve a long-lasting effect on their customers if they are able to stage a series of experience as opposed to one-off, isolated event. In context to the empirical data, product owners understand that luxury is very subjective thing to their customers and objectives of travel are different, so, each trip or experience needs to be personalized at every phase within customer journey. Based on these objectives, product owners classify these luxury travelers/ customers into two types (customers new to the segment spending money in the most luxurious places and seasoned customer getting rich spiritually) and the perception of these luxury travelers/ customers are that the former will provide a perfect service that is personalized and staged every time, throughout the customer journey, catering to their individual needs and details. Furthermore, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) suggested that customer expectations can spillover from one domain, industry or context to another and these interactions affects how customers perceive a product or service experience. These perspective holds true to luxury travel segment as well. As highlighted by some of the interviewees, customers have certain expectations before they travel, and they are likely to compare their current service and experience to previous travel(s). For example, a customer who has traveled to Dubai in the past staying in a luxurious hotel where the customer gets undivided attention by many individuals attending to him, as opposed to an experience in Norway where he will still get that undivided attention, but, the definition of luxury is providing the X-Factor with limited number of resources (probably have one or two individuals attending to his / her needs). As product owners this creates a challenge and they need to be transparent and educate the customer before they travel.

Co-creation

From a perspective of co-creation, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) suggested that organization have to come to terms that customers are becoming partners in creating value. Organization should escape from a firm-centric view to a view that focuses on personalized interactions between customers and organization. This concept of co-creation resonates well within the luxury travel segment and both the case companies even though they have not used the word co-creation in their business circles, they are practicing this on a day-to-day basis. For both case company's co-creation is not just mere co-marketing, it is about partnership or collaboration between multiple supplier and stakeholders within the supply-chain, co-creating with agents or DMCs to understand customer expectations and needs. They believe that this information is vital for them in order to personalize the trip for their customers and curate an experience that is memorable for a lifetime.

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) also suggest that it is of organization's best interest to leverage their customers competencies, so that the former can co-shape / co-construct consumer expectations and experiences along with their customers. In relation to the empirical context, we have found very limited data provided by both the case companies to support this theory of leveraging customer (referring to the end traveler here) competencies to co-create personalized experience. One of the interviewees did quote an example of how an experience which was specifically requested by one customer has becomes a norm or standardized experience used for other guests, but, the concept of co-creation for product owners in our context is limited to agents and DMCs. While this seems to be a simulating value-proposition for product owners, mass marketing, commoditization and social media can be perceived to pose a threat to this novel co-creation. Furthermore, with the luxury traveler always seeking for something unique and authentic each time he or she travels and with product owners always wanting to offer an experience that is tailor-made to their customers, the concept of co-creation (whether positive or negative) has a great influence on CX, but, with a limited shelf-life, specific to individual customer and their trip.

5.2.2. Actor: Tour or Cruise Operator

In order to understand how tour operators (or cruise operators) provide CX, the empirical data collected from White Desert and Southern Cross were categorized into sub-themes and abstract level themes. Important insights on measurement of CX and influence of co-creation on CX are analyzed under two main themes: CX insights/ metrics and co-creation. These themes are discussed below.

CX insights/ Metrics

Lemon and Verhoef (2016) suggested that customer experience is a combination of experiences which evolves during the purchase cycle that starts from awareness, intent, search and continues to pre-purchase, purchase, consumption to post-purchase, across different channels. Customer feedback metrics in the form of customer satisfaction are used as a feedback tool by firms to capture their performance, customer behavior and perception of CX.

This perspective of measurement can also be related to our case companies, but the approach and phases during which these companies measure are different. Southern Cross requests a formal feedback from travel agents on their customer travel at the end of the trip and, they also resolve queries and get direct feedback from customer at the end of each destination. White Desert are not too stiff in collecting feedback from their customers, instead they send out a newsletter at the end of the season. They are aware that the trip that their customers embark on is going to be one-off trip because of the expensive nature of the trip and unless White Desert change their service offering drastically, it’s highly unlikely that they will have repeat customers. Customer satisfaction for White Desert is having a genuine relationship with their customer by offering high-end customer service at every phase of the customer journey. As highlighted by the interviewee of White Desert, what begins as guest and host relationship at the start of the journey, transforms into an authentic relationship in most of the cases where guests and hosts depart as friends.

Co-Creation

In context to the empirical data, both case companies had contrasting views on co-creation. Southern cross finds co-creation a very tricky concept because what one particular traveler would like to introduce in their journey is not necessarily good for another traveler and this creates conflict of interest. White Desert on the other hand, collaboratively design and develop an experience along with the customer. Creativity is what White Desert expects their customer to bring with them while designing a trip and this is very well complemented by the product or service their destination can offer. They also use this co-constructed concept to sell and market it to other clients, some of them would buy into this, others would like to start from a blank slate. This general concept of co-creation can be related to the theory where the company and its network collaboratively works with customer and their capabilities to achieve a higher order goal or objective for the customer, thus creating value jointly (Maklan and Klaus, 2011; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

5.2.3. Travel Agencies / Designers / Consultants

In order to understand how travel agency (include travel designers and consultants) provide CX, the empirical data from Bru & Bru, Travel Quest, WOTA Lifestyle, Lushescapes and Elefant Travel has been compiled into following abstract level themes, they are Target customer group & Service expectation, Organization Strategy and Approach, Firms Capabilities, Engagement and Training and, CX Insights/ Metrics. These themes are discussed below.

Target Customer group & Service Expectation

We understand from the empirical data that customers within the luxury travel industry look for different experiences which could be exclusive access, unique corners, luxury, open doors, or access to unique people around the world. They want to grow while they travel, want to feel that they are contributing to something and they want to get an experience which affects their lives. We understand further that customers are demanding, requesting quick answers, and changing their ideas often and sometimes also in the last minute. Therefore, travel agencies try to understand their customers really well in order to offer them a memorable experience. This understanding of each individual customer can create greater economic value (Pine and Gilmore, 2011).

We also know from the empirical data that when a customer becomes a seasoned traveler, money is not necessarily a restriction and these individuals make use of intermediaries whom they trust completely to provide individual services. For example, the Chinese speaking market comprises of many rich travelers (either single or group travelers) who make use of individual service. But this context cannot be applied on a global scale as there are geographical variations. Within the Indian market, there are two groups of travelers and even if travelers are rich and have lots of money, some will trust the travel agents for the best offer while others compare the offer through websites to receive a cheaper price. This creates a problem for the agencies in India as they always need to explain the cost breakdown for their services.

While culture of the customer plays a role when it comes to the trust factor, one can also perceive that even though HNW individuals have enough funds to pay for the costly trips easily they will not spend the money without understanding the cost breakdown for the price. For this reason, travel agents give an authentic and transparent vision or imagination about the trip with an understandable explanation of the price in order to build trust with the end-customers which makes them spend the money.

One can perceive that clients are demanding and there are cultural differences to consider and agencies need to meet these demands as mistakes would affect the business otherwise. In order to meet customer demands good expertise, knowledge and a network of reliable partners are required.

Organization Strategy and Approach

The insights from the empirical data shows that companies offer a service, that is special, real, and authentic, full of creativity and knowledge. Companies develop this knowledge through trips to new destinations or through their relationships with partners in order to meet customer expectations and requests. We understand that companies do not follow a push-strategy when it comes to selling their products, but rather sell something, that customer finds interesting and catches his or her imagination. These characteristics that a travel agency applies to provide CX are embedded in the value proposition in every feature of the service portfolio (Meyer and Schwager, 2007). Travel agencies within the luxury travel segment are customer-centric. Their primary focus is to customize every journey according to the customer's wishes and desires. However, they are limited in what they can offer and sell as their products or services are tied to a destinations and services they have knowledge about and, is also linked to the business relationship they have developed in the process. Even though the agencies put the customer in the center while planning an itinerary, their product or service portfolio is similar to other agencies operating in this segment which can create a threat that companies have difficulties to differentiate themselves from the competition, which can affect their sales negatively (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Therefore, travel agencies establish a customer-centric business models, where for example opening hours suit the clients and everything that the travel agents plan are handcrafted which gives the customer more influence and possibilities to get involved (Meyer and Schwager, 2007).

As elicited in the section Firm's capabilities, engagement, and training (Actor: Product or Service Owner) where Richard Mosley (2007) suggested that, there are two dimensions (operational and interpersonal) of complexities to be worried about in delivering consistent brand experience. In context to the empirical data, on an operational level, agencies take advantage of their relationships and networks, the personal experiences and their existing knowledge about products and services to meet customer's demand. At an interpersonal level, this dimension is addressed through a combination of informational material e.g. shared experiences in journals and stories about fun-trips on the webpages in order to give the customer 'the feel' and knowledge about destinations and services. Overall, one can perceive that the agencies create a consistent brand experience which addresses both interpersonal and operational dimensions which is authentic, puts the experience as center stage and creates magic around the company to lure in new potential customers.

Partnerships, network, collaborations and building relationships is also perceived highly important for travel agencies to provide CX and can be related to the customer experience ecosystem suggested by Tax, McCutcheon, and Wilkinson (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016) as stated in the section Firm's capabilities, engagement, and training (Actor: Product or Service

Owner). From our empirical data we can understand that personal partnerships between travel agents and their suppliers and, a solid network throughout the industry add benefits to customer in the form of special experiences and unique offers that the customers can avail around the world as those offers can only be achieved through personal connections. To ensure the quality of those experiences, travel agencies select their partners and suppliers (DMCs, tour operator, product owners) either according to their own quality guidelines or through the affiliation of suppliers to a travel show (e.g. PURE Life Experience) or from other independent establishments (e.g. Virtuoso) who provide a certificate on the quality and standards on these suppliers.

One can perceive that due to this mix of partnerships and intertwined network a large group of individuals (easily more than 50) are involved to curate an experience for one single customer that creates a challenge to maintain a seamless experience throughout all the connections. This complex network on one hand is advantageous as the customers always get an expert for each service, but on the other hand leads to a shared responsibility between all involved actors within the supply chain who need to fulfill their part in delivering CX.

Firm’s Capabilities, Engagement and Training

Travel agencies perceive knowledge, soft skills and proactiveness are important contributors to CX. From the empirical data, we understand that soft skills include multilingual capabilities, appearance when the staff meets the customer and training/ education to gain knowledge about destinations. From a proactiveness perspective, we understand that agencies always think one step ahead in order to mitigate risk due their deep sense and understanding for the luxury tourism world. These are all the important characteristics a travel agent needs to bring along in order to touch customers on a rational as well as emotional level (Schmitt, 1999) and influence the CX positively, since customers are demanding and the work-tasks for agents are complex with many variables. Finding those well-educated individuals and training them to maintain customer satisfaction is not easy and creates a challenge for travel agencies to hire new employees.

CX Insights/ Metrics

From the empirical context we understand that the travel agencies primarily take feedback from the customer and forward it occasionally, i.e., only negative feedback or when there is an improvement that is highlighted by the customer, to their suppliers. Furthermore, asking customer for feedback is in general something that the agencies are cautious about since the customers do not have much time and giving feedback is not rewarding for them. Simply filling a form or survey would not excite the customers in this segment and travel agencies look for ways to stimulate interest and engage with the customers after the trip. Travel agencies collect feedback either by meeting the customer face-to-face or by having a personal conversation over the phone and use tools such as matrixes to rate CX. We also understand that there are agencies who do not follow the traditional way of measuring CX using tools, but measure CX based on the return customers and referrals they get for their business from a satisfied customer. Furthermore, we can understand from one interviewee, that they connect with the customers and get feedback through an established communication model, to pitch and reinforce the engagement with the customers. These measurement techniques outlined above to measure an holistic picture of CX can be drawn parallel to Maklan and Klaus’s (2011) EXQ scale.

5.2.4. Actor: DMCs

In order to understand how DMCs provide CX, the empirical data collected from Ishav Arctico and Safrans du Monde were categorized into sub-themes and abstract level themes. They are Target customer group & Service expectation, Organization Strategy and Approach, Customer Journey, Channels and Touchpoints and Co-Creation. These themes are discussed below.

Target customer group & Service expectation

From the empirical data we understand that DMCs seek for an active interaction with its customer (the travel agencies) to build a long-lasting relationship through trust. One way of building this trust is to have an open and clear communication with the travel agencies, giving all relevant information to create shareholder value and eventually through agencies provide the best CX for the end-customers (Payne and Frow, 2005). Travel agencies limited understanding of the services, lack of enthusiasm, lack of trust on DMCs services can create a challenge to latter, as DMCs service can be seen to be less attractive or even unreliable to the end-customer, therefore does not get sold. Furthermore, another way that DMCs build trust with the travel agencies is with regards to confidentiality and handling of personal information of the end-customer. DMCs handle this information with caution across different touchpoints along the customer journey, as the luxury travel segment consists predominantly of HNW individuals who do not want to see their private information being leaked or used for publicity.

Based on the findings, one can perceive that DMC's build a strong relationship and maintain a long-lasting cooperation, trust and openness with their travel agencies and other actors in order not jeopardize their business relations and also provide great CX for the end-customer.

Organization Strategy and Approach

From the empirical data we can see that it is important for DMCs to offer very special services for their customer (, i.e., travel agencies) that in turn excites the end-customer on a personal level. Furthermore, the challenge for DMCs is to develop special experiences which give them unique propositions to differentiate themselves from the market. To overcome this challenge DMCs collaborate closely with suppliers who are more knowledgeable than them to create value. In order to identify the right suppliers who are experienced, DMCs look for independent establishments like Virtuoso, who provide a certificate on the quality and standards on these suppliers. DMCs also actively participate in travel shows (e.g. PURE Life experience) to find new and interesting suppliers whom they can collaborate with.

These findings of partnership and collaboration of DMC to provide unique CX can also be related to the customer experience ecosystem suggested by Tax, McCutcheon, and Wilkinson (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The authors highlight that a service delivery network consists of multiple actors in the form of customers, partners or communities or collaborators and, firms and each of these actors perform a specific role within the network that influences CX and we see from the empirical data that this is common practice for DMCs.

Customer Journey, Channels and Touchpoints

We know from the empirical data, that the DMCs have various channels and touchpoints to engage with their customer and also with their end-customers. DMCs interact with their customer through Newsletters, give them briefings with impressive presentations and detailed descriptions and invite agencies for fun-trips. From this one can perceive that DMCs try to get in contact with the agencies through various channels and touchpoints during the purchase cycle in order to provide them with the best possible information, create trust and influence the CX positively (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The importance of the different touchpoints may vary based on the offered product or service and DMCs determine how to influence these touchpoints to provide better CX (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

Since DMCs are involved in providing local services and handling the end-customer and staging experiences to them. The former has direct contact with the latter during the trip and thus, has a strong influence on providing CX. DMCs try to understand and empathize with the end-customers to influence CX positively. One critical touchpoint that we understand from the empirical data is the initial physical meeting (first touchpoint) between end-customer and the local suppliers (e.g. hotel, guide etc.). Therefore, DMCs raise awareness and sensitize their local suppliers and guides through a short personal call before the end-customer arrives to ensure a seamless service and a good CX is provided. DMCs treat this phase of consumption, where the end-customer accumulates customer experience, with utmost importance because this phase determines whether the end-customer becomes repeat/ loyal customer and spread positive reviews of their service (Nasution et al., 2014).

Co-Creation

One observation made within the luxury travel industry from the empirical data is that different actors within the supply-chain meet on travel shows (e.g. PURE Life experience) to jointly exchange ideas, knowledge, and experience. This experienced network enables newer collaboration, partnership and builds relationship amongst that actors and thus, acts as a breeding ground for co-creation where value is jointly created (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003). One can perceive that this experience space where all the actors meet can be leveraged to design, develop and curate personalized experiences to the end-customer. Furthermore, in order to curate an experience that is memorable to their end-customer, DMCs try to offer something 'out-of-the-box', something, which they have never thought about or done before. Even though it is the same destination that DMCs offer to their end-customer, each journey is designed and customized to meet each individual end-customer. One can understand that in order to stage an experience and offer something magical that the end-customer can remember for his lifetime, DMCs co-construct these experiences with travel agencies.

5.3. Cross-Case Analysis

Within cross-case analysis, analysis between product owners and tour operators and, travel agency (includes travel agents, travel designers and consultants) and DMC's are performed. Following common sub-themes / themes were generated that can be leveraged along with within-case analysis for building new theory or construct.

Organization's vision, mission & goal

From a firm's perspective in order to design a strong CX, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) suggest that a firm requires certain specific capabilities in the form of partnership and network, inter-departmental cooperation and collaborating to mobile resources and customer-centric orientation. This concept of firm's perspective can also be associated to our empirical data. All the cases companies refer to having a long-term vision where business model is developed by keeping customer at the heart of their operations. For capabilities or resources that they lack they make up for it by partnering and collaborating with experienced individuals or supplier or by being a part of a community that connects to these resources. Furthermore, from the empirical data we understand that these case companies operate with a small but highly effective team where each individual performs multiple roles catering to one single customer, thus, avoiding conflicts and priorities that may arise in a hierarchical multi-functional organization and, also reinforcing confidence and trust with the customer as they have to deal with one single person.

Value Proposition

From the perspective of value-proposition, the interviewees of both product owners and tour operators emphasized the importance of having uniqueness in the product or services that they offer to their customers. They also highlighted that to complement their product or service uniqueness, each trip that they design, develop, and curated for the customer is tailor-made and personalized to meet their customers' expectations. Travel agency are intermediaries and don't own any physical assets, but they specialize in networking, partnership with their suppliers (product owners, tour operators and DMCs), customers and luxury travel communities. The value that they bring on to the table is in the form of knowledge about a particular product or service or destination that they offer in their portfolio, multilingual skills, soft skills and their deep connect with the high-net worth customers. Like travel agency, DMCs also don't own any physical assets and they provide value in the form of local knowledge and experience of a destination by providing local resources, assets, logistical and ground services to other actors within the luxury travel segment. This concept of uniqueness and customization can be related to the theory of Pine and Gilmore (2011), who suggested that as the economic activity is moving away from good and services to experience, companies should avoid the trap of staging experiences alone without considering the effect of these experiences on participants that does not create a desired change. Over a period of time, these experiences become less enjoyable and eventually commoditized. From the empirical data one can perceive that all the case companies are very well aware of their customers preferences to customize the experience and meet the needs of each individual customer.

Marketing Channels

Payne and Frow (2005) suggest that when a firm develops a multi-channel integration strategy, it should focus on three aspects. Firstly, the decision about choosing the most appropriate channel to attract customers, secondly, how to ensure that the chosen channel delivers positive CX and finally, when there is more than one channel where the customer can interact with the firm, how can a firm ensure that these channels deliver the same cohesive message to the customer. In the empirical case context, each case company have their own multi-channel integration strategy, but, the foundation on which it rests and the criteria that these case companies use to assess, resonates with the three aspects outlined above. OceanSky prefers customers coming through travel agents as opposed to direct customers through websites. 62°Nord and White Desert also leverages travel agents, but prefer customers coming directly through their websites. Southern Cross being a B2B tour operator sell all their products and services offline directly to agents and they do not entertain direct customers. The travel agencies use social media as an important marketing channel to share experiences, pictures and stories and provide information to their customer, but the aim is predominantly to be active more as an inspiration and lure customers. The DMC's on the other hand do not use social media intensively, instead they focus building their network and customer generation through the travel agencies, product owners or tour operators. In addition to these primary channels, all the actors within the supply-chain use other channels such as word-of-mouth, social media, PR, MICE, or travel shows to spread awareness and interest about their product or service offering. From a messaging standpoint we also understand that all the actors representing the case companies spend a lot of time and effort on how the content and visuals get displayed on their website or used by other media outlets.

Seamless experience to customers

In the empirical data one of the challenges that was highlighted by both product owners and tour operators was providing a faultless and smooth experiences to their customers from pre-purchase phase to during travel to post-travel. This challenge can be associated to the Lemon and Verhoef (2016) theory of understanding customer experience throughout customer journey. As suggested by these authors, while orchestrating a customer journey and touchpoint design, a seamless experience across different channels within the customer journey will create a strong CX. In context to the case companies, both product owners and tour operators use other actors in the supply chain, such as travel agency or DMC's to curate an experience to their clients. A limited understanding of the product or service from travel agency or DMC can result in translation issue or miss-communication to the customer, resulting in bad CX. To avoid these challenges, both product owners and tour operators work with few, but seasoned and licensed travel agencies or DMCs and if needed provide training and support on a case-by-case basis. From a travel agency and DMCs perspective, they offer a 24/7 phone service to the customers in case of any complains or problems. The agency and DMCs try to fix issues immediately if possible, to minimize discomfort, or give refund or other compensations depending on the gravity of the situation and issue. Some travel agencies go a further step and follow-up with their local suppliers on a daily basis, so that they know exactly what's happening or going to happen even before customers gets to experience it. In case of a minor problems or issues, which the customers did not report, but, the travel agencies are cognizant of this, they may arrange a special treatment at a later stage of the trip to make up for the issue and influence the CX.

