

Do passengers perceive flying first class as a luxury experience?

Eileen Lee¹, Carl A Boger Jr^{1*} & Andy Heyes²

¹Conrad N Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management, University of Houston, Houston, USA

²Stenden Hotel Management School, NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands

*Correspondence: cboger@uh.edu

ABSTRACT: The definition of a single luxury experience has remained elusive to the airline industry, experts, scholars, and even luxury consumers. The duality of luxury suggests that experiences must provide a sense of prestige and hedonic well-being to be perceived as luxurious by consumers. This study proposed that consumers' feeling of prestige influences their hedonic well-being, as suggested by self-determination theory. Passengers derive a sense of prestige from their sensory and behavioural experiences. Meanwhile, they derive hedonic well-being from their sense of prestige and their sensory and intellectual experiences. Thus, the first-class cabin experience was confirmed as luxurious. The airline industry should enhance sensory, intellectual, and behavioural experiences in their first-class cabins to increase the luxuriousness of the first-class experience.

KEYWORDS: airlines, consumer behaviour, duality of luxury, experience, luxury

Introduction

The airline industry is essential for economic growth; it is a critical infrastructure for the tourism industry in the United States. In 2018, the total operating revenue for airlines in the US was US\$187.5 billion with a net profit of US\$11.8 billion (Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2018) and nearly a million passengers (The World Bank, 2018). First-class airline seats in the US generally account for only 5% of all seats; however, they produce nearly 50% of the total revenue (Mouawad, 2012). The reliability of first-class passengers to generate revenue has caused airlines to invest a large number of resources in their first-class cabins to improve passengers' experience (Mouawad, 2013). Airlines have improved the experience in their first-class cabins by offering personalised services, latest in-cabin technologies, and state-of-art designs (Bellamy, 2017). Passengers expect a luxurious experience from a first-class cabin because the premium price of a first-class ticket considerably exceeds the price of a coach- or business-class ticket (Hwang & Lyu, 2018). The word "luxury" originated from the Latin term "luxus" (Mootee & Goddard, 2004), which means that a luxury experience is characterised by extremely high quality and cost (Shukla & Purani, 2012). Although the importance of providing a luxury experience to first-class cabin passengers is critical for the highly competitive airline sector, a gap exists in understanding whether first-class cabin passengers perceive their experience as luxurious. Accordingly, the current study examined whether first-class cabin passengers perceive their experience as luxurious.

Previous studies on airline experiences have focused on how airline passengers evaluate the service quality of experience attributes and then they group individual attributes into categories. The attributes of cabin experience include the quality of food service (Ahn et al., 2015; Atalık et al., 2019; Bogicevic

et al., 2017; Kim, Kim, et al., 2016), entertainment within the cabin (Ahn et al., 2015; Atalık et al., 2019; Bogicevic et al., 2017; Kim, Kim, et al., 2016), cabin facilities (Ahn et al., 2015; Kim, Kim, et al., 2016), overall environment of the cabin (Ahn et al., 2015), service provided by flight attendants (Ahn et al., 2015; Atalık et al., 2019; Bogicevic et al., 2017; Kim, Kim, et al., 2016), attractiveness of attendants (Ahn et al., 2015), and comfort of the seats (Ahn et al., 2015; Atalık et al., 2019; Bogicevic et al., 2017). For studies that group characteristics into categories, Lim and Lee (2020) categorised the individual characteristics of cabin experience into tangibles, reliability, empathy, responsiveness, and assurance. Comparatively, Olivero (2017) grouped the characteristics of cabin experience into concrete and abstract attributes, functional and psychological consequences, and instrumental and terminal values.