Customer journey and touchpoint orientation

Based on the insights from empirical data, the customer journey consists of seven steps including, actors who participate along the purchase cycle. Furthermore, as we understand, in order to purchase a trip, the customer within the luxury travel segment has 3 options, a) travel agency, b) tour operator and c) product owner. We have depicted the flow considering option a) travel agency. The flows for the other two options also remain the same, except that the associated suppliers for these two options may change. For instance, option two, the suppliers will be DMCs. So, depending on which option the customer decides to select, the associated suppliers come to play.

1) The customer contacts the travel agency about their travel plans and their imagination of a vacation. It is important for the latter to build confidence and trust with the former in order to provide a smooth, flawless and positive CX
2) The travel agency starts designing the itinerary and will contact the associated network of supplier, i.e., DMCs, product owners and tour Operators. The agency passes only minimum required information on to their suppliers, in order to protect their customer's confidential information
3) The travel agency presents the crafted itinerary to the customer, discusses the offer, and receive feedback
4) Based on the feedback the travel agency updates the itinerary and sends a revised version. This is an iterative process and happens several times
5) Once the customers are satisfied with the itinerary and confirm the trip, the travel agency initiate the booking of hotels, flights, adventure activities with their suppliers and the

customer pays a deposit for the trip. All dates and information about the trip and contact information are provided either through a digital travel plan or a printout

6) During the journey, the customers are constantly updated by the travel agency about their critical travel points (hotel, flights, etc.). The travel agency ensure that the customers receive a flawless journey and experience throughout the trip. In case of problems or complains, the travel agency is available 24/7 to help their customer
7) After the customer returns from their journey, the travel agency will contact them again to capture feedback. This can either be a personal conversation via phone or in-person or via social media, or through sending an email or survey

Information Management

From a perspective of utilization of information management process, Payne and Frow (2005) suggested that customer data collected from different touchpoints can be used to generate customer insights and also provide marketing response. Furthermore, the key components that form the information management process were, data repository, IT systems, analysis tool and front-end and back-end application. This perspective of utilization of information management process hold true for luxury travel segment, but not all the components that form the information management process are leveraged by the actors within this segment. From the empirical data, we understand that all the case companies have made minimal investments in utilizing software applications to run their day-to-day business. All the actors have emphasized on having a visually appealing websites and leverage basic form of IT technology and tools such as excel files, reports and some sort of database system and / or CRM application to capture and manage customer information. As highlighted by the case companies, company websites play a vital role in storytelling. For that reason, they have tried to create their websites in a fashion that is a visual representation of what an individual might experience when they travel. Travel agencies use only ordinary databases in the form of excel sheets or matrixes to keep track of their customer data or mitigation charts to preempt risk. One agency stated that they use their website more intensively in a way to use statistics and numbers generated by the website and add-ons to directly get in contact with their potential customer. With regards to providing customer support, we understand that all the actors within the luxury segment have leveraged smartphones help to provide a better customer service to stay connected with their customers and suppliers everywhere and in real time. One can perceive that investing in software and analytical tools means a huge investment for most of the actors, but, on the other hand these technological solutions can enable the actors to spend more time to connect with their clients, understand their expectations and also orchestrate the customer journey and entire experience through visualization.

Moderating factors that create challenges in providing CX

In context to the empirical data, we understand that for a newly formed organization that operates in the luxury travel segment, one failed journey or adventure can have a devasting effect on the progression of the organization and they don’t get a second chance to recover. Furthermore, as the organization (whether big or small) gets established, they don’t want to explore uncharted territories and stop taking risk to protect their revenue stream and profit lines. One can perceive that this strategy of protecting the bottom-lines without exploring and investing in newer avenues can act as an hinderance to innovation. Another factor that creates a challenge for organizations in providing CX is the profit margins. As highlighted by the case companies, each trip that they design, develop and curate are unique for their customer and there is no mass customization or economies of scale. One can perceive that as profit margins by nature is dependent on economies by scale, this uniqueness can be problematic for the actors to have a constant profit margin. Off the challenges mentioned above, some factors are within control and some are outside of organization’s control and these factors can be associated with organizational moderators suggested by Verhoef et al. (2009).

From our empirical data, we understand that customers also pose a challenge in providing CX. As highlighted by all the case companies, the customers within the segment are always looking for unique and authentic adventures and, their demands and desires are only getting crazier as they travel more. Creating new experiences every time for the actors to meet customer expectations are becoming harder. This challenge is further amplified when the customer takes the information from the intermediaries but avoids them while booking the trip. This creates a problem for other actors within the industry from a trust and relationship perspective. One can perceive that these challenges that are posed by the customer are outside of organization control and can be associated with customer moderating factors suggested by Verhoef et al. (2009).

External factors also pose challenges in providing CX and from our empirical context, we understand that factors such as political, environmental, overpopulation, mass consumerism and virus outbreak have an adverse effect on both the actors in providing CX and customers engaging in the experience. One can perceive that these external factors are outside of both organization’s and customer’s control and these factors can be related to the macro factors suggested by Verhoef et al. (2009).

By reviewing all these factors that create challenges for providing CX, one can clearly identify that these factors are dynamic components that influence the overall service and CX process between the customer and the organization. Some of these factors are in control of the organization, while others are outside of organization’s control and there are some which are both outside of organization’s and customer’s control.

The other common sub-themes that emerged from the empirical data where both product owners and tour operators and, travel agency and DMCs shared a similar point of view were, capabilities of the organization and training program to develop employee’s knowledge, skill and attitude, customer groups and their expectations and, co-creation.

With the common themes discussed above, let us turn our focus towards themes that are opposing or contrasting and themes that were specifically highlighted by just one actor, which we consider important for theory generation.

Product owner’s and tour operator’s expectation versus travel agency’s perception

In context to the empirical data, we understand that product owner’s and tour operator’s expectation of their product or service to travel agent’s perception of their offerings can pose a challenge to the former. As highlighted by the interviewees of product owner and tour operator, this gap of expectation can be perceived as travel agent’s lack of passion of product or services provided by the former. Furthermore, this reason can also be attributed to ulterior motive of the travel agents, i.e., different viewpoint and incentives on selling the product or service (effort vs reward) and, lack of understanding and knowledge of the product or service as well. Product owners and tour operators hope to address this issue by providing knowledge and training on specific products or services to make sure that the travel agents are comfortable in selling their proposition and also partnering with them by building trust and relationship.

Actual service delivered by product owner, tour operator and DMC versus service communicated and advertised by travel agent

In context to the empirical data, we understand that the actual services delivered by product owners, tour operators and DMCs to services communicated and advertised by travel agents to their customer can pose a challenge to the former. The interviewees of all the case companies agree that trust, transparency, access to information and channel for communication and dialog acts as critical building blocks that are setup and available between all the actors to functional seamlessly to provide CX. But, the reason for this challenge as highlighted by product owners, tour operators and DMCs is due over-selling or over-committing of a service by travel agents without consulting the former, in order to lure the customers and make a sale. In the process of being customer-centric, travel agents become overzealous and commit to certain services that the product owners or tour operators or DMCs cannot fulfil, leading to bad experiences for the customer.

Blurring lines between actors in the luxury travel segment supply-chain

Based on the empirical data, product or service propositions, business models, organization strategy and approach, and CX design are all designed and delivered keeping the customer in mind, their expectations, needs and wants. All the actors within the supply-chain are determined in staging or providing a memorable experience to their customers while maintaining healthy gross margins. In the process of maintaining this balance product owners have expanded their service portfolio to include curating of experiences by taking on the role of a DMC or tour operator. For example, 62°Nord, as product owners they offer boutique hotels and as DMCs they curate, stage and delivery Norwegian experience to their customers. Tour operators have expanded their service portfolio to include DMCs, for example, White Desert, where they develop & design an experience as a tour operator and curate, stage & delivery the experience as DMC and product owner. Travel agencies who have expanded their portfolio to also be a tour operator, for example, Safrans du monde, who specializes in tailor-made trip and world tour. One could also say that destination plays a crucial role in how actors expand their service portfolio (as in the case of White Desert and 62°Nord), but, other factors such as providing seamless CX, financial backing, government approvals, past track record, appetite for risk and innovation also play an important role that influence the actors to expand their service portfolio.

5.4. Summary of the Analysis

The summary of the main take-aways from our analysis is outlined below in Table 3.

<table>
<tr><th>Themes</th><th>Product Owners</th><th>Tour Operators</th></tr>
<tr><td>Organization strategy and approach</td><td colspan="2">Offer different product or services with a long-term vision in mind. Business models and value proposition are centered around keeping customer at the heart of their operations. Emphasized the importance of having uniqueness in the product or services. Limited empirical data on organization culture and leadership. Operate with a small but highly effective team where each individual performs multiple roles.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Firms capabilities, engagement, and training</td><td colspan="2">Three components act as a foundation for a company to operate within luxury travel segment - personal track record and experience, unique offering, and business proposition and, financial backing. To address the operational and interpersonal complexities, both actors have strategically decided to partner and collaborate with individuals or supplier companies. They also provide education and training to their internal staff, local guides, and their existing suppliers about CX.</td></tr>
</table>

Themes	Product Owners	Tour Operators
Information management	Minimal investments in utilizing software applications to run their day-to-day business. Emphasis on having a visually appealing websites and leverage basic form of IT technology and tools such as excel files, reports and some sort of database system and/ or CRM application to capture and manage customer information.	
Customer Journey, channels, and touchpoints	Products or services are not sold on platforms like TripAdvisor or Bookings.com, as they are high-value that costs thousands of dollars for a single trip. Channels such as MICE, word-of-mouth, direct invitation, ambassadors, direct sales, social media, PR are used to spread awareness and lure customers. From a customer perspective, the purchase channel is either through travel agents or directly via product owners company website. The customers prefer to use the same channel that he or she has used to book the previous trip for subsequent trips. Multiple actors interact with customers at every stage within the customer journey through various touchpoints. Every touchpoint throughout this purchase cycle is critical and impact CX.	
Target customer group and service expectations	Luxury is very subjective thing to their customers and objectives of travel are different, so, each trip or experience needs to be personalized at every phase within customer journey. Customers have certain expectations before they travel, and they are likely to compare their current service and experience to previous travel(s).	
CX insights/ metrics	A formal feedback is requested from travel agents at the end of the trip. Both the actors also resolve queries and get direct feedback from customers at the end of each destination. Some are not too particular in collecting feedback from their customers, as they realize that their product or service is one-off trip because of the expensive nature of the trips. Instead they send out a newsletter at the end of the season.	
Co-creation	Co-creation is not just mere co-marketing, it is about partnership or collaboration between multiple suppliers, stakeholders to meet customer expectations and needs. Limited data to showcase that actors leverage end-customer competencies to co-create personalized experience.	Co-creation a very tricky concept because what one particular traveler would like to introduce in their journey is not necessarily good for another traveler. Collaboratively design and develop an experience along with the customer.
Moderating Factors	For newly formed organization, one failed journey can have a devastating effect on the progression of the organization and they do not get a second chance to recover. Innovation can act as an hinderance to a company’s bottom-lines. Profit margins by nature is dependent on economies by scale, providing unique offerings can be problematic to have a constant profit margin. Creating new experiences every time for the actors to meet customer expectations pose a challenge. External factors such as political, environmental, overpopulation, mass consumerism and virus outbreak can have an adverse effect in providing CX.	
Themes	**Travel Agency**	**DMCs**
Organization strategy and approach	Offer a service, that is special, real, and authentic, full of creativity and knowledge, which is not volume driven and customer-centric. Limited in what they can offer and sell as their products or services are tied to destinations and services, they have knowledge about. Customers receive unique itineraries and trips which are not easy to access without the agency’s knowledge. Having personal partnerships and a solid network with suppliers, adds benefit to customers and gives access to special experiences all around the world. Messaging through consistent brand experience, resolve issues around interpersonal and operational dimensions that puts the experience as center stage.	Business proposition needs to differ from other DMCs, and no itineraries are ever created twice. Cooperation with knowledgeable partners and supplier, otherwise, cannot provide value addition to the complete supply-chain
Firms capabilities, engagement, and training	Knowledge, soft-skills and proactiveness the important virtues of a travel agency. Soft skills required to create a positive appearance on the customer. Knowledge to fulfill customers’ demands and proactiveness to mitigate risks.	Establish trust, credibility and confidence within partners, suppliers, and customers by being transparent and an expert in providing good services.

Themes	Travel Agency	DMCs
Information management	Emphasis on visually appealing websites with basic form of IT technology and tools to capture and manage customer information. Ordinary databases in the form of excel sheets or matrixes to keep track of their customer data or mitigation charts to preempt risk. Some use websites more intensively to directly get in contact with their potential customer.	Also, prefer having a visually appealing website. Rely on cellphones and connectivity to constantly keep in touch with their customers and suppliers.
Customer Journey, channels, and touchpoints	Channels to reach out to the customers are online and offline and approach them with content, campaigns, events, word-of-mouth, and personal references. Update customers about their itinerary, offer 24/7 service and connect and coordinate with the suppliers. Quality control at each step of the journey is important, to provide a seamless experience, otherwise the whole supply-chain will suffer.	Target and engage their customer (agencies) through Newsletters, briefings with good presentations and descriptions and, sometimes fun-trips. Trust between the different counterparts important to offer the best service for the end-customer. Provide supported 24/7 via phone for their customers and end-customers.
Target customer group and service expectations	Customers have varied idea about luxury. People are looking for different experiences such as exclusive access, unique corners, luxury, open doors, access to unique people around the country. Demanding customers who expect seamless experience from start to finish. Privacy is important.	
CX insights/ metrics	Primarily take feedback from the customer and forward it occasionally to their supply-chain. Collect feedback either by meeting the customer face-to-face or by having a personal conversation over the phone and use tools such as matrixes to rate CX. Some measure CX based on the return customers and referrals they get for their business from a satisfied customer.	Feedback is taken by the travel agency and they forward it to DMC. Often, only if the feedback is bad it is certainly shared, otherwise no formal process.
Co-creation	Create and design the itinerary together with the customer in order to make the trip perfect and memorable. Includes personalization, customization, and access to exclusive things to make the customer feel special and unique.	Participate in travel shows to reach out to the international market, make connections and improve the network. DMCs try to offer something 'out-of-the-box' and co-construct with travel agencies
Moderating Factors	Environmental change is also changing customer demands. Customers are requesting more sustainable and greener trends while travelling. Agencies need to offer more sustainable solutions and adventures. Hiring employees with skills as everything revolves around one single person. Have no control on the service provided as they rely on suppliers and external service providers to fulfil what is planned.	The way marketing is done, speak about experience not about luxury.

Table 3: Summary of the Analysis

6. Discussion

In this section, key findings from empirical analysis will be leveraged to discuss and addresses our research questions in conjunction with the theoretical literature. Besides, we also discuss academic contributions and limitations of the thesis, followed by suggestions on managerial recommendation, ethical consideration, and future study opportunities.

6.1. Research Question Discussion

6.1.1. Integrated CX Framework

From the literature, we understand that while multiple authors have tried to decipher CX from both qualitative and quantitative ways, the frameworks, or constructs on CX seem to be fragmented, providing a constrained view. We address this gap through a framework that provides a holistic picture of designing, developing, and managing CX. Our first research question is divided into two parts, and the first part of the questions was, how should a firm integrate customer and co-creation perspectives to generate an integrated CX model. In answering this question, we propose a new integrated framework on CX (illustrated in Figure 10 below), using themes and sub-themes generated from the thematic analysis supplemented by models and constructs from the literature review.

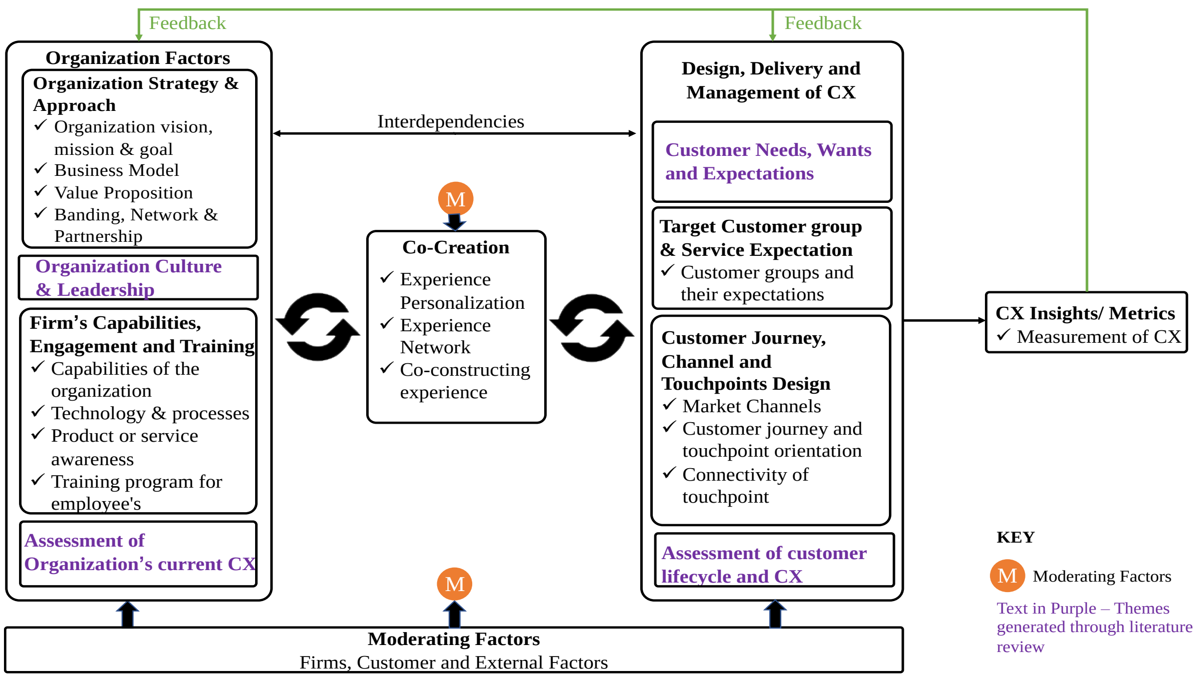


Figure 10: Integrated CX Framework

The framework consists of five blocks, (1) Organization factors, (2) Design, delivery and management of CX, (3) Co-creation, (4) CX Insights/ Metrics, and (5) Moderating factors, that coupled together should influence CX. The main objective of this framework is to provide this amalgamated view to an organization, where they can leverage these different building blocks to align themselves to be more customer-centric, thus improving overall CX to their targeted customer group. While developing this integrated model, the organization's size and maturity have not been considered. However, these factors may influence how CX is designed, developed, and managed by an organization, which needs to be considered as a part of future research. For now, let us look at how the proposed construct with the different building blocks complement or contrast the existing literature on CX, CEM, and Co-Creation.

The 1st building block *Organization* consists of several sub-themes such as organizational strategy and approach, organization culture and leadership, firm's capabilities, engagement and training and, assessment of the organization's current CX. What we are proposing here is, in order for an organization to provide a good CX, these sub-themes within the organization should be designed and developed, keeping customers as a constant entity.

Within *organization strategy and approach*, the organization's vision, mission, and goal should be aligned with customer needs and wants, understand customer's vision, and be recognized by everyone within the organization from top leadership to the operation level employees. Organizations should develop business models keeping customers at the heart of their operations and value-proposition entrenched in every product or service provided to the customer. This strategy approach aligns with Pine and Gilmore's (2011) experience economy concepts, where the author states that a firm needs to understand its customer in order to generate greater economic value. This strategy also agrees with Meyer and Schwager's (2007) theory, where the authors, while echoing Pine and Gilmore, state that in order for a firm to improve CX, it has to become their top priority. In order to reflect these changes, the firms need to transform their processes, systems, technology, and structure to become customer-centric.

From an *organization's culture and leadership* perspective, the culture within the organization should follow a customer-centric approach, where commitment to good customer initiatives is supported by the top leadership team and executed by all the employees. This concept aligns with Meyer and Schwager (2007). The authors state that in order for the brand to deliver consistent CX, value-proposition should be incorporated in every feature of the product or service they offer. The organizational culture should be customer-centric, led by the top leadership team, with every employee engaged and aligned to this culture.

In order to develop a *firm's capabilities, employee engagement and training* play a vital role. An organization should have a workforce that is competent to implement CX initiatives and understand their role in providing good CX. Complementing the workforce is the organization's learning and development programs that support the employees and policies and procedures to recognize and reward the workforce where necessary. This concept of the firm's capabilities, employee engagement, and training resonates with Lemon and Verhoef (2016) and Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) theory. Both authors state that for an organization to function effectively, the strategy should be dependent on customer-centricity, customer engagement, capabilities an organization possesses and developed, and inter-organizational relations that they forge and utilize.

Complementing the firm's capabilities is the technology strategy that is customer-centric, providing a seamless experience and processes, systems, and technology that captures and provides a single view of customer. This technology logic is also supported by Verhoef et al. (2009), where the authors highlight the growing importance of technology in influencing CX and how technology is increasingly facilitating the interactions between the company, employee, and customers.

Within the final sub-theme *assessment of the organization's current CX*, an organization should continually keep evaluating their current business proposition, strategy, operating model, and value proposition based on the feedback they receive from the customer. Furthermore, with the customer needs, wants, and expectations continually changing, it becomes imperative for the organization to have processes, systems, and tools in place that assesses and captures these changes regularly to implement appropriate changes internally within the organization. This concept of the organization's assessment of CX has been loosely captured within the literature. Verhoef et al. (2009), while providing a conceptual model of customer experience creation, highlights that a firm should consider customer experiences in alternative channels and previous customer experiences as some of the components while design CX strategy, but does not mention about the assessment of current CX. Our framework enhances this view by including CX assessment as a metric that the organization should perform regularly and use it as an internal comparing tool.

The 2nd building block, *design, delivery, and management of CX* consists of several sub-themes such as customer needs, wants and expectations, target customer group and service expectations, customer journey, channel, and touchpoint design and assessment of customer lifecycle and CX. What we are proposing here is, the organization is in the process of designing an experience, should also consider customer perspective and their actual expectations and, how this information is translated into product or service delivery specifications.

From a perspective of understanding *customer needs, wants, and expectations*, the organization first needs to conduct a thorough customer research activity in order to understand these elements, before proceeding with designing and orchestrating CX. Organizations are aware that these customer requirements are not static, and they keep evolving over some time, so they need to be flexible and agile to capture these requirements in order to align organizational strategy with customer value. Following from customer requirements, in the next sub-theme, *target customer group, and service expectations*. An organization needs to define its customer segmentation and develop business models and value-proposition that targets these segments. Furthermore, this stage also allows the organization to match their perception of the customer's expectations with the customer's actual expectation. Understanding these components will assist the organization in developing a successful marketing strategy. The importance of understanding customer values and making customers the central focus on marketing was also stressed by Nasution et al. (2014).

The next sub-themes entail identifying and designing *customer journeys, channels*, *and touchpoints*. As a part of this process, organizations should map the customer journey process for each customer segment along with touchpoints (from a customer perspective) and align this journey map to business goals, people, process, and technology (from an organization's perspective). The customer journey should include low-level details of the customer activities during the complete purchase cycle starting from pre-purchase to purchase to post-purchase along with touchpoints for each for these phases. This journey map should also include organization goals, activities performed by individuals, failure points, business processes, system and technology, and service measurement factors, for each phase of the purchase cycle. This proposed customer journey from a customer perspective agrees with Lemon and Verhoef's (2016) model, where the authors refer to stages of total customer experience within the customer journey highlighting different phases of purchase cycle along with types of touchpoints within the customer journey. However, there seems to be no evidence within the literature about combining both customer's and organization's perspectives while designing the journey map, and our proposed framework addresses this issue.

The final sub-theme, *assessment of customer lifecycle and CX*, is a due-diligence activity that an organization needs to perform from a customer's point of view throughout the entire customer lifecycle journey of a product or service, including activities performed by the partners. The purpose of this process is to identify gaps in service, identify critical touchpoints, identify important channels that customers value the most, and incorporate all these points in the organization strategy to design a sustainable CX model. Here again, several authors are referring to the assessment of the customer lifecycle as a part of providing CX. However, none have included this component within a conceptual model while designing CX.

The 3rd building block relates to *Co-creation*, and we are proposing that an organization cannot autonomously stage experience without the input from the customer. With customers interacting with the organization through multiple touchpoints within the customer journey throughout the purchase cycle, the organization should create an environment where each customer can co-construct an experience that is personalized to him/ her, thus creating value for both the customer and the organization. In order for these interactions to happen, the organization needs to be transparent to their customers, spread awareness of their product or services, and educate customers where necessary. The organization should also be flexible in incorporating personalized experience within the customer journey to create an environment where customers can co-create with the organization and their networks, allow the flexibility of customization and personalization of products or services, and align the organization's business model, product and service, tools, technology, and processes to address customer needs and expectations. This concept of co-creation and staging experience is not new. Pine and Gilmore (2011) refer to staging experiences within "Experience Economy" literature, but, from a perspective of a firm who is the stager of the experience is an organization. The literature does not explicitly talk about customers also being a stager. Instead, the customer gets involved only at the point of exchange.

On the other hand, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) state that co-creation of experience and value creation is a joint activity between customers, organizations, and communities. The authors also provide an account on how to co-create an experience by referring to setting up an experience environment where customers co-create with the network that comprises of organizations, institutions, and customer communities, but, these details are at the superficial level. Our integrated model tries to address this gap by providing further details on the "how" part of the co-creation.

The 4th building block, *CX Insights/ Metrics*, organization should setup processes, measurements, and metrics that measure the customer process along the customer journey, including customer feedback. This measurement should include both internal organization measurements and external customer measurements and should be measured continuously. Several authors refer to measuring CX using different metrics such as SERQUVAL, Customer Experience Quality (EXQ), Voice of Customer (VoC), Customer satisfaction, Net-Promoter Score (NPS), Key-Performance Indicators (KPIs), Customer Effort Score (CES). All these metrics are discussed and presented as a stand-alone theory, but, not included in a conceptual model based on our findings. So, we are proposing that an organization should collect and measure these feedback (both formal and informal) across channels and touchpoints and use these data points to influence business strategy and decisions and also aid in designing customer journey, channels and touchpoints.

The 5th and the final building block, *Moderating factors*, influence the overall service and CX process between the customer and the organization, where some factors are in control, and others are out of the organization's control. These factors include organizational moderators that are within the control of the firm such as price, assortment, retail brand, retail atmosphere, customer experience in alternative channels, and service interface (Verhoef et al., 2009).

Situational moderators such as type of store, location, organization culture, which are also within the control of the organization (Verhoef et al., 2009; Nasution et al., 2014). Customer moderators such as social demographics, customer attitudes, which are outside of the organization's control (Verhoef et al., 2009; Nasution et al., 2014) and external factors such politics, regulations, economic climate, competition, which are outside of organization's control and also out of control of the customer (Verhoef et al., 2009). These concepts of moderating factors impacting service and CX not new. As highlighted above, various authors have discussed their impact on customer and organization, but there is no evidence of moderating factors influencing co-creation. This is what we propose in our framework.

6.1.2. Integrated CX model applied in the luxury travel industry

The second part of the first research question was, how are the components in the integrated model used by the luxury travel industry to design, deliver, and curate CX. Keeping the integrated model as the foundation and leveraging the empirical evidence, this question will be discussed for each actor within the luxury travel industry. This question aims to address how each actor positions within the luxury travel segment to design, deliver, and curate CX.

Product Owners have a long-term vision where the business model is developed by keeping the customer at the heart of their operations. Their value proposition is in the form of unique products or services, i.e., technology, assets, or destination, that delivers a unique experience to the customer. For example, OceanSky using an airship to travel to the North pole or 62°Nord having boutique hotels providing Norwegian experience. Some of the product owners have further strengthened their portfolio by expanding their service. For example, 62°Nord is in a unique position as a product owner and a DMC, curating experiences from end-to-end.

For competences or capabilities that product owners lack, they depend on their network, i.e., suppliers (DMCs), intermediaries (travel agents or designers/ consultants), tour operators, and communities (travel shows) to fill this gap. Product owners generally prefer intermediaries or tour operators to curate end-to-end experiences for the traveler, so, for this reason, they tend to partner with individuals or companies that have a good track record, knowledge of the industry and are recognized within the community. In the complete purchase cycle, product owners interact with the customer only when the latter is on-board the trip. The rest of the time, it is the intermediaries who provide information to the customer, manage their expectations, and design a travel itinerary for them. With this being the case, it becomes crucial for product owners to provide information and knowledge and support their intermediaries and tour operators to ensure that the customer gets the right information, in order to create a seamless experience.

From a target customer expectation, product owners understand that customers are looking for authenticity, uniqueness, perfect services, and the X-factor in their trip. In order to cater to these needs, product owners are flexible within their business proposition, allowing some bandwidth for customization and co-creation. However, they also understand that their product or service is tied to a specific destination; the space for co-creation can sometimes be limited due to the constraints imposed by the travel destination itself. For product owners, co-creation generally refers to collaboration and partnership with their network of intermediaries, tour operators, and suppliers while staging experience to the customer.

From a marketing channel perspective, as outlined above, product owners rely heavily on intermediaries to influence and inspire their customers. Direct sales through company websites are also used as another channel where customers can reach product owners. For this reason, a lot of effort and time is spent by the product owners on building visually appealing and easy to navigate webpages. Product owners also ensure that the same user experience and content messaging is maintained across all the channels such as intermediaries, MICE, social media, emails, travel shows, PR, which are used to spread awareness and interest in their product or services.

Like the product owners, *Tour operators* also insists on having a long-term vision when it comes to developing a business strategy. Tour operators factor in a longer return horizon in order to meet their vision and goal, as shorter return horizons will only skimp the resources that provide CX, and they cannot afford to do that as they are operating within the luxury segment. Generally, tour operator's assets are their knowledge and experience about the product or service or destination they provide as a part of their portfolio. Their competencies include networking and collaborating with individuals or other actors within the luxury travel industry to provide CX. However, as we understand from our empirical findings, sometimes a tour operator acts as a product owner and DMCs, for example, White Desert, curating an end-to-end experience for their customer, this puts them in a unique position differentiating them from the market.

From a marketing strategy perspective, in order to get access to the world's wealthiest people who can afford high-value trips, tour operators rely heavily on PR and not on paid advertisements. They strongly believe that selecting the right publication where the story can be told and getting that story in-front of these high-net-worth individuals will influence them to get on-board the trip. Furthermore, one can also perceive from the empirical findings that the luxury travel segment is dependent on referral customers and repeat business. Nevertheless, for certain destinations such as visits to Antarctica or the North Pole, tour operators expect one-time value for their customers. This one-time value further pushes the tour operators to provide an experience of a lifetime to their customers, who can go home and talk about these stories to their family and friends.

As we understand, some tour operators support co-creation. However, they do not prefer to use it due to the trickiness involved in designing the trips. Since what one particular customer would like to introduce in their journey is not necessarily good for another customer. But, there are other tour operators like White Desert, who offer a blank canvas to their customers, and they work collaboratively to design and develop an itinerary.

Intermediaries (Travel Agencies, Designers, or consultants) operate in a niche market. Like product owners and tour operators, their business model, value proposition, branding, and services are all aligned to customer wishes and desires. Their service portfolio needs to be creative, authentic, and special. Intermediaries attract customers and do not believe in a push marketing strategy but instead let their portfolio of services speak to the market. From a capability's standpoint, they do not own any physical assets like product owners who own Airships or boutique hotels. However, they specialize in building solid personal networks and relationships with partners such as the product owners, suppliers such as tour operators and DMCs, travel communities, and high-net-worth customers. Intermediaries assets are their knowledge about the products or services provided by other actors within the segment, knowledge about the market and destinations, their multilingual capabilities to connect with many clients, skills that include soft skills to inspire, influence, and offer good services to their customers.

As we understand from the empirical findings, intermediaries have visually appealing websites and leverage the basic form of IT tools such as excel files, customized matrixes and reports, and CRM tools to capture and manage their customer information. Advanced technology in the form of data analyzing tools, data analytics can be helpful to improve their services, but, as these tools are expensive, it is a huge investment for some of the smaller companies that operate in this segment.

Intermediaries use social media as one of their essential marketing channels to spread awareness and interest in their service and product portfolios. However, they understand that this medium is not a reliable source for business generation. Moreover, as they are responsible for selling high-value, high-ticket items, word-of-mouth, and personal relationships with their customers are used as channels to generate new business. In order for the intermediaries to leverage this channel, credibility, experience, and track record plays a very vital role, and sometimes to enhance their outlook, they collaborate with luxury brands as well. Intermediaries ethos is providing flawless service with high-quality standards throughout the customer journey. They believe that a satisfied customer will be loyal to them. Thus, creating repeat business.

Moreover, the intermediaries believe that if a customer has had a bad experience during their travel, they for sure will report and provide feedback. No feedback from the customer is considered good news. Intermediaries also measure customer satisfaction based on the amount of repeat business and businesses that come through word-of-mouth. Having said this, the intermediaries also formally measure CX by meeting the customer in person or sending an email or having a conversation over the phone.

From a co-creation perspective, we understand that customers have little influence on co-creating an experience once they are on the trip. Nevertheless, during the pre-purchase stage, the intermediaries collaboratively design and develop a plan. Co-creation, according to intermediaries, refers to the personalization of trips, getting to know their customers, customizing minute details within the trip, and providing gifts to their customers during the trip to make them feel unique and special.

Within the luxury segment, *DMCs* are known for their local knowledge and experience of their given destination for providing resources, assets, logistical, and ground services. Their organization and business models are aligned to provide a seamless experience to the customer when they are on tour. Like intermediaries, DMCs core competencies lie in building networks, relationships, and trust with their local suppliers for local guides and adventure activities and also with intermediaries, product owners, and communities (such as travel shows) within the supply-chain, by offering service to them.

During the complete purchase cycle, DMCs interact with the end customer (, i.e., traveler) only when they are on the journey. Prior and post the journey, DMCs communicate only with intermediaries. For DMCs, intermediaries and product owners are their immediate customers, and it is through the intermediaries that they get in touch with the clients (travelers). As everyone knows everyone within the luxury travel segment and the whole industry operates with trust as the foundation, DMCs would not want to risk their reputation and business relationships by bypassing the intermediaries or product owners to lure the end customers directly.

As DMCs do not interact directly with the end customer, their influence on co-creation is very limited. DMCs collaboratively designs and co-construct itinerary and adventures with intermediaries and product owners, who know the destination. Even though the former does not directly interact with the end-customer at the planning stage, the latter fills that gap and coxes the former to look for exciting and outstanding ideas for the end customer. The same logic applies while measuring CX. As the intermediaries predominantly perform this activity, DMCs depend on intermediaries to share the feedback if the client (traveler) provides one. Otherwise, as we perceive from the empirical data, they do not have their own CX measurement criteria.

As we conclude, one can say that even though all the actors provide different products or services and specialize in certain capabilities within the supply-chain, customer-centricity is at the heart of their operations. Everyone is working towards bettering their business proposition to meet customer expectations. Furthermore, it is also interesting to see an industry that heavily leverages intermediaries, and each actor uses their experience and competencies and knowledge, trust, and relationships of their intermediaries to provide CX. From an area of improvement perspective, there is a vast scope for all the actors with regards to measuring CX, collecting feedback throughout the customer journey, and aligning these feedbacks to business KPIs. Secondly, as a basic form of technology is leveraged to run the business, the actors can make use of advanced technologies such as big data, virtual reality (VI), artificial intelligence (AI), to measure CX, digitalize each experience, and provide a seamless experience throughout the customer journey.

6.1.3. Touchpoints or a mix of touchpoints acting as primary contributors to CX

Our second research question relates to what touchpoints or a mix of touchpoints act as the primary contributors of CX within the customer journey for a luxury travel industry. In order to address this question, we have used the data from our empirical analysis and literature review to develop a customer journey map for channels and touchpoints, as illustrated in Figure 11 below.

Customer Journey Mapping – Channels and Touchpoints

Stages	Awareness & Research	Planning & Booking	Pre-Tour	During Tour & Experience	Post Tour & Advocacy
Customer Activities	✓ Researching on trips ✓ Attending travel fairs ✓ Sharing ideas with family & friends ✓ See offline & online ads ✓ Compare offers ✓ Get inspired	✓ Details on personalization ✓ Confirmation of the trip ✓ Make payments ✓ Personal details, preferences & allergies	✓ Prepare for trip ✓ Itinerary print outs and contact information	✓ Enjoy the trip ✓ Share experiences with family & social circles ✓ View itinerary ✓ Provide feedback if expectations are not met	✓ Provide feedback and testimonials ✓ Enroll to the loyalty program ✓ Post on social media ✓ Influencers ✓ Attend travel events
Channels	**Purchase channel** ✓ Intermediaries ✓ Direct sales through website **Marketing channel** ✓ Social media, PR ✓ MICE, Travel shows ✓ Ambassadors, Direct Invitation ✓ Loyalty programs or clubs	✓ Intermediaries ✓ Sales team of the travel services	✓ Intermediaries ✓ Sales team of the travel services	✓ Intermediaries ✓ Sales team of the travel services ✓ Local contacts, Guides	✓ Intermediaries ✓ Sales team of the services ✓ Travel shows, events ✓ Social media, PR
Touch-points	✓ Intermediaries Face-to-face interactions ✓ Word of mouth ✓ Social Media blogs ✓ Websites landing page ✓ Emails, printed materials ✓ Videos and Ads ✓ Phone calls , Video calls	✓ Intermediaries & sales team customized plan, ✓ Intermediaries & sales teams booking page, payment page ✓ Email exchanges ✓ Customized App & Websites	✓ Intermediaries information pack, Emails ✓ Customized Apps or webpage providing tour & travel details ✓ Sales teams phone calls, emails	✓ Arrival & departure points ✓ Local contacts & Tour Guides interactions ✓ Phone conversation ✓ Customized Apps ✓ Messages	✓ Memorabilia ✓ Newsletters, Magazines, Videos ✓ Email asking for feedback ✓ Website to provide feedback

Figure 11: Customer journey mapping – Channels and Touchpoints

The customer journey has been developed from a customer perspective. It comprises different stages, where each stage within the journey divides into a set of activities performed by the luxury traveler during a trip. Organization setup mediums in the form of channels, which act as a source of information and marketing tool to address traveler's needs, spread awareness and knowledge about a product or a service. These interactions of the traveler with the organization's products or services using different channels throughout the customer journey are what we refer to as touchpoint interactions. In the following sections, the five stages of the customer journey and different touchpoints within the customer journey that influence CX are discussed.

During the 1st stage, *Awareness, and Research*, the luxury travelers are exploring options for their trip that's either planned in the next couple of months or in the near future. The general trend within the luxury travel industry is that the luxury travelers either uses his existing channels, i.e., intermediaries (travel agents, designers/ consultants, tour operators) to get information and be inspired or directly reach the actor(s) who is providing travel services (direct sales). During this discovery process, they also leverage other marketing channels to gain information. Such as company websites, social media, and events like MICE, travel fairs/ shows. They also speak to ambassadors or friends who had recently completed their trip and receive information from communities and loyalty clubs. In the process of extracting information from the channels, the luxury traveler interacts with several touchpoints, some which are either designed and influenced by intermediaries or by actors of the travel services within the luxury travel industry. The touchpoints include face-to-face interactions with the intermediaries, word-of-mouth, social media blogs & reviews, videos and ads, emails, printed materials, and magazines. These specific touchpoints delivered through different channels are the first impressions that a traveler gets about a product or service that they are interested in. Furthermore, interpersonal influence and word of mouth from influencers or family, friends and social communities play a vital role in their decision-making process on progressing further within the customer journey

In the 2nd stage of the journey, *Planning, and Booking*, the luxury traveler has some fundamental imagination of their trip or the destination(s) they want to visit along with some tentative dates for their travel. In order to further explore their imaginations and convert them into reality, the traveler collaboratively works with an intermediary or the sales team of the travel services. As the objectives of each luxury traveler are different, it is crucial for the intermediary and sales team first to get to know their traveler and their needs and expectations before start designing the itinerary. So, the intermediary or the sales team either meet face-to-face or have a conversation over the phone with their traveler to gather these requirements. Following this, a customized draft itinerary is shared with the traveler via email or sometimes discussed in person, and feedback is incorporated. This is an iterative process until all queries and questions are answered, and the customized itinerary meets the expectations of the traveler. Post-approval, the travelers are asked to make a deposit the booking on the payment page, or through a customized app or by providing credit card information. As outlined above, starting from understanding the traveler till booking and payment, there are several interactions that intermediary and sales team have with the travelers. Each of these touchpoint interactions needs to be tailor-made for each traveler to make them feel engaged and excited about their trip.

Post booking, in the 3rd stage of the customer journey, *Pre-Tour*, the intermediary, and sales team share further information on the travel that includes a detailed itinerary with contact points for every leg of the travel. Starting with a pick-up from their home destination during travel and drop back to their home destination. Based on the preference of the traveler, details are posted on the customized app by the intermediary and sales team, or a digital copy of the information sent via email or a personal hard copy is handed to the traveler. Here again, there are multiple interactions with the traveler, and these interactions need to be seamless in order to instill the confidence and give assurance that every minute details within the trip are planned, and they are in safe hands when they travel.

In the 4th stage, *During Tour and Experience,* the plan laid out by intermediary or sales team gets executed, and there are additional actors in the form of local contacts, tour guides, hotel and restaurant employees who execute the experience promised to the travelers. Along with the additional actors, the intermediary and sales team are in constant touch with the traveler either via messages/ push notification or through a customized app to provide live and updated information of their travel, information of the contacts, and details of the experiences. In order to stage a seamless and memorable experience for the travelers, all these different touchpoints and interactions should come together and work cohesively.