These recent studies on cabin experience have focused on passengers' evaluation of the utilitarian and concrete attributes of their experience, disregarding the emotional and physical responses stimulated by a luxury experience. However, the definition of a luxury experience has remained elusive for brands, luxury experts, and scholars. The characteristics of a luxury experience include exceptional quality, unique design, personalised, exclusive, and authentic; meanwhile, consumers have defined a luxury experience as one that is exclusive, hedonistic, provides access to rare quality, and authentic (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2019). The definition of a luxury experience also varies by culture and by personal point of view because an experience that is considered luxurious by one person or culture may be regarded as ordinary by another person or culture (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Other factors, such as gender, ethnicity, and age, also affect how an individual define a luxury experience (Nwankwo et al., 2014). The current study focused on identifying common emotional outcomes of

any luxury experience. These outcomes will then suggest if the experience is luxurious. The objectives of this study are (1) to identify the emotional and physical responses of passengers during a first-class cabin experience; and (2) to determine whether their responses cause them to develop feelings known to be associated with a luxury experience.

Literature review

Emotional outcomes of luxury

Motivational theories are psychological approaches for determining which factors inspire human beings to seek out certain experiences to satisfy their needs (Jeon et al., 2011). Motivation theory suggests that individuals seek experiences that provide them with extrinsic and intrinsic emotional fulfilment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic emotional fulfilment occurs when individuals are satisfied from external rewards; intrinsic emotional fulfilment occurs when people are satisfied internally. Vigneron and Johnson (1999) and Langer and Heil (2013) asserted that for an experience to be considered truly luxurious, it must provide individuals with the extrinsic emotional fulfilment of prestige and the intrinsic emotional fulfilment of hedonic pleasure, for which Kapferer and Bastien (2012) coined the term "duality of luxury".

The definition of the emotional fulfilment of prestige refers to consumers' feeling of status and self-respect, reflecting their need for social identification (Schiffman et al., 2008). Individuals desire prestige because they want to be recognised as part of an elite class (Nia & Lynne Zaichkowsky, 2000). Conceptually, the feeling of prestige invokes the dual concepts of social status and wealth (Dubois & Czellar, 2002; Tsai, 2005). Customers' sense of prestige derived from a luxury brand experience emotionally separates them from lower social classes because of the exclusivity of the experience (Mazodier & Merunka, 2014; Tsai, 2005). Moreover, when a luxury brand experience occurs in public, customers' feeling of prestige is heightened because people can witness that they belong to a higher social class (O'Cass & Frost, 2002).

The emotional fulfilment of hedonic pleasure is defined as feeling a sense of fun and fantasy among individuals (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Vickers and Renand (2003) suggested that consumers receive more hedonic pleasure from luxury brand experiences than from luxury goods because of their physical and emotional engagement during such experiences. A hedonistic brand experience makes customers feel good, develops positive emotions, and creates pleasant memories (Na et al., 2007; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). The "non-return effect" of luxury suggests that a part of the hedonic pleasure felt by customers during a luxury brand experience is that they deserve to have luxury experiences as part of their life experiences (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Conversely, if individuals are unable to maintain their consumption of luxury brand experiences, then they feel disappointment rather than hedonic pleasure (Gagné & Blanchard, 2007). A luxury brand experience also produces hedonic pleasure among individuals because it enables them to avoid people who are less worthy of such luxury experience (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

The current study suggests that hedonic pleasure produced by a luxury brand experience is derived when customers fulfil their need for pleasure and avoid things that cause them pain or disappointment during the experience; thus, the

concept is better defined as hedonic well-being rather than hedonic pleasure (Kahneman et al., 1999). Hedonic well-being encapsulates all the characteristics of hedonic pleasure, including arousal (Campbell, 1987), feelings, and fun (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), and fulfilling personal desires (Gagné & Blanchard, 2007), while avoiding uncomfortable situations and feelings (Kahneman et al., 1999). Therefore, the present study suggests that the two elements of "duality of luxury" are prestige and hedonic well-being.