Finally, the 5th stage, *Post Tour and Advocacy*, the travelers provide feedback and testimonials of their experience, act as influencers spreading the experience to their family, friends, and community, enroll in the loyalty program, and post their stories within social media. In order to facilitate these activities, the intermediary and sales team setup multiple touchpoints such as a customized platform or webpage or app to collect feedback and enroll for a loyalty program personalized feedback emails, and in-person interactions. Furthermore, to keep the excitement of the travelers alive and kicking, the intermediary and sales team share memorabilia, personalized newsletters, magazines, and videos of their travel and invite them to travel shows to share their experience and also give them updates on the trends and prospects.

In conclusion, one can perceive that every touchpoint or interaction of each actor within the luxury travel supply-chain with the travelers throughout the different phases along the customer journey plays a vital role in influencing the CX. From our empirical analysis, one can also assimilate that each "first moment,", i.e., first meeting with an intermediary, meeting your chauffeur, looking for your guide, entering the hotel, within every stage of the customer journey act as critical touchpoints, and this can either make or break the complete experience for the travelers. Furthermore, while there is evidence of technology such as customized apps, webpages, (and probably technology used in the back-end to facilitate these front-end forms or apps) being used as touchpoints during the customer journey, human interactions and interpersonal influence seem to predominately dominate as touchpoints across the different stages of the customer journey. Finally, for the intermediary and sales team to design, develop and curate a memorable experience for the luxury traveler, all the actors within the supply-chain should work seamlessly, adding value at every stage, along with different touchpoints delivering the same experience across the customer journey.

6.1.4. Driving factors and barriers for providing CX

In order to address our third research question: what are the driving factors and barriers for providing CX within the luxury travel industry? We used data from our empirical analysis, and the summary of the factors and barriers is outlined in Figure 12 below.

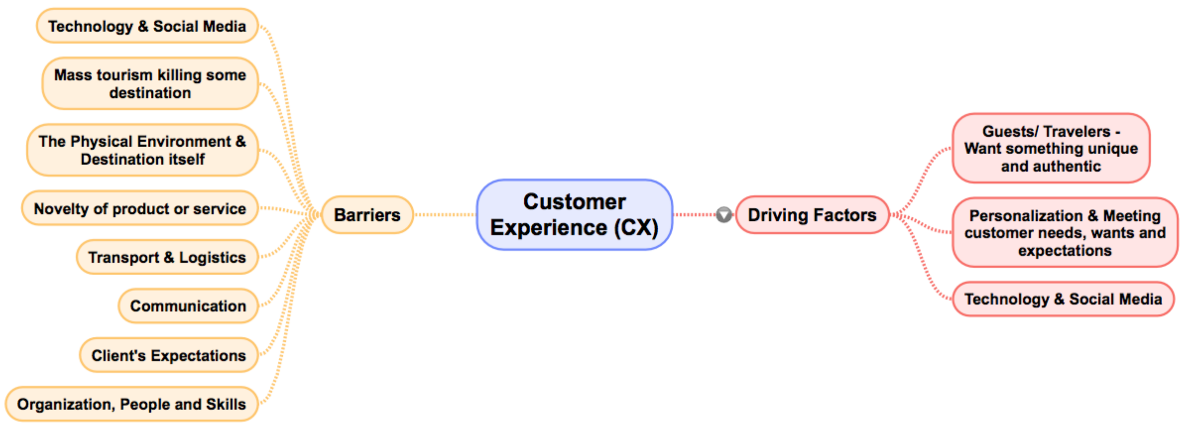


Figure 12: Driving factors and barriers for providing CX within the luxury travel industry

As luxury is a very subjective and loosely defined term within the luxury travel industry, each guest/ traveler's objectives for travel are certainly more concrete and different. Money is the least of the concerns for these high-net-worth guests/ travelers. They are always looking for trips, adventures, or experiences that are unique and authentic and want to be the first ones, like early adopters to have experienced products or services that are accessible to only a few individuals. Coupled with uniqueness and authenticity, the element of personalization and "feel at home" concept at every step of their trip or adventure has become the basic expectations of these guests/travelers. These kinds of profiles of customers are creating demand within the luxury travel industry thus, coxing and inspiring the actors within the supply-chain to meet these demands and expectations by developing business models and value propositions that are centered around the customer and staging experiences that are memorable. Moreover, with CX becoming the most critical factor in an organization's success, the actors in the industry are also leveraging technological solutions to customize and personalize experiences where possible and social media to lure and excite the customers. For example, during the awareness and research phase of the customer journey, some actors are using virtual reality to inspire the customers and provide information about their future travel.

While it is true that embracing technology and social media enhances CX, it can also act as a barrier for providing CX. For example, when an actor within the luxury travel industry like OceanSky introduces lighter-than-air technology to aviation, using hybrid aircraft like Airlander 10 into their high-end experiential and luxury travel. The prototype crash of Airlander 10 (which by the way was not too dramatic) that went viral within the social media and other channels can raise questions about the technology and safety of the aircraft. While this is still a prototype, risk-averse guests/ travelers would not want to venture into these kinds of experiences, even though these kinds of experiences are what they desire, until they have seen enough evidence and proofs of its operational capabilities. Furthermore, the novelty of the product or services introduced by the actors poses a threat purely because of a lack of understanding and awareness by the guests/ travelers. The former needs to be innovative in creating awareness and transforming this novelty into an experience that is co-created in order to provide a unique experience.

Each experience within the luxury travel segment is customized and personalized based on individual guests/ travelers' preferences. These life-changing experiences have a very short shelf-life once they are posted onto social media or other internal community channels. The experience and destination that was novel and limited to select few become viral and trendy due to social media, paving the way for mass tourism and making it hard for the actors within the luxury travel segment to meet their traveler's expectations. There are other times where the physical environment and destination itself can act as the biggest barriers in providing CX. For example, traveling to the North Pole using Airships or making a trip to Antarctica, there are many uncertainties in the form of weather, terrain, and the wilderness that can impact the actors in delivering the experience that was promised. Furthermore, as most of the adventures that the guests/ travelers want to experience are in the wild or sometimes in uncharted territory where transportation and logistics pose a problem to the actors to curate these experiences. Keeping the safety of the former (which is top priority) and simultaneously making sure that they receive a highly customized experience that was promised before the trip, is a balancing act that intermediary and sales team needs to deal with for each traveler.

The main goal of the actors within the luxury travel industry is to meet customer needs, wants, and expectations and align their business models and value-proposition towards customer-centricity. However, sometimes, these guests/ travelers' demands, and expectations are so outrageous and crazy that even if the actors invest all their resources to fulfill their desires, they cannot be satisfied. This is one of the biggest obstacles in providing CX. The latter always has to balance what is realistic and what is not. The same needs to be communicated effectively to the former in order to set the right expectations. It is not just the communication between the actors and guests/ travelers that need to be crystal clear, communication amongst the different actors within the supply chain also needs to be clear in order to provide a seamless CX to the guests/ travelers. Every step of the customer journey needs to be personalized, miscommunication between the actors at any of the touchpoints within the customer journey will harm CX. Finally, in order to carry out these seamless experiences along the customer journey, the actors need to have a strong customer-focused network of individuals who are skilled, experienced, and knowledgeable. Who understands the luxury travel industry, their guests/ traveler's expectations, wants and needs and, ultimately be able to transform their imagination into reality by providing solutions that create that magical moment. Weak linkages in any of these elements can also act as a barrier to providing CX.

6.2. Academic Contribution

Although there is evidence of prior and existing literature streams that link CX concepts with customer satisfaction, service quality, relationship marketing, CRM, customer centricity, customer engagement, and CEM. These pieces of literatures provide a one-sided, fragmented view on constructing CX. There are several strategies, frameworks, or process models developed by various authors that measure CX from an organization's perspective. However, very few models, frameworks or concepts that measure CX from the customer point of view and include the concept of co-creation to develop CX. Nevertheless, there seems to be a lack in the literature that provides a holistic picture of measuring CX through a model that includes all three perspectives, i.e., a contribution from an organization, the contribution from the customer, and the influence of co-creation. Our conceptual integrated CX model provides this holistic picture and contributes to the literature of CX.

Our second contribution is to the experience economy and co-creation pieces of literature. Pine and Gilmore (2011) were the first authors to coin the term "Experience Economy," where the authors suggested that businesses need to transition from just selling goods or services to mass customization and memorable staging experiences that create value for both the organization and the customer. These transformations of staging experiences were from an organization's perspective, where a firm staged the experiences by using goods as a prop and service as a stage and the customers were involved only at the point of the exchange who were leveraging these experiences. The concept of co-constructing experience and how customers can influence the staging of experience along with organization is ignored. Our study addresses these issues where we refer to an experience that is designed, developed, and curated by an organization for their customer that includes co-creation. Our study also contributes to the Co-Creation literature proposed by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004). The authors do a good job of providing an account on joint value creation between customers, companies, and communities and how co-creation works at the very high-level. However, the nitty-gritty of what an organization should consider to co-construct and how can customers and organizations jointly work to stage an experience seems to be lacking.

Finally, our third contribution is to the knowledge of the hospitality and luxury tourism management industry. Based on our research, we understand that there is no one single framework that can be leveraged by the luxury travel segment to analyze what factors or components should an actor within the supply-chain consider while designing, developing, and managing CX and how these components assist in providing CX. Through our multi-case study of different actors within the industry and thematic analysis generated from these cases, we propose an integrated conceptual model that aims to address the current gap highlighted above through our research questions.

6.3. Limitations of the Study

In the process of conducting a multi-case study and developing an integrated CX model using data from the thematic analysis, the following were some of the limitations that we have identified in our thesis:

Our first limitation is associated with the availability of a secondary source of data. In the process of conducting a multi-case study, we used the case company’s websites and articles as a secondary source of data to validate the claims made during interviews. But, we feel this is a challenge as it is limited, or, in some situations, no secondary data is available. The actors within the luxury travel segment do not post customer testimonials or feedback on their company websites or social media. Furthermore, as customers in this segment are high-net-worth individuals, they want to keep their trips, and personal getaways confidential. They do not provide permissions to post any kind testimonials or feedback. We have tried to mitigate this to some extent by leveraging articles posted by some popular luxury travel magazines to validate some of the claims made by the case companies.

Our second limitation is related to the actors in the supply chain within the luxury travel segment. In the complete supply chain, we have excluded the tourism board and government and end-customer or traveler from our case study. The reason for exclusion is purely because of the availability of the contacts and time constraints of the thesis. Furthermore, there is another thesis conducted by two fellow students within the MILI-program. They are also working on the luxury travel segment but focusing only on understanding end-customer or traveler needs and expectations. As a part of future study, there is a possibility to combine both the findings and generate a further deeper understanding of CX. From the actors that we have considered for our study, we have performed at least two interviews per actor (total of five actors were interviewed) within the value-chain but getting time from these individuals and agreeing to be a part of our study was a challenge. Also, during our interview, we realized that some of the actors perform dual roles or sometimes curate an experience end-to-end. It is difficult for us to assess if these dual roles that the actors perform have influenced the interviewees while answering our interview questions, thus, giving us a picture that everything is OK within this industry.

Our third and final limitation is the thematic analysis leveraged to build the conceptual integrated CX model. Based on the empirics collected from the case, companies, themes, and sub-themes were generated using thematic analysis. Using these themes/ sub-themes, we have developed a conceptual integrated CX model. However, the challenge here is, some of the components within this integrated model was not supported by the data from empirics (the components highlighted in purple in Figure 10) and so not validated. These components were included in the CX model based on theoretical understanding from other streams of literature. This validation and enhancement of the model can be taken up as a future study.

6.4. Managerial Recommendations

With the customers now interacting with an organization through numerous touchpoints using different channels and devices, designing, developing, and managing CX throughout the customer journey is becoming even more complex and challenging for customer experience officers or other managers within the organization. Whether it is retail, personal care, automotive industry, the luxury travel industry, or any other segment, practitioners, in general, are finding it challenging to develop a unified organization strategy that is customer-centric, provide CX that will increase customer loyalty, and engage the customer.

Our integrated conceptual CX model can act as a starting point and source of inspiration for the practitioners in understanding the different components or building blocks involved in designing, developing, and managing CX from different perspectives. Using this CX model, practitioners can further deep-dive into each of these building blocks separately, perform an audit and assessment of their current processes to understand how each component is leveraged within the organization to provide CX. Developing processes, standard operating procedures, and metrics that connect organizational performance with customer feedback and, finally, implement changes and continuously measure them enterprise-wide. The integrated CX model can also serve as guidance to the practitioners in assisting them in allocating monetary budget, technical and human resources. As well as act as a tool that empowers them to understand their customer and design customer experience that increases their willingness to pay for the product or service and differentiate them within the marketplace.

6.5. Ethical Implications

Within our thesis, the setting (the luxury travel industry), the service providers (whom we refer to as different actors within the supply chain), the luxury travel community (like travel shows), and the traveler. Most of whom we have considered to understand the CX within the customer journey is a subject of contentious debate from an ethical standpoint.

One may argue that the global tourism industry is recognized as one of the world's largest industries in supporting millions of jobs, contributing heavily to a nation's GDP and growth and, also acting as a critical driver for the realization of UN sustainability goals (Hanna, 2017). However, the darker side of this industry, which everyone conveniently ignores is that it is surrounded by a multitude of ethical issues which further gets exacerbated by a small niche luxury travel segment and its actors.

As we understand from our case companies, the objectives of the luxury travelers for traveling varies. Some travelers are looking for luxurious places to unwind and relax, while others are looking for something more spiritual, unique, and authentic experience that is limited to only a few individuals. Nevertheless, one thing that's common amongst all the luxury travelers is that they are ready to pay a premium price for their experience. One can perceive that as the traveler is paying a premium price for their product or service. They are enjoying their experience in a responsible manner from an ethical standpoint contributing to the economy, local communities, to the eco-system and having a less negative impact than mass tourism. But, if we dig deeper, this connotation is far from being ethical. For example, a traveler spending time in a high-end resort in Dubai pays a premium price for his/ her services, but behind the scenes, there might be human right volitions, which the travelers are not aware of or do not care about. The workers may live in a condition that is far away from luxury, getting paid a meager salary with no holidays and working seven days a week.

Another example where a traveler is visiting a super plush beachside property in Panama, and he/ she hopes that their excessive spending of money may have a positive impact on the local economy and benefit the people. Yet, this may not be true on the ground reality, as the benefits may not be equally distributed. We think this may just not be the case of two destinations. It could be a generic problem across the board both in developed and developing countries. However, the luxury traveler in the process of fulfilling their travel objectives may not consider these ethical violations.

It would be unfair if we just point fingers towards the luxury travelers for this situation. Even the service providers and government institutions within the industry share equal responsibility and blame for allowing such a situation to arise in the first place. Government institutions in the process of boosting their GDP provide subsidies, waivers, and regulations that are conducive to the service providers. Furthermore, in certain destinations or countries, they also direct the scare resources such as water and energy towards the luxury travel segment in order to cater for the high-net-worth individuals. Service providers milk this situation and create demand by offering exclusive private access to an island or a destination, private cruises, or jets fairing them to locations that are virtually inaccessible to the general public or mass tourism or setting up logistics in the middle of a wilderness. Setting these activities is resource-intensive, consumes energy and, sometimes endangers the eco-system, environment, and local communities. Also, as service providers have invested heavily to create demand and lure travelers, they try to ensure that their operational costs are as minimum as possible to maintain a profit margin, if it means that they have to ignore some of the ethical aspects.

The solution to this has to be a collaborated approach, where the government sets up stricter rules and regulations for operating in the luxury segment. The complete luxury travel segment, including all the actors within the supply, should realize and acknowledge that the resources such as environment, water, and energy are valuable, and they need to put a limit on their growth if they have to operate in a sustainable environment. Furthermore, as this is a service-oriented customer-centric industry, both travelers and employees need to be treated ethically. The service providers need to be transparent with their traveler by providing information about their business proposition and their ethical impact, and also treat their employees fairly without violating their human rights. Finally, the traveler can also contribute to this noble cause by asking the right ethical questions to their service providers. Going deeper than what has been advertised on the website or social media, do not choose destinations or places that do not support local communities and has a history of human right violations and use their power to create a small change.

6.6. Suggestions for future research

The limitations highlighted from our study provides an opportunity for future research, details of which are outlined below.

The integrated CX model is a generic framework developed based on the themes and sub-themes generated by the case companies operating within the luxury travel segment. Furthermore, there are components within this framework that are not validated by our empirics. So, as a part of future research, we suggest a similar multi-case study is performed in a different industry setting, for example, retail or manufacturing and the findings from these studies will further enhance and validate our integrated CX model.

Within the hospitality and tourism industry, we suggest a comparative study between actors within the luxury travel segment and actors within the mass market segment. This study will further widen the understanding of how actors within these two segments operate and provide CX, and the findings that come out of this study can be used to validate our integrated CX model.

Some of the factors that we have excluded while developing our integrated CX model are the size and maturity of the organization. And the type of customer, age-group of the customer, and the region the end-customer comes from. As a part of the future study, we propose to include these factors as a criterion for selecting the case companies and customers in order to understand the influence of these factors on CX and also validate our CX model. Furthermore, while doing this study, we also propose to include perspectives from tourism boards and government institutions and also incorporate the findings of the end-customer or traveler generated by another thesis, as these were excluded from our study.

Our study intended to look at different elements or components that contribute to designing, developing, and managing CX within the luxury travel industry from an organization, customer, and co-creation. However, each of these elements or components that emerged from our thematic analysis can be further researched and studied as a stand-alone topic that influences CX. There can be multiple future studies that can arise as a result of this study.

Finally, as another future research, one can perform a multi-case study with all the actors within either the luxury travel segment or any other segment to understand how organization and customer co-create experience by using quantitative methods.

7. Conclusion

Several authors, scholars, and practitioners have studied the concept of CX in different settings and come to a consensus that CX is a complex multidimensional construct. They have also developed various models and frameworks that help understand this broad concept of CX, factors that would influence CX, determinants, and moderators that can impact CX and also measure CX from a qualitative and quantitative perspective. However, these existing frameworks and models are biased because they provide a one-sided take on CX by considering a viewpoint from an organization's, from a customer's or a co-creation perspective. This is problematic as there is no one holistic framework that includes all three perspectives to explain the CX phenomenon.

Furthermore, when these fragmented constructs are leveraged to understand the luxury travel industry, which is a niche market compared to the mass tourism industry, the resulting picture gets further convoluted. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, the customers in the segment are demanding, looking for unique, authentic, and 'crème de la crème' kind of experience. Secondly, there are multiple actors within supply-chain involved in designing, developing, and curating an experience (ranging from two to five actors for each trip) and, the roles and functions of these actors are getting blurred. Keeping this as the premise for our study, we decided to dig deeper into this phenomenon through our research questions. The first questions focused on developing an integrated CX model that encompasses different perspectives/ views of CX and juxtapose it to the luxury travel industry to understand how the actors provide CX. The second question was to understand and map the complete customer journey process and identify critical touchpoints and how these touchpoints influence CX. Our third and final question was to understand the driving factors and barriers to providing CX within the luxury travel industry.

In order to address these research questions, we adopted a qualitative approach with a multi-case study research strategy, where a detailed set of data and insights were collected from various actors within the supply-chain of the luxury travel industry. Five actors were considered for our study, and for each actor, at least two case companies were selected based on a set of guidelines (resulted in a total of eleven companies). A total of 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide.

Using a thematic analysis, the rich textual empirical data generated from our interviews were converted to develop first-order sub-themes and second-order abstract level themes. These themes, coupled with secondary sources in the form of scientific research articles, documentation, and websites, were used to address our research questions. As a part of addressing our first research question, we offered an integrated conceptual CX framework consisting of five building blocks, i.e., *Organizational Factors, Design, Delivery and Management of CX, Co-Creation, CX Insights / Metrics and Moderating Factors*. This model encapsulates a firm integrating customer and co-creation perspectives to generate an integrated CX that can be leveraged by any organization to design, deliver, and manage CX throughout the different touchpoints within the customer journey. Leveraging this conceptual model, we analyzed how different actors within the supply-chain provide CX. A common plot that emerged was that even though each actor specializes in certain capabilities and offers different products or services, their value-proposition is customer-focused. For competencies that they are lack, they address it by building a network and partnership with intermediaries to provide CX. A customer journey from a customer's perspective consisting of customer needs, channels, and touchpoints were developed as part of a second research question. From the customer journey, we understand that each touchpoint within every stage of the purchase cycle in the luxury travel segment acts as a critical touchpoint that can affect the CX positively or negatively. Finally, in addressing the third research question, we highlight that personalization, meeting customer needs, and expectations and, technology and social media acts as a driving factor to providing CX. In contrast the same technology and social media, mass tourism, physical environment, novelty, transport and logistics, communication, organization, and client's expectations can act as a barrier for providing CX.

We believe that although there is no dearth in the literature to address the broad multidimensional construct of CX, there is undoubtedly a lack of framework or model that includes multiple perspectives to address CX. In the process of addressing this gap through our master thesis, we will be contributing to the existing literature of CX, experience economy, and co-creation literature.