Self-determination theory suggests that passengers in a first-class cabin feel in control of their hedonic well-being because they choose to participate and can afford the experience (Tynan et al., 2010). Moreover, this previous study proposed that passengers' feeling of prestige derived from a first-class cabin experience also increases their sense of hedonic well-being. Although desiring to have prestige is considered outside the control of an individual because others must recognise your achievement or position in life, prestige also creates an intrinsic sense of life accomplishment and pleasure in a person by knowing that he or she is considered part of an elite group of individuals; hence, it affects a person's hedonic well-being (Lee et al., 2018). Thus, when passengers acquire a sense of prestige derived from a first-class cabin experience, prestige influences their internal feeling of hedonic well-being.

H₁: Passengers' feeling of prestige exerts a significant positive influence on their hedonic well-being.

Experience effects on the duality of luxury

A brand experience has two sides: (1) what is provided during an experience by the brand itself (i.e. stimuli); and (2) how consumers respond emotionally and physically to the experience. The characteristics of a brand experience stimulate a person's cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses (Hawkins et al., 1998). These broad classifications have been defined differently by experience scholars to provide clarity to these classifications. Dewey (2002) categorised a person's responses as intellectual, sensory (i.e. perceiving the experience through their senses), emotional (i.e. feelings during the experience), and physical (i.e. participating in the experience). Dubé and Le Bel (2003) suggested that an experience also stimulates individuals socially and provides them with physical pleasure, suggesting that individuals can respond to an experience intellectually, emotionally, socially, and physically (i.e. through physical pleasures). Pinker (1997) proposed that an experience activates the sensory perceptions, feelings and emotions, creativity and reasoning, and social relationships of individuals. Schmitt (1999) hypothesised that an experience activates individuals' senses, feelings, thoughts, actions, and relationships with others. Brakus et al. (2009) indicated that individuals' respond to an experience by using their senses, affective emotions, intellect, and behaviour. Five types of response dimensions have emerged among experience studies, namely individuals' five senses (i.e. taste, smell, touch, sight, and hearing), affective emotions, intellect, physical actions, and social behaviour. In Brakus et al. (2009), the social experience dimension was captured in four other dimensions. The current study used Brakus et al.'s (2009) experience dimensions (i.e. sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural) to measure the emotional and behavioural responses of first-class cabin passengers during their flight experience. The next step was to measure the effects of these experience dimensions on the passengers' sense of prestige and hedonic well-being.

Sensory experience

Sensory experience is defined as consumers' responses to experience stimuli that affect their visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile senses (Brakus et al., 2009; Hultén, 2011). A sensory experience is created through the aesthetic styles and themes of a brand, which provide context and meaning to an experience (Hultén, 2011). A personal in-flight entertainment console allows first-class passengers to watch videos (i.e. visual and auditory) on demand, listen to their favourite music (i.e. auditory), and play games (i.e. tactile) (Alamdari, 1999). Other features that appeal to passengers' five senses include light cabin colours, soft lines, cabin design, appealing aromas, first-class meals, design of flight attendants' uniforms, appearance of flight attendants, and surfaces/textiles, such as seats, tables, and blankets, that feel pleasing to touch and also reflect the quality of the design (Garcia, 2020).

A sensory experience can make customers feel prestigious when the experience is exclusive and exhibits high quality (Choi et al., 2017; Hwang & Lee, 2019; Kim, Chua, et al., 2016) because sensory experience enhances customers' status or self-esteem (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). Heide and Olsen (2018) suggested that customers feel prestigious because they perceive the experience as prestigious and interact with other individuals belonging to high social classes that reflect their own status in life. Dubois and Czellar (2002) supported the findings of Heide and Olsen (2018) because they found that brand sensory experience reinforces customers' desired view of themselves. Sensory stimulation provides aesthetic pleasure and excitement (Schmitt, 1999) that induce fantasies, feelings, and fun (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Baumgartner et al. (2006) found that congruent visual and musical emotional stimuli automatically evoke strong feelings of pleasure. Customers expect a high level of a sensory experience when expecting a luxurious experience that provides them with pleasure; otherwise, they become disappointed (Le Monkhouse et al., 2012; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999).

H_{2a}: The sensory experience of passengers in a first-class cabin significantly influences them to feel prestigious.

H_{2b}: The sensory experience of passengers in a first-class cabin significantly influences their feelings of hedonic well-being.

Affective experience

Shamim and Butt (2013) defined an affective experience as consumers' inner feelings and emotions toward the experience that lead them to either like or dislike the experience. At the subconscious level, consumers are attracted to experiences that make them feel good (Law et al., 2012; Williamson, 2002). The affective aspect involves customer commitment and enjoyment derived through experience (Cho et al., 2015; Esch et al., 2006; Faircloth et al., 2001; Low & Lamb, 2000). Several studies have examined affective experiences in first-class cabins. Examples of affective experiences include passengers being treated as valued customers and guests, welcoming passengers with a smile, passengers and flight attendants developing a warm and friendly relationship, providing passengers with a high sense of safety (JD Powers and Associates, 2013), the behaviour of other passengers (Tsang et al., 2018), creating a memorable experience (Tung & Ritchie, 2011), and inducing an ultra-comforting in-flight experience (Lin, 2015). Previous studies have shown that customers' affective experience of a brand influences their feeling of prestige toward the brand (Choi et

al., 2017); such prestige also reflects their status to other people during the experience (Hayakawa et al., 2018). The affective experience of a customer has also been found to exert a positive influence on their hedonic well-being in integrated resorts (Ahn et al., 2019) and cultural heritage destinations (Sharmiladevi & Rameshraj, 2017), and when customers cocreate the experience (Ajitha et al., 2019).

H_{3a}: The affective experience of passengers in a first-class cabin significantly influences them to feel prestigious.

H_{3b}: The affective experience of passengers in a first-class cabin significantly influences their feelings of hedonic well-being.

Intellectual experience

Intellectual experience is defined as having analytical and imaginative thinking components (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2013). It is characterised by an experience's capability to arouse curiosity in individuals' minds (Jung et al., 2014). The term "intellectual" refers to individuals being stimulated creatively by being surprised and intrigued, producing long-lasting memories of the experience (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013). An intellectual experience also reflects individuals' creative thinking process because it predicts the creative use of the experience (Brakus et al., 2009). The intellectual experiences of passengers in first-class cabins include conversations among passengers and flight attendants (Gunarathne et al., 2017; Harrison, 2015), involvement with technology in the cabin (Avram, 2013; Rothkopf & Wald, 2011; Xinhui, 2008), and having time for reflection because the design of first-class cabins allows passengers to engage in deep reflection (Betsky, 2008; Deshpande & Lau, 2017). The ability of individuals to feel a sense of superiority in terms of knowledge during an intellectual experience causes them to develop a feeling of prestige because they feel superior to others (Choi et al., 2020) and choose an area of expertise (Heine et al., 2016). An intellectual experience also influences the hedonic well-being of passengers because such experience allows them to overcome boredom during their flight, which can lead to excitement (Brakus et al., 2009). Other studies have found that an intellectual experience enhances customers' hedonic well-being in integrated resorts (Ahn, 2018) and cruise trips (Ahn & Back, 2019).

H_{4a}: The intellectual experience of passengers in a first-class cabin significantly influences them to feel prestigious.

H_{4b}: The intellectual experience of passengers in a first-class cabin significantly influences their feelings of hedonic well-being.

Behavioural experience

The behavioural experience of customers is defined as their physical actions or bodily responses to a brand experience (Shim et al., 2015). In many instances, a behavioural brand experience creates a visible experience and promotes interactions with others (Wang, 2014). Moreover, customers' participation in physical actions can demonstrate their levels of expertise, abilities, and skills to others, reflecting a prestigious image of themselves to others (Tsaur et al., 2007). A study found that an onboard shopping experience stimulates passengers' behavioural experience because of their physical involvement when interacting with the showcase space, physically experiencing a sample, and physically interacting with a flight attendant (Park & Park, 2015). Another study determined that a favourable behavioural experience of passengers in a first-class