Finally, we also hope that the case companies will leverage our integrated CX model as a tool to assess and undertake CX engagement. From an academic standpoint, we also hope that our study will garner interest and inspire other master students to progress further on this CX phenomenon in a different industrial context and further enhance our CX model.

References

62° Nord, 2020. *62° Nord*. [online] Available at: <https://www.62.no/no/om-oss/> [Accessed 17 Mar. 2020].

Agoda, 2019. *Agoda Research Reveals Travel Trend Expectations for the 2020s*. [online] Available at: <https://www.agoda.com/press/2020s_travel?cid=1792549> [Accessed 18 Jan. 2020].

Athwal, N. and Athwal, 2017. *The Evolving Luxury Hospitality Market 2017*.

Bell, E., Bryman, A. and Harley, B., 2019. *Business Research Methods*. 5th ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bru & Bru, 2020a. *About – BRU&BRU*. [online] Available at: <https://bru-bru.com/en/about/> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2020].

Bru & Bru, 2020b. *Travel Stories – BRU&BRU*. [online] Available at: <https://bru-bru.com/en/travel-stories/> [Accessed 26 Mar. 2020].

Bru & Bru (LinkedIn), 2020. *BRU&BRU Exclusive Travel Designer: About | LinkedIn*. [online] Available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/bru&bru-exclusive-travel-designer/> [Accessed 3 Apr. 2020].

Caballero, C., 2019. *A definition of "luxury travel" and "luxury travelers."* [online] A Luxury Travel Blog. Available at: <https://www.aluxurytravelblog.com/2019/03/17/a-definition-of-luxury-travel-and-luxury-travelers/> [Accessed 5 Feb. 2020].

EHL, 2020. *The 5 C's: A new definition of luxury travel*. [online] ÉCOLE HÔTELIÈRE DE LAUSANNE. Available at: <https://blog.ehl.edu/the-5-cs-a-new-definition-of-luxury-travel> [Accessed 5 Feb. 2020].

Eisenhardt, K.M., 1989. Building Theories from Case Study Research. 14(4), pp.532–550.

Eisenhardt, K.M. and Graebner, M.E., 2007. Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), pp.25–32.

Elefant Travel, 2020. *We travel | Custom luxury travel | Elefant Travel: We design your trip to measure*. [online] Available at: <https://www.elefant.com.es/tu-viaje-a-medida/> [Accessed 8 Apr. 2020].

Euromonitor, 2018. *Global Luxury Hotel and Travel Trends | Market Research Report | Euromonitor*. [online] Euromonitor International. Available at: <https://www.euromonitor.com/global-luxury-hotel-and-travel-trends/report> [Accessed 5 Feb. 2020].

Flavián, C., Gurrea, R. and Orús, C., 2020. Combining channels to make smart purchases: The role of webrooming and showrooming. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 52(July).

Gartner, 2019. *Customer Experience: Increase Customer Loyalty and Advocacy*. [online] Gartner Inc. Available at: <https://www.gartner.com/en/marketing/solutions/customer-experience> [Accessed 24 Jan. 2020].

Gartner, 2020. *Customer Experience Definition*. [online] Gartner. Available at: <https://www.gartner.com/en/information-technology/glossary/customer-experience> [Accessed 24 Jan. 2020].

Gentile, C., Spiller, N. and Noci, G., 2007. How to Sustain the Customer Experience:. An Overview of Experience Components that Co-create Value With the Customer. *European Management Journal*, 25(5), pp.395–410.

Gioia, D.A., Corley, K.G. and Hamilton, A.L., 2013. Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research: Notes on the Gioia Methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), pp.15–31.

Hanna, P., 2017. *Is it ethical to take a luxury holiday in a 'developing' country?* [online] World Economic Forum. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/09/is-it-ethical-to-take-a-luxury-holiday-in-a-developing-country> [Accessed 18 May 2020].

Homburg, C., Jozić, D. and Kuehnl, C., 2017. Customer experience management: toward implementing an evolving marketing concept. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 45(3), pp.377–401.

Ishav Arctico, 2020. *Ishav Arctico*. [online] Available at: <http://www.ishavarctico.com/index.php/what-we-do/destinations> [Accessed 24 Mar. 2020].

Kadam, A. and Deshmukh, R., 2019. *Luxury Travel Market Size, Share & Growth | Industry Report, 2019-2026*. [online] Allied Market Research. Available at: <https://www.alliedmarketresearch.com/luxury-travel-market> [Accessed 18 Jan. 2020].

L.E/Miami, 2020. *Meet the collective | L.E/Miami*. [online] Available at: <https://lemiami.com/meet-the-collective/> [Accessed 26 Mar. 2020].

Lemon, K.N. and Verhoef, P.C., 2016. Understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(6), pp.69–96.

Lluberas, R. and Shorrocks, A., 2019. Wealth outlook. *Global wealth report 2019, by Suisse Group, Credit AG*, (October), pp.37–42.

Lushescapes, 2020. *lushescapes | About Us*. [online] Available at: <http://www.lushescapes.com/aboutus.php> [Accessed 26 Mar. 2020].

Luxury Travel, 2013. *luxury-travel.pdf*.

Maklan, S. and Klaus, P., 2011. Customer experience: Are we measuring the right things? *International Journal of Market Research*, 53(6), p.5.

McKinsey, 2019. *What matters in customer-experience transformations | McKinsey*. [online] McKinsey and Company. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/what-matters-in-customer-experience-cx-transformations> [Accessed 29 Jan. 2020].

Mela, C.F., 2020. Research Priorities 2018-2020. *Marketing Science Institute*.

Meyer, C. and Schwager, A., 2007. Understanding customer experience. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(6), pp.1–12.

Mosley, R.W., 2007. Customer experience, organisational culture and the employer brand. *Journal of Brand Management*, 15(2), pp.123–134.

Nasution, R.A., Sembada, A.Y., Miliani, L., Resti, N.D. and Prawono, D.A., 2014. The Customer Experience Framework as Baseline for Strategy and Implementation in Services Marketing. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, [online] 148, pp.254–261. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.07.041>.

OceanSky, 2020. *The Company - OceanSky Cruises*. [online] OceanSky Cruises. Available at: <https://www.oceanskycruises.com/company/> [Accessed 18 Jan. 2020].

Palmer, A., 2010. Customer experience management: A critical review of an emerging idea. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 24(3), pp.196–208.

Patton, M.Q., 2014. *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. Fourth Edi ed. SAGE

Publications, Inc.

Payne, A. and Frow, P., 2005. A strategic framework for customer relationship management. *Journal of Marketing*, 69(4), pp.167–176.

Pine, B.J. and Gilmore, J.H., 2011. *The Experience Economy*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.

Prahalad, C.K. and Ramaswamy, V., 2003. The New Frontier of Experience Innovation. *MIT Sloan management review, ISSN 1532-9194*, 44(4), pp.12–18.

Prahalad, C.K. and Ramaswamy, V., 2004. Co-creation experiences: The next practice in value creation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, [online] 18(3), pp.5–14. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/dir.20015>.

Safrans du Monde, 2020. *Safrans Du Monde*. [online] Available at: <https://www.safransdumonde.com/fr/notre-savoir-faire/notre-vision> [Accessed 20 Mar. 2020].

Safrans Du Monde, 2020. *Around the World - Safrans Du Monde*. [online] Available at: <https://www.safransdumonde.com/fr/tour-du-monde> [Accessed 24 Mar. 2020].

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., 2009. *Research Methods for business students*. 5th ed. Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited.

Schmitt, B., 1999. Experiential Marketing. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 15(1–3), pp.53–67.

Song, H., Liu, J. and Chen, G., 2013. Tourism Value Chain Governance: Review and Prospects. *Journal of Travel Research*, 52(1), pp.15–28.

Southern Cross, 2019. *Southern Cross (Tour Operador de Viajes a Medida y Viajes de Lujo)*. [online] Available at: <https://www.southerncross.es/un-ano-mas> [Accessed 20 Mar. 2020].

Southern Cross (LinkedIn), 2020. *Southern Cross Tour Operator: About | LinkedIn*. [online] Available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/southern-cross-tour-operador/about/> [Accessed 20 Mar. 2020].

Starc Peceny, U., Urbančič, J., Mokorel, S., Kuralt, V. and Ilijaš, T., 2019. Tourism 4.0: Challenges in Marketing a Paradigm Shift. In: *Consumer Behavior and Marketing*. IntechOpen.

The Luxury Network, 2020. *About Us - The Luxury Network*. [online] Available at: <https://www.theluxurynetwork.ae/about-us/> [Accessed 26 Mar. 2020].

Travel Quest, 2020. *A Travel Quest - About Us*. [online] Available at: <http://www.atravelquest.com/#about> [Accessed 26 Mar. 2020].

TURNER, R. and JUS, N., 2019. *Travel and Tourism: World Economic Impact 2019. World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC)*.

Vaismoradi, M., Jones, J., Turunen, H. and Snelgrove, S., 2016. Theme development in qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice*, 6(5).

Verhoef, P.C., Lemon, K.N., Parasuraman, A., Roggeveen, A., Tsiros, M. and Schlesinger, L.A., 2009. Customer Experience Creation: Determinants, Dynamics and Management Strategies. *Journal of Retailing*, 85(1), pp.31–41.

Virtuoso, 2020. *How to become a Virtuoso Member Agency - Virtuoso*. [online] Available at: <https://www.virtuoso.com/why-virtuoso/Join-Virtuoso/Become-a-Virtuoso-Member-Agency> [Accessed 20 Mar. 2020].

White Desert, 2020. *White Desert | Adventures in Antarctica*. [online] Available at: <https://white-desert.com/> [Accessed 20 Mar. 2020].

White Desert (LinkedIn), 2020. *White Desert: Overview | LinkedIn*. [online] Available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/white-desert/> [Accessed 28 Mar. 2020].

Wota Lifestyle, 2020a. *About us - Wota Lifestyle*. [online] Available at: <https://wota.co/en/about.html> [Accessed 26 Mar. 2020].

Wota Lifestyle, 2020b. *Membership - Wota Lifestyle*. [online] Available at: <https://wota.co/en/membership.html> [Accessed 26 Mar. 2020].

Yaffe, J., Moose, A. and Marquardt, D., 2019. *The experience economy is booming, but it must benefit everyone | World Economic Forum*. [online] World Economic Forum. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/01/the-experience-economy-is-booming-but-it-must-benefit-everyone/> [Accessed 5 Feb. 2020].

Yin, R.K., 2014. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 5th ed. US: Sage Publications Ltd.

Appendix

A) Appendix: Interview Guide

Background and Problem statement:

The luxury travel industry is a very small part of the total travel industry and "covers most desirable and premium experience in terms of luxurious accommodations, convenient transport facilities, and authentic travel experience (Kadam and Deshmukh, 2019). The industry had a market size of $891 billion in 2018 and is expected to grow with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7,9 % up to $1.614 billion during the period from 2019 to 2026 (Kadam and Deshmukh, 2019). Overall only 0.9 % of all adults in 2019 belong to the top end of high net worth (HNW) individuals and the aggregate wealth of these HNW individuals has grown four-folds from 2000 to 2019, i.e., USD 39.6 trillion to USD 158.3 trillion and with their share of global wealth has increased from 39 % to 44 % over the same period (Lluberas and Shorrocks, 2019).

Based on our initial research we understand that there have been several authors and researchers who have looked at customer experience both from qualitative and quantitative methods. Although there are several customer-experience models, frameworks or constructs, they all seem to be fragmented and provide limited picture. We certainly see a gap within the research community with regards to an integrated model, framework or construct that includes design, delivery and management of customer experience from different perspective, i.e., firm, customer and co-creation.

Furthermore, from a luxury travel industry perspective, one of the challenges that actors within the value-chain are facing is staging an experience that is memorable for their target customer group. This further gets complicated where luxury may not be limited to just excess or opulence, but, it's also about preserving natural habitats, culture, local communities and travelling in a sustainable way.

With this being the premise for our research, we have further divided our research into multiple research questions. Our intention is to address these research questions through a qualitative case-study approach by interviewing luxury travel operators or agencies.

Research questions:

1) How should a firm integrate customer and co-creation perspectives to generate an integrated CX model? Furthermore, how are the components in the integrated model used by the luxury travel industry to design, deliver and curate CX?
2) What touchpoints or a mix of touchpoints act as the primary contributors of CX within the customer journey for a luxury travel industry?
3) What are the driving factors and barriers for providing CX within luxury travel industry?

Interview Guide:

Duration: Approx. 50 to 60 mins

Introduction Questions:

1) Personal background:
    a. Name:
    b. Age:
    c. Professional experience:
    d. Current role:

2) As a product owner, we understand that you provide a set of adventures to your guests, can you please elaborate on how this journey began?
    a. The challenges you had to go through during the initial days
    b. What steps you took to overcome those challenges?
3) What factors play an important role for a company such as yours to operate in a high-end experiential luxury travel segment? What are the differentiating factors?
    a. What capabilities a firm should have in order to succeed in this segment?
    b. Is there a competition for you in this segment?
    c. What is the entry barrier for a new entrant into this segment?
4) What are the different channels (e.g. agents, online, offline etc…) that you use to reach your target customer? And how?
    a. What percentage of target customer come from which channel? And you as a luxury tour operator have any preferences on the channels?
    b. How do you ensure that your customers receive a seamless experience across all the channels? And how are all the channels integrated?
5) Can you please elaborate on the customer journey process along with different touchpoints where the customers are contacted?
    a. Who are the actors involved within this journey and what processes are followed?
    b. What according to you are the critical touchpoint within the journey?
    c. Do you provide a personalized experience throughout the customer journey? If yes, please elaborate on the personalized experience at different phases
6) What do you think your guests value the most in the service(s) that you provide?
    a. How do you currently measure your customers behavior (, i.e., satisfaction, loyalty etc.…)?
    b. What steps or actions would you take to ensure customer retention and loyalty is maintained?
7) In your view does co-creation have any influence on customer experience.
    a. Provide example(s) of co-creation that has resulted in either positive or negative customer experience
8) What are the driving factors and barriers for providing customer experience within luxury travel industry?
    a. How has technology changed the way you provide experience to your guest?
    b. What kind of digital experience have you adopted to make this experience a memorable?
9) What according to you are the current and future challenges of luxury travel industry?
    a. Are there any challenges that you are facing? And how do you plan to tackle these challenges?

B) Appendix: Details about Case Companies

Sl No.	**Company**	**Actor in the Value-Chain**	**Company Description**
1	OceanSky AB	Product Owner & Tour Operator	OceanSky AB was founded in 2014 to introduce the lighter-than-air technology to aviation and usher in a new era of modern transportation using hybrid aircraft technology (OceanSky, 2020). As a product owner and tour operator, OceanSky cruises (started in 2018) focuses on high-end experiential and luxury travel with the aims to deliver unique experience to the high-end adventurous travelers while keeping sustainability at the heart of

			operations and strategy (, i.e., sustainable mobility) (OceanSky, 2020). In 2019 OceanSky has been chosen as a Climate Force Global Ambassador and been a part of Pure Life Adventure since 2018.
2	62° Nord - Hotels & Adventures	Product Owner & DMC	62°NORD offers their guests at their hotels in Ålesund (Norway) luxury escapes and bespoke itineraries for leisure, incentive and event travel (62° Nord, 2020). With local guides, boats, cars and helicopters they can take clients off the beaten track. 62°NORD believes in creating authentic, pure and personal experiences to enhance the distinctive geographical character of their destination. The company has been a member of Pure Life experience since 2013 and also National Geographic unique Lodges of the world.
3	White Desert Antarctica	Product Owner, Tour Operator & DMC	White Desert, established in 2005, is a five-star luxurious and ecological camp set up in one of the greatest wildernesses on earth, Antarctica (White Desert, 2020).The adventurous spirit at the foundation of White Desert has allowed for some great achievements including the only private jet scheduled service to Antarctica and the world's most awarded polar expedition operator (White Desert (LinkedIn), 2020). The highlights of Antarctica experience include the South Pole, the Emperor Penguins and the incredible beauty of this stark environment, which truly is an otherworldly experience.
4	Southern Cross CIF	B2B Tour Operator	Southern Cross, setup in 2002, is a Virtuoso preferred tour operator specialized in tailor made journeys to worldwide destinations (Southern Cross, 2019). They operate in a B2B segment and offer many different kinds of luxurious travel trips like group travels or honeymoon travels and have a network to many destinations around the globe. The company is located in Madrid and Barcelona and has been a Virtuoso preferred supplier since 2017 and a member of Pure Life Experience since 2009.
5	Travel Quest - Immersive Journeys	Travel Designer	Travel Quest (provides their service since the second half of 2019) are designers in the luxury travel and the well-travelled team curates a seamless journey through meticulous planning and personalized attention in order to design a holiday experience which revolves around each individual travel style. Travel Quest has its origin from Travel Duet (founded in 2012), India's first travel brand, designing highly personalized and luxurious experiential travel, exclusively for couples (Travel Quest, 2020). They have been a member of Pure Life Experience since 2013
6	Bru & Bru Exclusive Travel Designer S.L.	Travel Designer	Bru & Bru Exclusive is a small crew of travel designer, who design unique, once-in-a-lifetime trips and experiences. The unique offer is, that they always recommend trips which they have experienced themselves first-hand. The company is located in Barcelona and has another office in Madrid, Spain and started their business back in 2004. Over the years they received several awards like the Alimara Business CETT-SITC Award and got invited to PURE Pursuits on Iceland.

7	WOTA Lifestyle - International Travel Service Co. LTD	Travel Agents	The company offers distinctive privilege, open rates, and deluxe lifestyle experiences with their unrivalled networking connections in the Asia Pacific area. The inimitable expertise makes the best option for lifestyle management and concierge services. The company, which is located in Taipei, Taiwan, was founded in 2015 and has several luxurious partners like Louis Vuitton, Chanel or Givenchy.
8	Lushescapes (owned by Bespoke Experiences DMCC)	Travel Designer/ Consultant	Lushescapes is a travel consultant, who offers a wide range of bespoke holiday options to give clients the best travel experience. They have carved a niche market for themselves as a luxury travel company that turns every holiday into a unique, enriching and memorable journey. More than a decade ago Lushescapes started its journey in Delhi, India and is currently operating from Dubai. They are a member of Virtuoso since 2017, a leading global network of agencies in luxury and experiential travel.
9	Elefant Travel	Travel Agents	Elefant Travel started as a small agency in 2004 in the Luxury Industry segment. Today they have offices in Madrid, Bogota and Barcelona and are among the top travel designers in Spain. The team of Elefant travel, travel extensively to experience the destinations first-hand. The team along the customers trip are professionals from all areas and they deliver a unique and real experience. They are part of the Belmond Bellini Club, the Emotions Travel Community and since 2009 a member of Pure Life Experience.
10	Ishav Arctico Inc. (IA)	DMC	IshavArctico is a company offering unique trips within the Norwegian Arctic. They have many local contacts and more than 20 years of experience within Norway. The company is located in Madrid. Since 2011 Ishav Arctico is a member of Pure Life Experience.
11	Safrans du monde	DMC & Tour Operator	Safrans Du Monde is a tour operator and travel agency specializing in customized travel, world tours and air cruises since 2003. One of their specialties include tailor-made world tours by airplane. Each travel is a perfect blend of personal dreams and the secret experiences by safrans du monde.

Appendix 1: Case company summary

C) Appendix: Journey and Business Proposition

Actor:	**Product or Service Owner**
Case company:	**OceanSky AB and 62°NORD**

OceanSky AB was founded in 2014 to introduce the lighter-than-air technology to aviation and usher in a new era of modern transportation using hybrid aircraft technology (OceanSky, 2020). According to OceanSky AB, this green technology replaces traditional air transportation with a clean and efficient hybrid aircraft that can carry a significant payload capacity and has low reliance on infrastructure to operate. Furthermore, the CEO states that, currently, within the market, there are multiple airship manufacturers, i.e., Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) and one of the biggest challenges that these OEM's face is finding customers. They need airline customers in order to raise investments and generate capital and without confirmed orders from the airline customers, they cannot raise the capital needed to manufacture airships. OceanSky is one such airline customer who wants to break this conundrum and kick-start the era of lighter-than-air-technology, OceanSky started their business focused on cargo handler. The most obvious use-case for application of these airships were to move cargo from one place to another place, where helicopters are limited with the payload they can carry. Furthermore, limitations on infrastructure, road limits and suitable runways to land proved airships attractive as an alternative mode of transportation. OceanSky also need customers in order to prove their credibility to the OEM. A sustainable business model can ensure that the enterprise can generate revenue to keep the cash-flows and build confidence that they can pay the OEM the leasing fee. As the time horizon for delivering a first transportation service for logistic customers was too long, this business model did not work for OceanSky. Although the customers for OceanSky were keen about the value proposition and wanted to use the service, there were no commercially available airships in the market yet and they did not want to commit and invest into an development with the time horizon of four to five years. So, OceanSky changed their business proposition from cargo handlers to focusing on experiential travel.