cabin causes them to create a positive image of the experience and the airline (Lishan et al., 2014). The nature of most airline experiences restricts physical movement; in a first-class cabin experience, however, passengers have more legroom, larger seats (Zurcher, 1979), and in some instances, access to an onboard lounge to provide them with a better physical experience (Living Warbirds, 2019). First-class passengers can have more physical experience than those in other cabins, enhancing their wealth and status (Makkar & Yap, 2018). The behavioural experience of first-class passengers of eating food that is exclusively offered to those in first-class cabins demonstrates their sophistication and culture, reflecting their status (Kang et al., 2020). A food study found that consuming exotic cuisine influences a person's well-being because he or she is able to try something new and different, improving his or her quality of life (Wang et al., 2018). Airlines have unique opportunities to provide exotic cuisine because departure destinations are located in a variety of cities and countries. Other studies have determined that tourists who physically cocreate their experience in a tourism setting positively influence their hedonic well-being (Uysal et al., 2016), suggesting that first-class cabin passengers who are physically engaged in an experience enhance their hedonic well-being.

H5_a: The behavioural experience of passengers in a first-class cabin significantly influences them to feel prestigious.

H5_b: The behavioural experience of passengers in a first-class cabin significantly influences their feelings of hedonic well-being.

Experience-sense of prestige-hedonic well-being

Passengers in the first-class cabin feeling a sense of prestige affect their hedonic well-being because prestige affects the sense of life accomplishment and pleasure in a person by knowing that he or she is considered part of an elite group of individuals; hence, it affects a person's hedonic well-being (Lee et al., 2018). Previous research also connected that passengers' first-class sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural experiences affected their sense of prestige. Thus, first-class passengers' sense of prestige influences the relationship between their sensory (Choi et al., 2017; Hwang & Lee, 2019; Kim, Chua, et al., 2016), affective (Choi et al., 2017; Hayakawa et al., 2018), intellectual (Choi et al., 2020; Heine et al., 2016), and behavioural experiences (Kang et al., 2020; Makkar & Yap, 2018) with their hedonic well-being. Thus, when passengers acquire a sense of prestige derived from a first-class cabin experience, prestige influences their internal feeling of hedonic well-being.

H₆: Passengers in the first-class cabin feeling a sense of prestige influences the relationship between their sensory experience and hedonic well-being.

H₇: Passengers in the first-class cabin feeling a sense of prestige influences the relationship between their affective experience and hedonic well-being.

H₈: Passengers in the first-class cabin feeling a sense of prestige influences the relationship between their intellectual experience and hedonic well-being.

H₉: Passengers in the first-class cabin feeling a sense of prestige influences the relationship between their behavioural experience and hedonic well-being.

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study belonged to a random sample recruited between 15 September and 5 November 2019 at an international airport in a south-eastern city of the US who flew first class within the past 12 months and were at least 18 years old. The participants were given a URL code where they could gain access to an online survey. Among the 346 surveys completed, 294 were usable, resulting in an 85.0% response rate. The average age of the respondents was 37.76 years (standard deviation [SD] = 15.97), with 127 males and 167 females. A total of 125 respondents (42.5%) identified themselves as Caucasian, 94 (32.0%) as Asian, 49 (16.7%) as Hispanic, 11 (3.7%) as African American, 2 (0.7%) as Native American, and 7 (4.08%) as others. The respondents had an average income of US\$116,092 ($N = 227$, $SD = US\$182,060$). The participants belonged to an average of 1.99 frequent flyer programmes ($SD = 1.78$). Their average flying time in a first-class cabin was 38.58% ($SD = 30.896$) compared with flying in other cabin types, and they flew an average of 13.75 times a year ($SD = 13.75$).

Measurements

Table A1 (Appendix) provides the measures used in previous studies. We adopted a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) for all the measurement items for the different dimensions. The sensory (three items), affective (three items), intellectual (three items), and behavioural (three items) brand experience dimensions used in the current study were developed by Brakus et al. (2009). The duality of luxury dimensions of passengers' feeling a sense of prestige (Baek et al., 2010) and hedonic well-being (Diener et al., 1985) were derived from previous experience studies. Both dimensions used three-item measurements.

Common method bias (CMB)

The survey method is evidently appropriate for our research to cover the perception, intention, and psychological states of passengers who flew in first-class cabins (Conway & Lance, 2010). However, surveys can result in CMB because this collection method leads to shared statistical variance caused by the measurement method rather than the dimensions represented by the items (Podsakoff et al., 2003). A single factor test developed by Harman (1976) was used as a post-test assessment for CMB. None of the factors accounted for the majority of covariances among the items, indicating that CMB was not a limitation in this study.

Validity check, measurement model fit, and data analysis

Table 1 provides the relevant psychometric properties and correlation matrix of the dimensions. All the extracted variances exceeded 0.50 (Hair et al., 2018). Composite reliabilities and Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.70, indicating the good reliability and convergent validity of the dimensions used in this study (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). Discriminant validity was checked using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion, which suggests that the square root of the average variance extracted of individual dimensions should exceed the factor correlation. This criterion was met for all the dimensions. The fit indices met or even exceeded the minimum fit for the model suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999). These indices include the chi-square/degree of

TABLE 1. Validity of the model

Dimension	Cronbach's alpha	Average	Sensory	Affective	Behavioural	Intellectual	Prestige	Hedonic well-being
Sensory	0.918	0.790	0.889					
Affective	0.905	0.760	0.670	0.872				
Behavioural	0.905	0.761	0.489	0.651	0.872			
Intellectual	0.927	0.810	0.337	0.465	0.680	0.900		
Prestige	0.917	0.787	0.457	0.410	0.524	0.316	0.887	
Hedonic well-being	0.907	0.666	0.288	0.254	0.244	0.325	0.266	0.816

Note: The largest skewness was -1.484 and largest kurtosis was 1.930 for all of the measurement items related to the dimensions, which suggest normality since skewness and kurtosis were ± 1.96

freedom ($450.280/214 = 2.104$) or <3 , the comparative fit index (nearly higher than 0.948), the adjusted goodness of fit index (0.858), and the root mean square error of approximation (0.061).

Procedure

A two-step approach was used. The first step was confirmatory factor analysis by using SPSS Amos (version 20.0). The maximum likelihood method was adopted to validate all the latent dimension measurements and the structural model. The second step was applying user-defined estimates to calculate indirect relationships. This method utilised the bootstrapping procedure, confidence intervals (CIs), and 2 000 bias-corrected samples.

Results

Table 2 indicates that a significant positive relationship exists between passengers' sense of prestige and their hedonic well-being (H_1 : $\beta = 0.160$, $t = 2.133$, and $p = 0.033$). In terms of the first-class cabin experience of passengers, significant positive relationships exist between sensory experience with sense of prestige (H_{2a} : $\beta = 0.289$, $t = 3.691$, $p < 0.001$) and hedonic well-being (H_{2b} : $\beta = 0.162$, $t = 1.842$, $p = 0.066$);

intellectual experience with hedonic well-being (H_{4b} : $\beta = 0.304$, $t = 3.520$, $p < 0.001$); and behavioural experience with sense of prestige (H_{5a} : $\beta = 0.468$, $t = 4.766$, $p < 0.001$). The other direct relationships were insignificant, i.e. [H_{3a}] passengers' affective experience with their sense of prestige and [H_{3b}] hedonic well-being, [H_{4a}] intellectual experience with sense of prestige, and [H_{5b}] behavioural experience with hedonic well-being.

Table 3 shows that passengers' sense of prestige partially mediates the relationship between their sensory experience in a first-class cabin and their hedonic well-being (H_6 : $\beta = 0.047$, 95% CI [0.011, 0.021], $p = 0.022$) and fully mediates the relationship between their behavioural experience and their hedonic well-being (H_7 : $\beta = 0.053$, 95% CI [0.011, 0.0135], $p = 0.030$). Passengers' sense of prestige exerts an insignificant influence between their (H_7) affective and (H_8) intellectual experiences and their hedonic well-being.