As a product owner and tour operator, OceanSky Cruises (started in 2018) focuses on high-end experiential and luxury travel with the aims to deliver unique experience to the high-end adventurous travelers while keeping sustainability at the heart of operations and strategy (, i.e., sustainable mobility) (OceanSky, 2020). OceanSky Cruises in collaboration with Hybrid Air Vehicle Ltd. (HAV) and using HAV's revolutionary airship "Airlander 10" aims to be the first to offers an adventure expedition to the North Pole from Svalbard during spring 2023/ 2024.

62°NORD is a family owned venture offering bespoke travel experiences on the north west coast of Norway (62° Nord, 2020). The area is known for its spectacular and untouched nature where steep mountains raises from narrow fjords. It was during 2014 that 62°Nord embarked into the luxury segment, prior to that they were operating in a local region providing services such as hiring of boats, hotels to mass market, conferences etc. As a part of their transformation into the luxury segment, they have designed boutique luxury hotels, i.e., three hotels at the moment based in Ålesund in the northwest coast of Norway. These hotels are part of "Small Luxury Hotels of the World" as the first hotel in Norway and also became a member of the "National Geographic unique Lodges of the world" (62° Nord, 2020). Furthermore, they also have a sister company that has a network of dedicated boats, cars and helicopters to fully cater to Norwegian experience. As we understand, their unique strength is that they are not only a product owner with hotels, but, they also act as a DMC curating complete experiences to their customers, the Norwegian way.

Actor:	**Tour or Cruise Operator**
Case company:	**White Desert and Southern Cross**

White Desert, established in 2005, is a 5-star luxurious and ecological camp set up in one of the greatest wildernesses on earth, Antarctica (White Desert, 2020). Whichaway Camp is a camp like no other, the perfect base for Antarctic adventure, with state-of the art sleeping pods (7) designed for 2 people, 5-star international cuisine and luxury interiors (Luxury Travel, 2013; White Desert, 2020). With only 12 guests on each departure, they have itineraries for pioneering travelers, ranging from 8 nights, that combines the magnificent Emperor Penguins with a flight to the southernmost point on earth-the Geographic South Pole, to a 24 hours trip. White Desert is in a unique situation, in the sense that it acts as both a Product Owner and a Tour Operator. In 2017, White Desert received World's Leading Polar Expedition Operator award and the following years they were nominated as finalists for the award. They have also received huge accolades in the press, some of them includes "White Desert – the only company in the world to offer a Gulfstream private jet to access Antarctic", says Forbes (White Desert, 2020). "White Desert Whichaway Camp is an Oasis of luxury in an inhospitable landscape", says Travel & Style (White Desert, 2020).
Southern Cross, setup in 2002, is a Virtuoso preferred tour operator specialized in tailor made journeys to worldwide destinations (Southern Cross, 2019). Virtuoso is the leading global network of agencies and partners specializing in luxury and experiential travel and is an apex authority that provides a hallmark to the travel agencies from a quality stand-point (Virtuoso, 2020). Southern Cross has been a virtuoso preferred supplier since 2017 and as a B2B tour operator with offices in Barcelona and Madrid, they stress on experiential travel, where highly qualified team of individuals create bespoke journeys for both individuals, FITs (fully independent travelers), small groups and family (Southern Cross (LinkedIn), 2020). Their membership is not limited to Virtuoso, they are also part of some of the prestigious experience fair or clubs such as Pure Experience (since 2009), LE Miami, Atta (Africa Travel & Tourism Association), exclusive member of LUXPERIENCE (since 2014), ACAVE and others (Southern Cross, 2019).

Actor:	**Travel Designer, Consultants and Agencies**
Case company:	**Bru & Bru Exclusive Travel Designer, A Travel Quest - Immersive Journeys, WOTA Lifestyle - International Travel Service Co. LTD and Lushescapes**

Bru & Bru is a small crew of travel designer, who design unique, once-in-a-lifetime trips and experiences (Bru & Bru, 2020a). Their unique proposition is that they only recommend destinations which the designers of Bru & Bru have experienced it by themselves before suggesting it to their clients. In addition to this they also share the experiences on their website (until now there are 83 articles) so that customers can get a notion of what they can experience (Bru & Bru, 2020b). Ana Bru, founder of the company, started her business back in 2004 in Barcelona, Spain (Bru & Bru (LinkedIn), 2020). Her passion to design travel experiences emerged during her studies and while she was working in a travel agency. This gave her knowledge about all the different roles an individual can play along the customer journey within the travel segment. Over the years Bru & Bru has gained experience and knowledge within the luxury travel industry and are known for providing bespoke experiences. Furthermore, they have been partnering with communities like the Belmond Bellini Club (which encircles the globe, with hotels, rail journeys and river adventures on six continents), the Aman Resorts (a collection of unique and truly romantic luxury resorts across the globe), travel shows like Pure Life Experiences (since 2009) and recently they have been accredited as a Space Agent for Virgin Galactic (Bru & Bru, 2020a; b). As a result of their efforts they received several awards like the Alimara Business CETT-SITC Award.
A Travel Quest is a company with travel designers within the luxury travel industry which is located in India. The company has its origins from A Travel Duet, India's first travel brand, designing highly personalized and luxurious experiential travel, exclusively for couples, which

was founded in 2012 (Travel Quest, 2020). Nishant Badami, the content head of A Travel Quest says that their prior experience from A Travel Duet and the curiosity to explore luxury market inspires them, to dig deeper and offer more unique itineraries to more off-beat places. Their vision is to curate experiences, which are creatively shaped around people (Travel Quest, 2020). The company is located in Mumbai, India and they have started to provide their service from the second half of 2019. They are part of reputed travel shows and travel communities, which offer a place for partnerships and networking, like Pure Life Experience (since 2013) and L.E/Miami (a travel show, that assemble the most unique, original and influential business minds in contemporary hospitality other communities (L.E/Miami, 2020)).
WOTA Lifestyle offers distinctive privilege, open rates, and deluxe lifestyle experiences with their unrivalled networking connections in the Asia Pacific area. Their inimitable expertise makes the best option for lifestyle management and concierge services which entails airport VIP services, operating of MICE events or special experiences like luxury yacht experience or hot air ballooning (Wota Lifestyle, 2020a). The company, which is located in Taipei, Taiwan, was founded in 2015. One of the initial challenges according to Chih-Heng Kwan, a product manager at WOTA Lifestyle was to reach out to the target customers, which was problematic due to their relatively short existence and the low publicity. In order to get more attention, Chih-Heng Kwan further explains, that in 2017 they started to give WOTA Lifestyle a bigger voice through a combination of offline and online advertising methods. They currently provide their services to individuals, corporate and group clients and have a premium membership for their loyal customers (Wota Lifestyle, 2020a). In order to attract more luxury customers and relate WOTA to luxury they have partnered up with luxurious brands like Louis Vuitton, Chanel or Givenchy and are members in luxury hotel communities like the Four Seasons Hotels or the Rosewood Elite from the Rosewood hotels (Wota Lifestyle, 2020b).
Lushescapes is a travel partner, who offers a wide range of bespoke holiday options, so that the clients get the best travel experience (Lushescapes, 2020). According to them, they have created a niche market for themselves as a luxury travel company, that turns every holiday into a unique, enriching and memorable journey (Lushescapes, 2020). The founder and CEO Abhishek Dadlani, who is a former banker had always been passionate about traveling. More than a decade ago he started Lushescapes in Delhi, India but moved subsequently to Dubai. According to Abhishek, one challenge, which still persists stems from an element of credibility, he states, “until and unless a customer does not know of you or haven't heard of you, unless you have a very big name […] they are not very confident in spending hundreds and thousands of dollars or millions of dollars on an experience.” Over the years Lushescapes connected with travel communities to extend their network. They became a member of The Luxury Network, the world’s leading luxury affinity marketing group which facilitates the co-operation between top-end companies and high-net worth private clients (The Luxury Network, 2020) and a member of Virtuoso in 2017, a leading global network of agencies in luxury and experiential travel, which also has one of the most demanding quality standards globally (Virtuoso, 2020).
Elefant Travel is a tailored travel agency, which develop trips about experiences and not about destinations. All designed itineraries resolves around personal interests, the occasion, the time of the year and the dream that lives within the client – simply put, a customer centric approach (Elefant Travel, 2020). The company started as a small agency in 2004 in the luxury travel industry segment and was founded by Gonzalo Gimeno. The founder explained that initial challenges for them were the lack of profound knowledge about the tourism industry and client acquisition. Today, they have offices in Madrid, Barcelona and Bogotá (Columbia) and are among the top travel designers in Spain. The team of Elefant Travel explores a lot of countries extensively, which means around 270 to 300 days of travel per year, to experience the destinations first-hand (Elefant Travel, 2020). They are part of the Belmond Bellini Club, the Emotions Travel Community and since 2009 a member of Pure Life Experience, only to mention a few.

Actor:	**Management Company (DMC)**
Case company:	**Ishav Arctico Inc. (IA) and Safrans du monde**

Ishav Arctico is a company offering unique trips within the Norwegian Arctic. This includes visiting the most spectacular areas of low, middle and high arctic territory, staying in the most authentic and original accommodation options around the arctic and experiencing unique moments, in a special and different way (Ishav Arctico, 2020). The company founder Javier Arjona started his career more than three decades ago as a guide in the north of Norway as he "fell in love with the north of Norway". It took Javier around 10 years to build the business and during that time he had to go through some initial challenges. The most demanding ones were to find the first customers and selling his service as there was not a lot of tourism in the north of Norway. Building up a network of travel agencies and local suppliers was also a very big challenge. Nowadays the company can look back on more than 20 years of experience and a lot of knowledge about the arctic region and a strong network of local contacts. The company is located in Madrid and focuses on the Spanish market but also has clients from all around the world. Since 2011, Ishav Arctico is a member of Pure Life Experience, which is an important fair for the luxury travel industry.

Safrans Du Monde is a company specializing in customized travel, world tours and air cruises since 2003 and their travel and service proposition encompasses a perfect blend of personal dreams and the secret experiences (Safrans Du Monde, 2020). In order to provide these services, the company operates at multiple levels, i.e., acts as a travel agency, a tour operator and a DMC. Prior to Safrans du monde, the founder Guy Bigiaoui was operating within tailor-made world tours on private airplanes and this experience enabled him to open his own company. The founder further elaborated, that they started with offering world tours for individual on scheduled flights and people kept demanding after a world tour for another travel on a bespoke basis. On that basis they started to offer travels for individuals, small groups or families anywhere to all continents of the world. This could be weekend trips, a trip by luxury train, a private jet experience, a world tour or whatever a human can imagine, states Guy. After the initial challenge to get the first clients the business grew up into the luxurious experiences and they joined fairs for luxury travel such as Pure Life experiences or other communities within the luxury industry such as Belmond Bellini Club, Rosewood Elite from the Rosewood hotels (Safrans du Monde, 2020).

D) Appendix: Interviewees

Sl No.	Name	Age	Case Company	Background & Experience within Luxury industry	Current Role
1	Aymeric Naudin (Mr)	38	OceanSky Cruises AB	Working in the luxury travel industry in China for ten years and saw the growth in China, India, Japan and Singapore. Used to work for traditional luxury agency and OTA.	Sales Representative - Asia & Middle East
2	Gisle Nair Dueland	52	OceanSky Cruises AB	First work-decade in different roles in different companies mainly in Sweden or Nordic countries as a sales manager or marketing manager. Second decade owned a communication agency including film design, graphic profiles and PR. Third decade worked with Turkish Airlines and Royal Jordanian	Sales Representative - Europe & Middle East

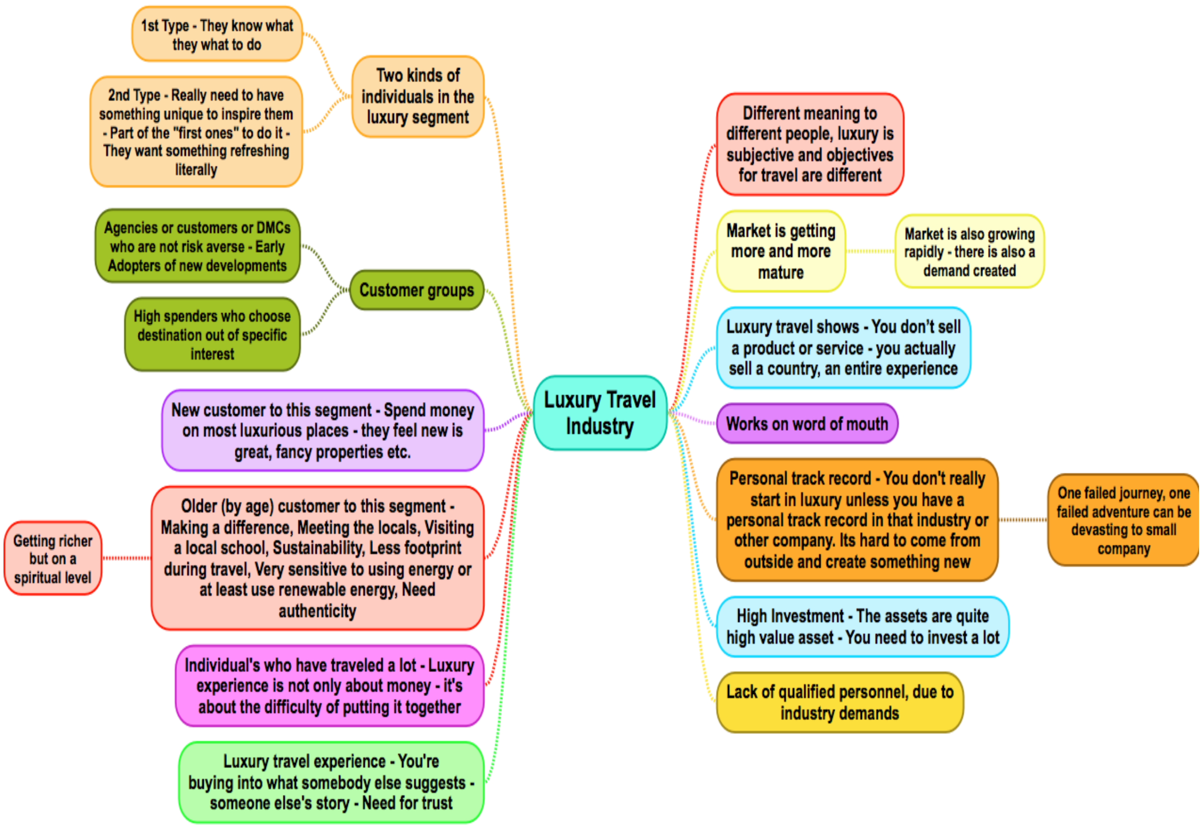
				airlines in Jordan leading transitions or new growth actions.	
3	Carl-Oscar Lawaczeck	42	OceanSky AB	Academic background: Economist from University in Gothenburg, focused on economical logistics. Professional experience - commercial pilot since 2004. Starting in Freight airline cargo, regional airline cargo and also went on the administrative side for three years as project leader. Then flew VIP aircrafts for five years in Russia and Ukraine. Now working at SAS, while managing OceanSky.	CEO
4	Nishant Badami	40	Travel Quest	Has been working for several years within the luxury travel industry. Starting off with designing honeymoon travels for Travel Duet	Product Head & Travel Designer
5	Ana Bru	57	Bru & Bru Exclusive Travel Designer	Studied a Law degree but discovered early that her passion was to design travel experiences. Already during the time at the university, she started in the sector of travel designing.	CEO and Founder
6	Ernesto Garcia-Dresbach	54	Southern Cross CIF	Has worked for various Spanish tour operators since 1988.	Executive Manager
7	Javier Arjona	50	Ishav Arctico Inc. (IA)	Started working as a tour leader in the tourism 30 years ago in Scandinavian countries and Europe. Five years later, after travelling to Norway, he started working as a guide from April until September in the north of Norway. Worked as a guide for around ten years in the north of Norway before opening his own Destination Management Company.	Managing Director & Founder
8	Guy Bigiaoui	57	Safrans du monde	Background is first Business school and Hotel school. Used to work for hotels for several years and then worked for nine years in Airlines, whereas the longest time (seven years) was working at Air France. After that he started with tour operating for nine more years before starting with Safrans du monde	General Manager & Founder
9	Chih-Heng (Wilson) KWAN	32	WOTA Lifestyle - International Travel Service Co. LTD	Studied in the UK and in Taiwan and was working for several companies including one normal travel agency located in Taipei and other companies in advertisement and marketing jobs. Since 2017, working within the Luxury travel industry.	Product Manager
10	Melanie Endres	36	OceanSky Cruises AB	Studied international business and tourism and started to work for an inbound tour operator organizing trips for mostly US-clients in Panama in 2008. In 2011, that company has become a DMC, so she started consulting (meaning put together trips) the high-end and luxury travel agents mainly from the US.	Sales Representative - America & Spain

11	Gro-Linn	47	62° Nord - Hotels & Adventures	Educated within in the marketing, economy and communication. Also had own company as a communication advisor and worked in diverse companies not just in the travel industry. Also worked in advertising agency and was a sponsorship manager for an innovation conference in Norway, before starting to work at 62°Nord.	Head of Sales - Regional & International
12	Gareth Brauteseth	35	White Desert Antarctica	He finished a business school, has a bit of a travel background and has done a lot of personal travel through Africa (about three year). At the end of that kind of journey he got involved at White Desert in a construction capacity, mainly in building the camp in Antarctica and then moved on to the sales capacity within White Desert.	Head of Sales
13	Abhishek Dadlani	38	Lushescapes (owned by Bespoke Experiences DMCC)	Started as Banker prior to Lushescapes and has a Bachelor of science and finance on the Kelly school of Business. Post that he worked for Citygroup for three years. Later he did an executive MBA from IIMP while working and then shifted gears into luxury travel segment and has been in this industry for over than ten years now.	Founder & CEO
14	Gonzalo Gimeno	46	Elefant Travel	Started in marketing as an early career, working at Unilever in Madrid, doing marketing. And then moved to Mars, where he ended up being a marketing director at Mars for the Spanish market. As one of Gonzalo's passions was to travel, he quit his job and started Elefant travel.	Founder, CEO and General Manager

E) Appendix: Product or Service Owner

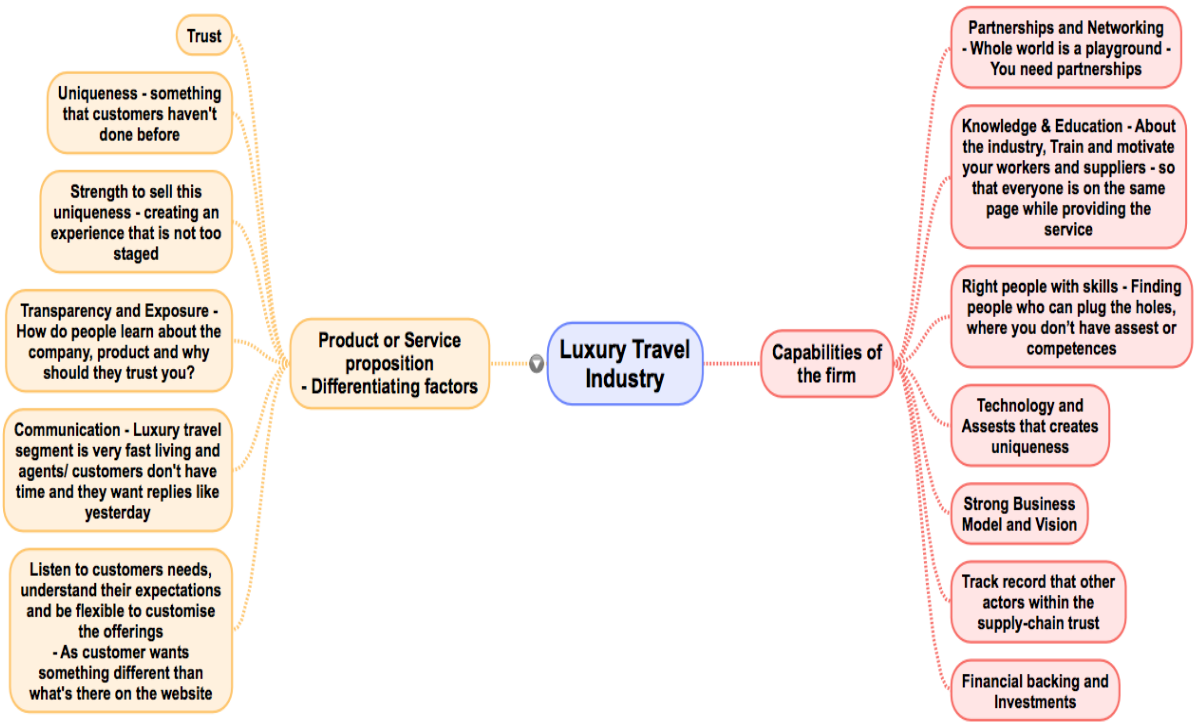
Perception of luxury travel industry

With the changing customer expectations and values, it is vital to understand how the product or service owners envisage luxury travel segment in order for them to tailor their business or service proposition. In-light with this, the Appendix 2 summaries the take-aways highlighted by the interviewees and the common themes that emerged from all the interviewees on their perception of luxury travel industry were, 1) industry built on trust, as one is buying travel experience based someone else's story, 2) personal track record important to succeed, 3) subjectivity of luxury travel, 4) word-of-mouth and references, 5) lack of qualified personnel, due to industry demands and 6) high initial investments.



Appendix 2: Key take-aways on luxury travel industry

Differentiating factors and Firms capabilities



Appendix 3: Differentiating factors and Capabilities of the firms to operate in luxury industry

Competition

For OceanSky, competition is dependent on the specific product or destination that a firm offers. According to interviewees from OceanSky, there is already existing competition in the market with regards to making a trip to Arctic (such as tours on icebreaker or other cruise companies), but, there is none within the market that is offering a trip using Airships and for this medium of travel, there is no competition yet. From a 62°Nord's perspective, the whole world is competing against them on the destination front, as they are up against some of the other exotic destinations that the luxury traveler can choose from. On the contrary, they actually welcome competition within Norway (especially north of Norway), as there are no luxury hotels in Norway and sometime this may act as an hinderance to customer choosing the destination, because they usually do a tour over just visiting only one destination.

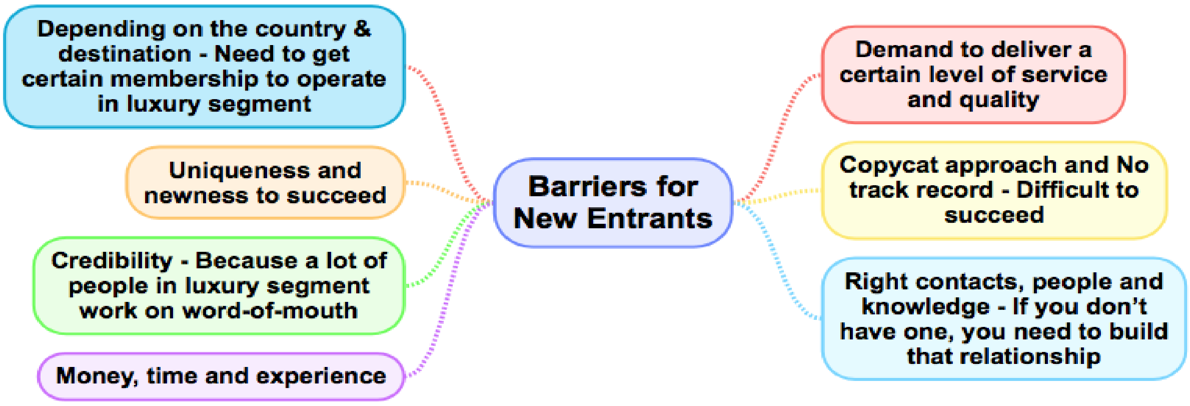
Barriers for New Entrants

For OceanSky, the barriers to operate as a product owner in their segment is down to two main factors. Firstly, there is only one supplier of airship, so all new entrants need to compete on price to gain access of the airships and secondly, there is a huge threshold to start an airline even without aircraft, as there is a need to establish an organization around moving people in the air and that's quite high threshold for anyone and need a lot of money, time, experience and experienced individuals.

For 62°Nord, communication and the customer interpretation of luxury coupled with employee remuneration acts a barrier for new entrants who wants to start a similar proposition in Norway. It's a challenge to communicate to your customers that you can provide "that" luxury service and average salary in Norway is higher compared to the rest of the world and employing individuals is expensive, so, new entrants cannot employ many people and this, some customers perceive as non-luxurious (unlike in Dubai, where you have too many people to attend to your needs).

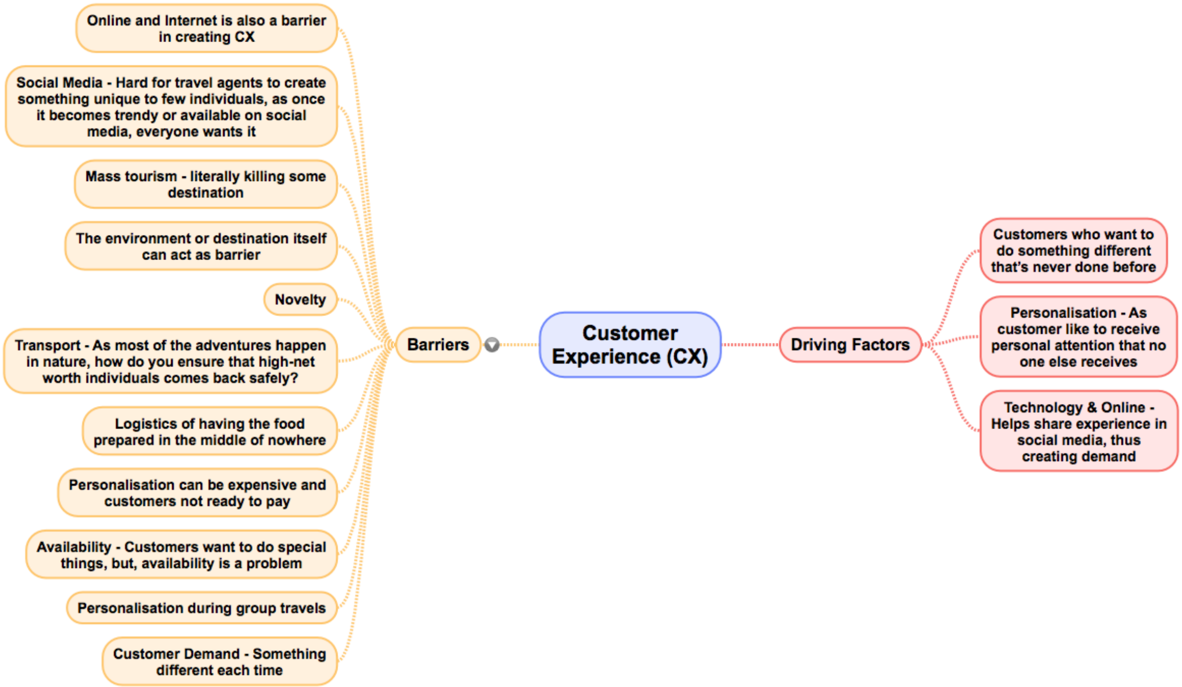
All the interviewees highlighted that the barriers for new entrants to start within luxury segment were very high and the themes that emerged on barriers for new entrants were track record, deep networking and relationship within the supply chain, uniqueness within the business or service proposition to succeed, huge initial investments, credibility. Carl-Oscar very succinctly states that "…there is a market, so there is the demand, from that perspective (market and demand), the barrier is low, but the demand to delivery certain level of service and quality creates barrier, unless you have something unique or something new, then you can succeed".

Appendix 4 summaries the take-aways highlighted by the interviewees on the topic Barriers for new Entrants.



Appendix 4: Barriers for new entrants within luxury travel industry

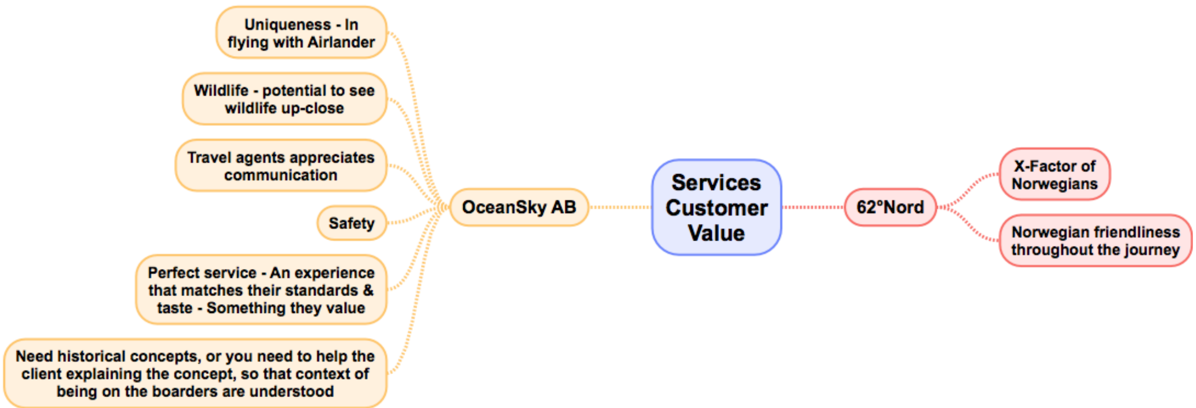
Driving factors and Barriers for CX



Appendix 5: Driving factors and barriers for providing CX

Services the customers value the most

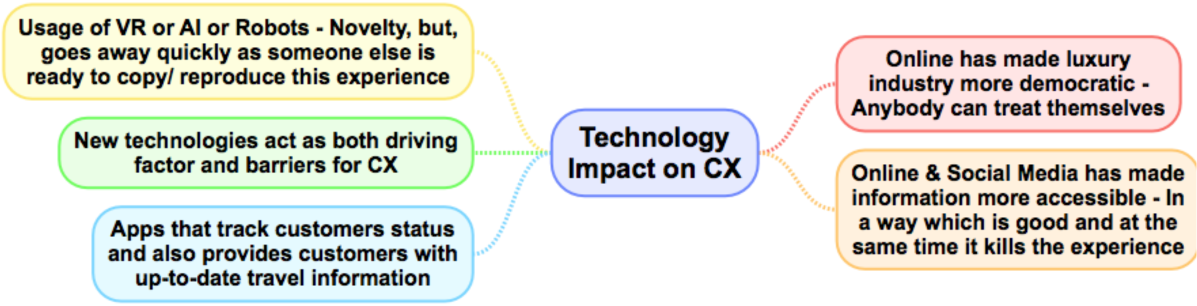
The interviewees of OceanSky states that service the customers value depends on whom you travel with or where you travel to, as the priorities for each individual are different. Appendix 6 (below) summaries all the key points highlighted by all the interviewees.



Appendix 6: Services customers value from Product Owners

Impact of technology on CX

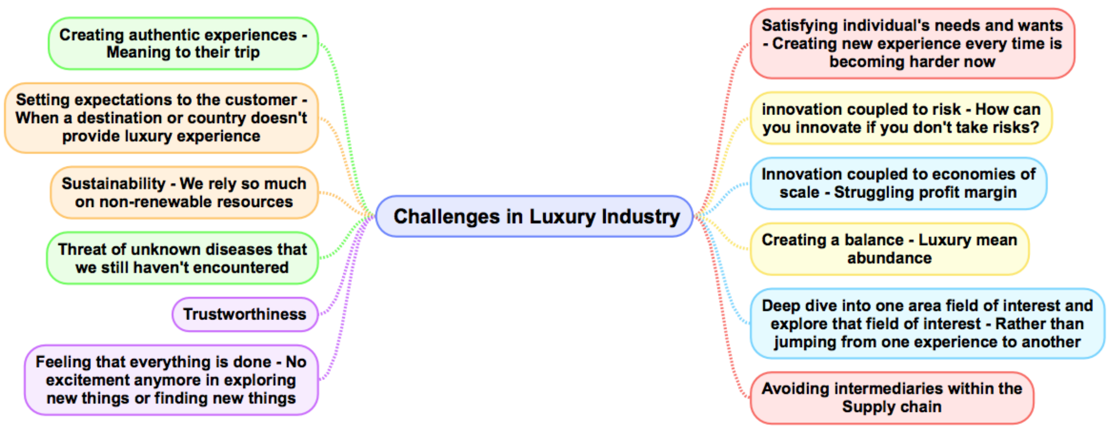
Appendix 7 (below) summaries all the key points highlighted by all the interviewees.



Appendix 7: Impact of technology in CX

Challenges within Luxury Industry

One theme that resonated amongst all the interviewees was sustainability. For Aymeric, even though the travel industry is beautiful, relies on non-renewable energy and this is a main challenge from a sustainability standpoint. He quotes, "I think sustainability because we're in a beautiful industry but traveling unfortunately is not very sustainable relying on oil and that's what I like about OceanSky is because somehow it can be a solution it can be the solution to transportation for literally today and tomorrow". Melanie looks at sustainability from a different standpoint, she talks about the whole luxury industry, where the meaning of luxury is synonymous to abundance and this not a sustainable business model. Furthermore, states that, while there are a sub-set of individuals who get lured to this element of abundance and excess, there is another set of individuals, who are coming back to roots, want to be exposed to authentic experiences, making a difference in communities and villages, helping in fundraising, and contributing towards climate change. She quotes, "So, I think people are now back to they want a meaning in their trip, and they want to satisfy their consciousness, their back consciousness". Along with sustainability, Carl-Oscar highlights challenges related to profit margins, which by nature is tied to economics of scale and innovation that is related to risk appetite. He quotes, "So, when companies become too big they don't want to take any risks anymore and if you don't take risks you can't innovate. So, I think innovation coupled to risk is one challenge. Uniqueness and innovation coupled to economies of scale is another challenge". Finally, for Gro-Linn the challenges include sustainability coupled with offering something new, partners within supply chain trying to avoid intermediaries, and individuals needs and wants are changing, as she quotes "…people are becoming crazier and so are their needs and wants…". Appendix 8 summaries all the key points highlighted by all the interviewees.



Appendix 8: Current and Future challenges within Luxury industry

F) Appendix: Tour or Cruise Operator

Differentiating Factors, Firms capabilities, Competition and New Entrant

From a competition standpoint, Gareth states that within regional boundaries in Antarctica, there is no competition for White Desert. But, competition for them is rest of the world, every fancy hotel in the world, their region is competing against other regions in the world. He further goes on to add by saying that holiday in Antarctica is for different clients, he quotes "…It's for a client, who's been everywhere, it's for a client who's looking for the next thing. It's a client who may have been to the polar regions before and they want a tick in the box. It's for the client who wants to go somewhere that no one's been before. So, it's like a lot of space clients". Ernesto states that suppliers themselves are becoming competitors than other operators or agents. He goes on to say that Airlines and Hotels are increasingly addressing end consumers requests and trying to overcome intermediaries, such as Southern Cross.
When questioned about barriers for new entrants, Gareth believes that initial finance is a big barrier to enter luxury segment. While Ernesto believes that finding the right professionals is a big challenge and quotes "People who are paid a regular salary and still manage to sell private islands for a million euros a week without batting an eye."

Challenges within Luxury Industry

Ernesto highlights three important challenges that the luxury industry needs to be grapple with, they are, 1) Appealing to the new generation of travelers, where they use different mediums of communication and perceive luxury travel differently. They are looking for value adds from their travel agents each time they do a booking and expect them to be more transparent about their costs and commission fees, 2) Sustainability, leading a more sustainable business and working and partnering with sustainable businesses throughout the world, getting paperless, travelling as sustainable as possible, making sure that partners in the business also follow the same ethos and finally, 3) Diminishing interest in becoming a travel agent, junior professionals seem less interested in taking up this profession, so there is a need to work closely with local tourism schools by offering attractive salary packages.
For Gareth, environment and human diseases pose a biggest challenge to luxury industry and he states that environment is becoming a luxury in itself. He elaborates this with examples such as Gorillas in Africa, Tigers in India, Polar Bears in Svalbard, all these are slowly diminishing, and it's becoming expensive to go, experience and see them. And when this challenge is coupled with overpopulation and mass consumerism, there is a knock-on effect on tourism. For this reason, luxury tour operators create an access to an environment where all the people can't go, and it can only be affordable by individuals with money.

Customer Journey and Touchpoints

According to Ernesto, following are the different phases within the customer journey and their personalization:

1) **Travel proposal/quotation phase:** journeys are fully customized on a day-by-day basis depending on the traveler's requirements.
2) **Reservation phase:** making sure all services are being confirmed according to requests, including concierge services such as airline seat reservations, restaurant reservations, opera tickets, etc.
3) **During the journey**: suppliers getting in touch with travelers on a regular basis to make sure services are meeting expectations or to amending whenever needed.

Services the customers value the most

According to Gareth, it is the complete product, the story of going to Antarctica is something that the guest value the most.

Impact of technology on CX

For White Desert, Gareth highlights that they send photographers down to Antarctica every year to capture the experience and they have tried to create websites in a fashion which is a visual representation of what customers are going to experience, as they realized that very few people can actually afford to go down and experience Antarctica. He also adds that for White Desert it is about giving customers the experience of a lifetime and memorable stories to go home and talk to their friends.

Ernesto highlights that internet has provided fast access to airline, hotel and ancillary services, inventories showing real-time availability, which is a definitely a plus and instant messaging services ensures fast intervention in case of necessity.

G)Appendix: Travel Agencies, Designers & Consultants

Luxury Travel Industry – Characteristics, Customer demands, Clients, Entry Barriers, and Future Challenges

According to Nishant, there are many different perceptions about luxury travel and many people have varied idea about it. In India, she explains, "the idea of luxury has been always about brands and spending a lot of money on room service and the quality of rooms". According to Nishant customers are always looking for something new and different to their prior experience. She states, "they might not understand what exactly they are looking for, but they are definitely hunting and digging around for a new experience". Kwan states that within the Asian region, the clients let their personal assistants or secretaries look for luxury travels or packages. He further goes to state that they (customers), "(are) very demanding and they require quick answers to their requests [….] and clients have a lot of changes in the last minute". Nishant elaborates on the similar lines and adds that clients want to have a "seamless experience from the start to the finish" and demand "exclusive access to some very exclusive content". Gonzalo says that clients look for "unique corners, luxury, open doors and access to unique people around the country". Gonzalo also explains that there are different perceptions of service anchored within each culture. He states, "In Asia people understand service because it's part of their culture, whereas in Europe the service is perceived as really bad and not nice if you come from Asia."

According to Kwan, within the Asian market clients are mostly rich travelers, including single or group travelers and as per Nishant, clients are well-travelled people, who are open to new experiences where budget is not necessarily a restriction. Gonzalo explains that a client has a life cycle, i.e., travel patterns based on age. He states, "People in the 20s are very digital, like to travel (using) internet, backpacking and designing their own trips. Married couples with children, could get everything on the internet, but they do not have the time due to work and children. So, they look for a travel agent. People in their 50s and 60s, who will have traveled a lot, will pay a little bit more to have somebody who takes care of them and the travel itinerary."

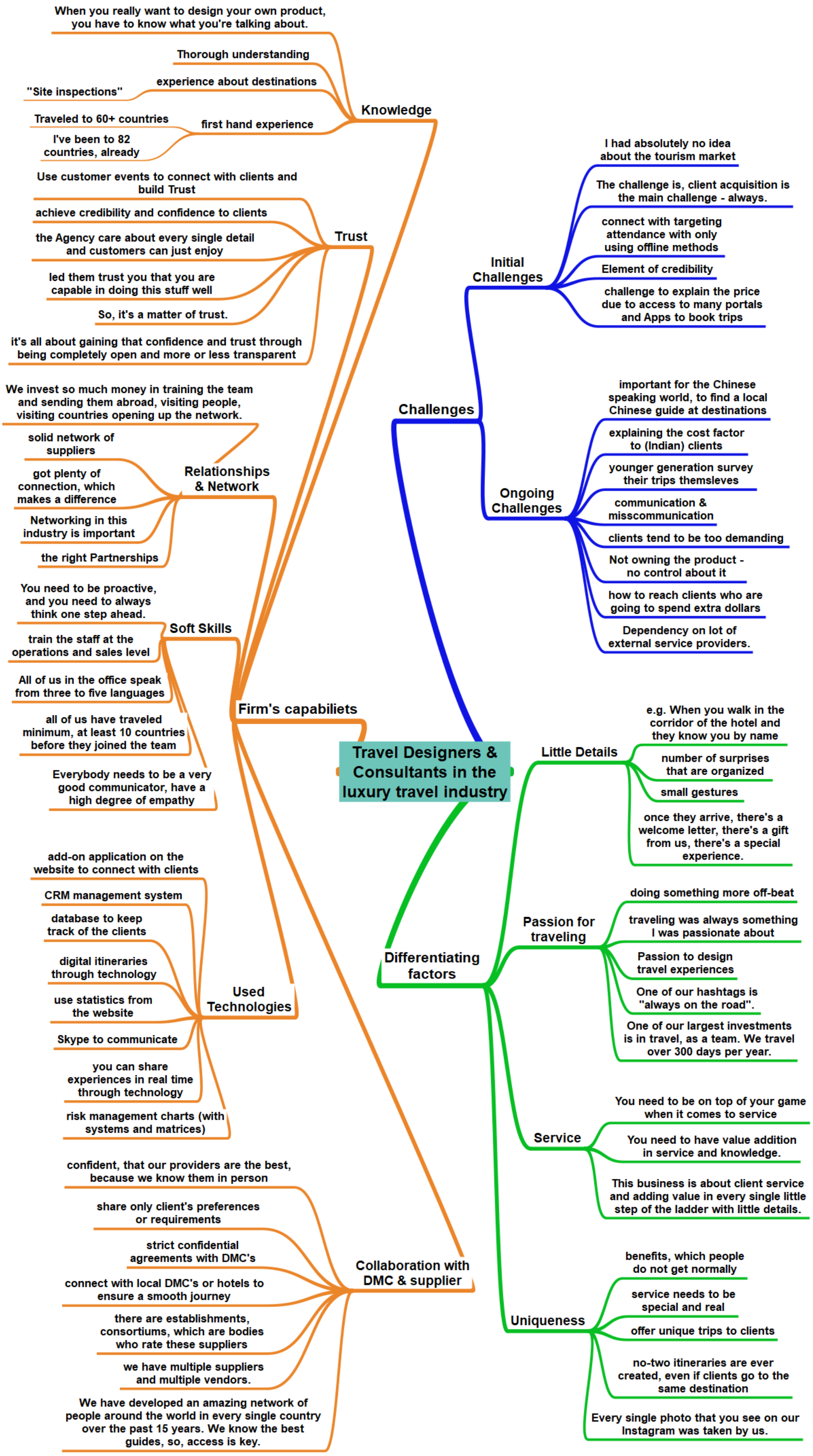
Several entry barriers have been mentioned by the interviewees. According to Ana, one needs to put in a lot of money before you can start looking for returns. She states, "to invest a lot of money for investigating properties and destinations, before one can have profit". Nishant also states, that one needs to have contacts established in order to provide appropriate service and also Gonzalo states, that "this industry only survives on references and retention." On the other hand, Abhishek has a contrasting view on the barriers and still feels, that "the market (luxury market) is very fragmented and as such there are no entry barriers. As long as one knows how different he will be from the rest, how he will innovate his service or product, one can go ahead and be in a fast pacing dynamic environment".

According to Nishant the industry is facing following challenges. Firstly, "there might be certain luxuries that people will need to give up (due to the environmental reasons)". Secondly, "it is then very important to educate Indian (traveler) on the actuality of where all these lovely

things (luxuries) come from (and) the effort to create some sort of awareness". Kwan states, that it is a challenge for travel agents, to find good and unique experiences. For Abhishek the biggest challenge is finding that invested customer. He states, "there is a gap finding the traveler who wants to travel and go that extra mile to get that experience, so a gap in finding the deserving travelers (whom they can curate an experience is a challenge)." For Gonzalo the challenge is awareness, he states, "to be able to get our message across to a wider segment of the population and become attractive".
All the different themes, which have been generated from the conducted interviews, have been clustered and can be found in the Appendix 9.

Appendix 9: Luxury Travel Industry from a Travel Designer/Consultant-perspective – Actors, Characteristics, Entry Barriers, Competition and Future Challenges

Differentiating factors and Firms capabilities



Appendix 10: Differentiating factors and Capabilities of Travel Agencies to operate in luxury industry

H)Appendix: DMC

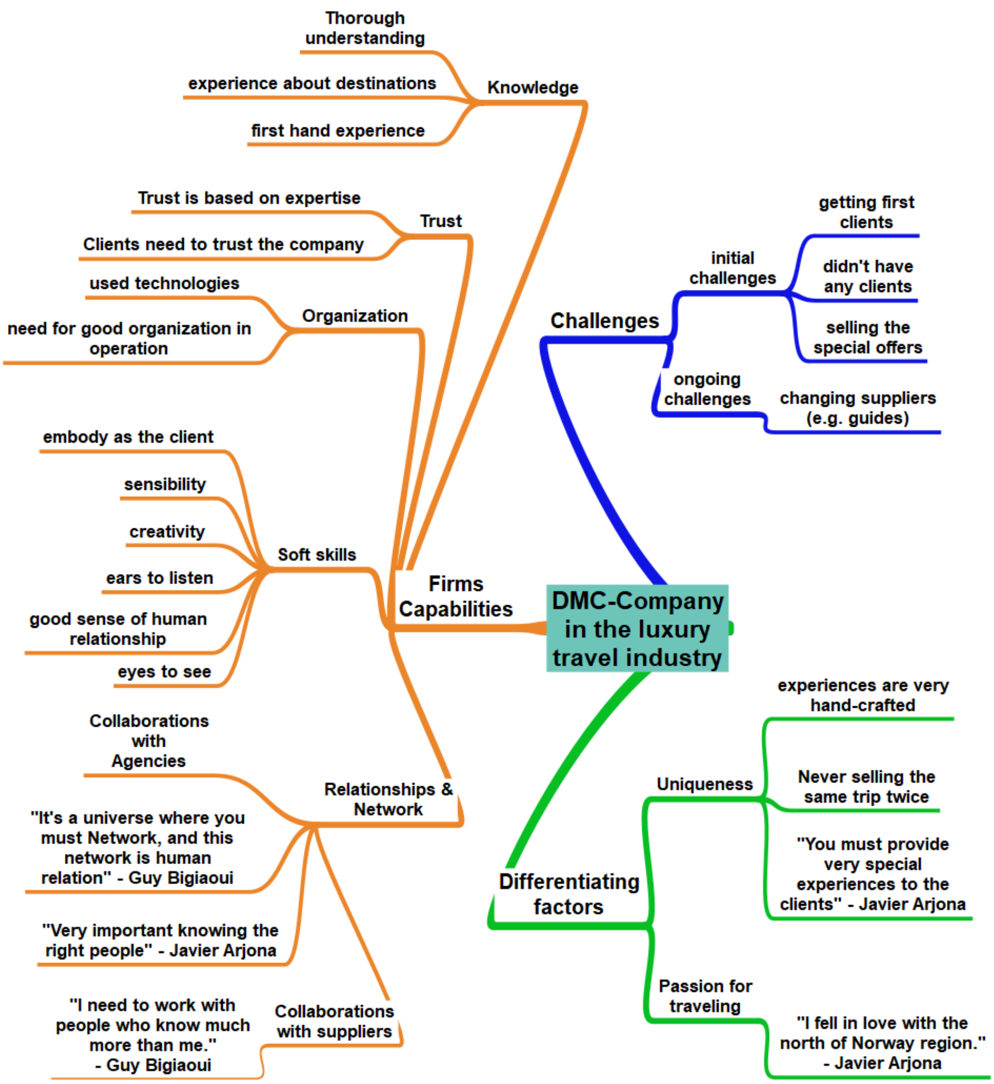
Perception of luxury travel industry

The characterization of the luxury travel industry is very subjective and as a consequence of that one can find many different views about this industry. Also, Javier states, that “luxury is a very subjective thing and privacy is one important factor” and tries to explain this with the following example:

> “Maybe for me luxury is being on a sailing boat in the middle of the Arctic Ocean with a cup of coffee and the right music in the right time. […] Then maybe for another person luxury can mean being in a five-star hotel in Jordan with the best bottle of wine in the world”.

For Guy, Safrans du Monde does not work like an industrial process, but, instead provides a bespoke offer. He further states that a DMC can only survive and operate in the luxury travel world, when you can offer a unique service and no other actor is offering the same service.

Differentiating factors and Firms capabilities



Appendix 11: DMC - Differentiating factors and Capabilities of the firms to operate in luxury industry

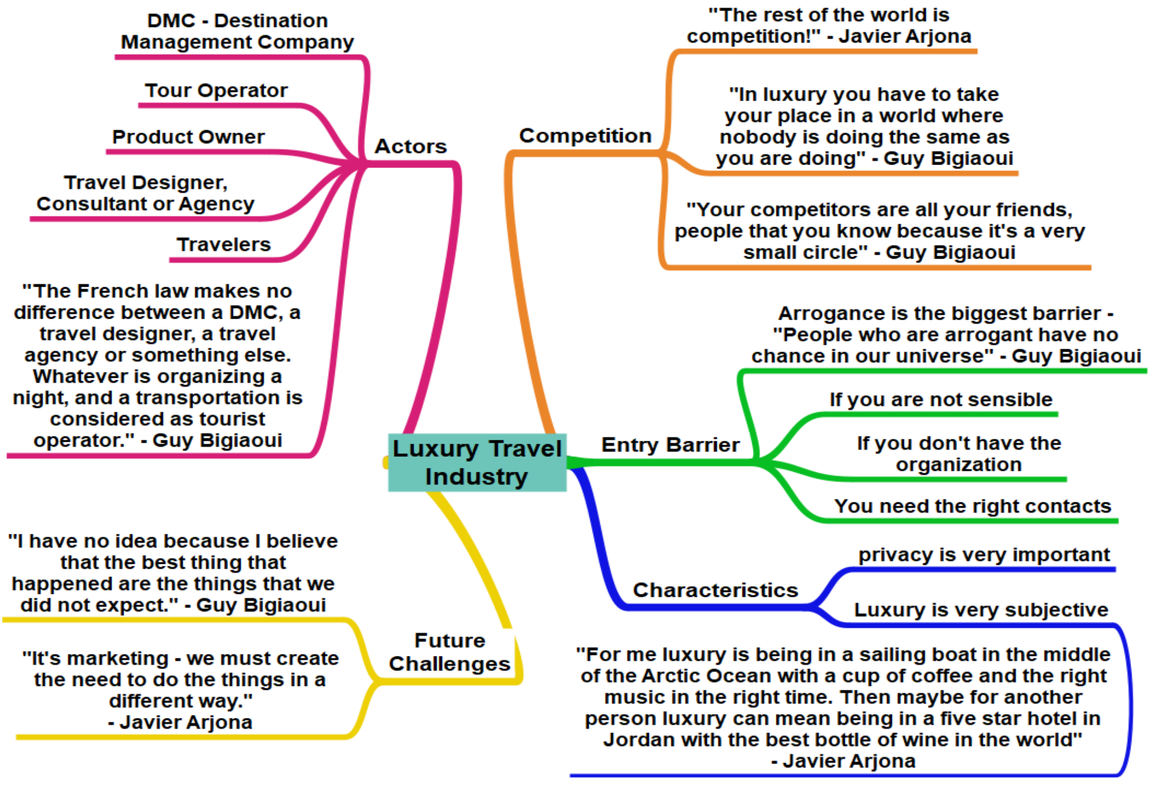
Luxury Industry – Actors, Entry Barriers, Competition and Future Challenges

Within the Luxury travel industry there are several actors who offer different services which have been categorized in 0 Table 1: Research questions addressed by different sources of data Case Study. Although Guy states that he does not differentiate between the different actors within the value-chain. For new entrants within this segment both interviewees agreed that one needs to be sensible with the clients, have sufficient network with the right contacts, and an organization to cope with the demands. According to Guy arrogance is the biggest barrier, he quotes, “People who are arrogant have no chance in our universe”.

Even within this small travel segment competition plays a predominant role, which mandates the different actors within the luxury travel segment to provide unique experiences. Javier explains that he is competing with the rest of the world, because the travel agencies are going to offer several destinations to their clients (the travelers). Guy explains that this industry is such a small circle, that he knows all of the competitors and refers them as his friends. Despite knowing everyone within this industry, he does not have a problem with that because “everything is crafted, so we all see things differently […] and nobody is doing the same as you are doing”.

The DMC face the following current and future challenges. Javier has difficulties to keep the same good local suppliers and guides over years due to the fact, that Norwegians change their work many times. According to Guy companies within the luxury travel industry face the following future challenges: technology, sustainability, luxury, experience and emotions. But, on the contrary he also mentioned, that he has no idea, because he “believes that the best things that happen are the things that we did not expect”. According to Javier it is marketing and pitching the idea to the customers that the actors within this segment are committed to create the need for doing things in a different way.

The above-mentioned themes are clustered within the mind map below (Appendix 12)



Appendix 12: Luxury Travel Industry from a DMC-perspective – Actors, Characteristics, Entry Barriers, Competition and Future Challenges

I) Appendix: Thematic Analysis

No.	Key	
1	Product or Service Owners	Text in Black
2	Tour or Cruise Operators	Text in Red
3	Travel Designers/Agencies/Consultants	Text in Orange
4	DMC	Text in Blue
	Same themes	
	Different themes between 1 & 2	
	Different themes between 3 & 4	

1st Order	2nd Order	Aggregate Dimensions
Two groups of clients: - Clients check and compare the offered options/itinearies and try to get it cheaper. - Clients trust in the desinger for the best offer	Customer groups and their expectations	Target Customer group & Service Expectation
Well-travelled people, who are open to new experiences where budget is not necessarily a restriction. For them the digital world is not so important.		
Client life cycle: - people in their 20's: very digital, like to travel on the internet, backpacking, designing the trip by themsleves. - young married coubles with children going to an agency, due to time constrains with work and family. - 40's and older, who have travelled a lot will go to someone who takes care of all details and one pays a little bit extra for this service.		
Perfect service & Uniqueness		
Luxury is subjective and objectives for travel are different		
Agencies and DMC's take care of everything in a personal manner and clients can enjoy the experience		

1st Order	2nd Order	Aggregate Dimensions
Niche business, which is not volume driven, rather boutique business. The Business has authenticity and really have relationships to clients.	Organisation vision, mission & goal	Organisation Strategy and Approach
Sustainable business model		
Move from Cargo handlers to Experiential travel	Business model	
Service needs to be special and real, ful of creativity and knowledge.		
No push strategy. (in the sense of the sellers do not push clients to buy - the sell only what really suits and satisfies customer!)		
OceanSky Cruises - high-end experiential and luxury travel, Deliver unique experience, while keeping sustainability	Value Proposition	
Unique strength-product owner with hotels, but, also act as a DMC curating complete experience Norwegian way		
Offered experiences need to differ from each other		
Niche property, niche region and niche industry		
Value addition in service and knowledge		
Offer memberships to loyal customers and also to connect with clients.		
It's about client service and adding value in each step. This includes, that the service is easy accesible and smooth.	Organisation's customer centric approach	
Client centric business model, where the opening hours suit clients (meet them at home) and everything is hand-crafted.		
No itineraries are ever created twice.		
Branding to create magic around the company.	Branding	
The marketing is about authenticity not about showing luxury suits and visual money - also refered as 'bling bling marketing'.		
Having personale partnerships and a solid network in place, which add benefits to customers and give access to special experiences all around the world.	Network & Relationships	
Cooperation with knowledgeable partners (otherwise no value addition)		
Whole chain of suppliers with more than 50 people involved.		

1st Order	2nd Order	Aggregate Dimensions
Right people with skills - To plug the holes from assest or competence perspective	Capabilities of the organisation	Firms Capabilities, Engagement and Training
Technology and Assests that creates uniqueness		
Track record that other actors within the supply-chain trust		
Security and safety of the mode of travel	Product or Service Awareness	
Lack of awareness and knowledge		
Knowledge about the industry, educate, train and motivate your workers and others	Training program to develop employee's knowledge, skill and attitude	
Knowledge and the offered service are the two virtues a travel agency can offer.		
An operator within the Luxury travel industry needs to be sensible, empathize with the clients from the first meeting, have creativity, good taste, ears to listen, eyes to see, good sense of human relationship and is a good communicator.	Soft skills / Service	
Act proactive - think always one step ahead for mitigating risk!		
Establish Trust, credibility and confidence with clients and partners through for example be transparent, expertise, capability of providing a good service.		
Mulitlangual staff is beneficial		

1st Order	2nd Order	Aggregate Dimensions
Channels to reach out to the customers (travler) are online and offline and approach them with content (aka. 'brain power').	Marketing Channels	Customer Journey, Channels and Touchpoints
Marketing channels depends on the target market		
Face to face through agency - Personal Network channel strongest		
Social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn), PR, Echo's on TV, radio, newspaper, 'the internet' and also various Tourism Boards.		
Be active on Social media, but it can be less used for business generation.		
Inspiration evenings or events such as luxury travel shows		
Word-of-mouth and personal references for luring new customers.		
Client/Traveler is going/contacting the travel agency, designer, consultants and gives information about himself and the travel (questionnaire, chat) - Build confidence and Trust - make this process smooth and flawless	Customer journey and touchpoint orientation	
The travel agency, designer, consultants start desgining the initinery and will contact the Service Owner, Tour Operator, DMC. - Provide the suppliers with requiered information.		
The travel agency, designer, consultants present the crafted itinary to the clients the first time and receive a feedback		
Based on the given Feedback do the travel agency, designer, consultants update and adapte the itinery and sent the updated version to the clients. This back and forth takes several times and has a high varity in duration (from a couple of days to half a year).		
Once the clients comfirm the travel, the travel agency, designer, consultants initiate the booking of hotels, flights, tour operator, DMC's etc. ...		
The clients/traveler start their journey and do their journey and are constantly updated from the travel agency, designer, consultants about their critical travel points (hotel, flights, etc. ...)		
The clients return from their journey. The travel agency, designer, consultants will get in contact again to reach out for feedback about their trip.		
Customer do all the research & get information online, connect via website		
Agents can influence/ inspire the customer depending on the purchase cycle		
Done on a multi-channel basis. Through PR, advertisements, networking, trade Shows, visits of travel agencies, appointments (face-to-face interaction), phone (or skype) calls, emailing, paper mailing, WhatsApp-Groups.	Connectivity of touchpoints	
Communication with clients can go through personal assistens or secretaries, but that varies from agancy and location (culture)		
Trust between the different counterparts to offer the best service for the clients (travlers).		
Shared responsibilty through multiple suppliers and vendors. That results in having an expert for each service.		
Customers are supported 24/7 via phone.		
Follow up with clients and local suppliers during travel.		

1st Order	2nd Order	Aggregate Dimensions
Rule is if you don't hear anything from a customer, everything is fine	Measuring CX	CX Insights/ Metrics
Measuring CX through a feedback conversation (ideal face-to-face, otherwise email or phone call).		
The travel agencies, desginers, consultants do forward the feedback to DMC's sometimes (in particilar, if it is bad feedback).		
Retention through good offered service (indicated by a high rate of return customers). But without tools		
Satisfied customers give references.		

1st Order	2nd Order	Aggregate Dimensions
Expectations not fulfilled by product owners, expectations by parties (agencies or DMCs) are different	Experience personalisation	Co-Creation
How to transfer information and how to ensure, that they reach the clients and affect emotionally.		
personalized gifts, surprises and small gestures (e.g. greeting on the hotel's hallway) are appreciated		
Partnerships and Networking - As the whole world is a playground	Experience network	
Participant of travel shows, to reach out to the international market		
Client has had a “bad” experience in a previous hotel, the product owner need to make up for it with personal complementary	Co-constructing experience	
We offer a blank canvas, but what you really want to do is bring your creativity to that blank canvas		
Create and design the itineary together with the clients (travlers) in order to make the trip perfect.		

1st Order	2nd Order	Aggregate Dimensions
More technology in the back office enables the agency to connect more with the clients and get to know him better.	Technology influence CX	Information Management
Database to keep track of the clients		
using CRM Management-System		
Matrix and risk mititgation charts to preempt risk		
Online made it more accessible in a way so which is good and at the same time it kills the experience		
Apps that track customers status and also provides customers with up-to-date travel		
Good cellphone coverage helps, to say in contact and support the clients everywhere on real time.		

1st Order	2nd Order	Aggregate Dimensions
release videos about the past provided experiences and sent them to the clients and patrons to keep them engaged.	Driving factors for CX	Driving Factors, Barriers & Challenges
Personalisation		
Social media and seamless connectivity via WhatsApp		
Expectations and Trust		
Even though there is a accurate plan, the possibilities of faults on the travel itself are still unpredictable.	Challenges in providing CX	
Everyone has their view and incentives		
Knowledge and passion of Agency		
You never understand something until you have experienced it by yourself		
Suppliers change over time - challenge to get new good ones		
The environment or destination e.g. landing on northpole	Barriers for CX	
Personalisation can be expensive and customers are not ready to pay		
Budget is important in that sense, that it needs to be a reasonable price for the experience.		
communication - misscommuication		
information barrier due to language difficulties		
Quality control is important otherwise the whole chain of suppliers suffers. (reaction chain, which gets delayed, breaks)		

1st Order	2nd Order	Aggregate Dimensions
You don’t sell a product or service, you actually sell a country, an entire experience	Factors affecting Luxury industry	Moderating Factors
Market is getting more and more mature		
Channels and touchpoints vary based on culture		
Due to the environment (environmental reasons) people will need to give up certain luxuries that have been normality.		
Threat due to easy access of information (price, hotels etc.) makes it difficult to explain the costs. Especially younger generation surveys the information themselves.	Challenges of luxury travel industry - From Firms perspective	
Hiring the people in the office, since everything revolves around one single person!		
How can you innovate if you don't take risks? - innovation coupled to risk		
No control about the provided service, reliant on suppliers and external service providers.		
One failed journey, one failed adventure can be devasting to small company		
Finding the clients, who are willing to go on the extra mile to get 'that' experience.		
The way marketing is done - speak about experience not about luxury		
Educate traveler and create awareness for changing habits and behaviours (due to environmental changes)		
New Technologies are relativly expensive for small comapanies.		
Sensibility for details		
knowledge and personal experience about properties, destinations - requires financial background.		
Creating new experience every time is becoming harder now, people are getting crazy, so are their needs and wants	Challenges of luxury travel industry - From Customers perspective	
Credibility - "having a name"		
Sustainability		
Political and Environment is a challenge	Challenges of luxury travel industry - From External environments	
Overpopulation and mass consumerism having knock-on effect		