Discussion

This study demonstrated that the first-class experience of passengers is a luxury experience because cabin experience significantly influences their sense of prestige ($R^2 = 0.332$)

TABLE 2. Direct path relationships

H_0	Path	β	S.E.	t-value	p-value
H_1	Hedonic well-being <--- Prestige	0.160	0.063	2.133	0.033
H_{2a}	Prestige <--- Sensory	0.289	0.095	3.691	<0.001
H_{2b}	Hedonic well-being <--- Sensory	0.162	0.089	1.842	0.066
H_{3a}	Prestige <--- Affective	-0.054	0.086	-0.583	0.560
H_{3b}	Hedonic well-being <--- Affective	0.036	0.079	0.359	0.720
H_{4a}	Prestige <--- Intellectual	-0.075	0.064	-0.957	0.339
H_{4b}	Hedonic well-being <--- Intellectual	0.304	0.059	3.520	<0.001
H_{5a}	Prestige <--- Behavioural	0.468	0.083	4.766	<0.001
H_{5b}	Hedonic well-being <--- Behavioural	-0.149	0.080	-1.319	0.187

Prestige $R^2 = 0.332$
 Hedonic well-being $R^2 = 0.161$

TABLE 3. Indirect path relationships

H_0	Indirect path	β	95% CI [LL, UL]	p-value
H_6 : Partial mediation	Hedonic<---Prestige<---Sensory	0.047	[0.011, 0.021]	0.022
H_7 : Not supported	Hedonic<---Prestige<---Affective	-0.007	[-0.045, 0.012]	0.434
H_8 : Not supported	Hedonic<---Prestige<---Intellectual	-0.008	[-0.038, 0.004]	0.261
H_9 : Full mediation	Hedonic<---Prestige<---Behavioural	0.053	[0.011, 0.135]	0.030
Direct path				
	Hedonic<---Sensory	0.164	[0.003, 0.309]	0.092
	Hedonic<---Affective	0.028	[-0.101, 0.177]	0.687
	Hedonic<---Intellectual	0.201	[0.062, 0.369]	0.015
	Hedonic<---Behavioural	-0.106	[-0.272, 0.061]	0.277

and hedonic well-being ($R^2 = 0.161$), which are the two luxury outcomes of the duality of luxury required for all luxury experiences suggested by Kapferer and Bastien (2012). In the original definition of duality of luxury, the two aspects of this duality include a person's sense of prestige and hedonic pleasure. However, the current study suggested that hedonic well-being is a better predictor than hedonic pleasure because the former includes all facets of hedonic pleasure and also recognises that receiving a sense of hedonic pleasure avoids negative feelings. For example, previous luxury studies have suggested that a portion of an individual's hedonic pleasure is avoiding people who are less worthy of a luxury experience (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012) and non-luxury experiences; this phenomenon is called the non-return effect of luxury (Turunen, 2018). Figure 1 shows that passengers' sense of prestige affects their hedonic well-being (H_1). Although customers' sense of prestige is derived from other people recognising their social status, a portion of prestige is derived from customers' ability to control their ability to be recognised, e.g. ability to purchase a first-class ticket. The ability to control their social recognition increases customers' hedonic well-being, which is supported by self-determination theory.

Passengers' feelings of prestige were derived from their (H_{2a}) sensory and (H_{4a}) behavioural experiences. Meanwhile, their hedonic well-being was derived from their (H_1) sense of prestige

and (H_{2b}) sensory and (H_{4b}) intellectual experiences. This study validated the importance of a sensory experience because this is the only experience that significantly affects passengers' sense of prestige (H_{2a}) and hedonic well-being (H_{2b}). Luxury studies have suggested that a luxurious sensory experience signifies to customers that they are privileged and belong to an exclusive group of individuals who deserve and have the ability to have a quality sensory experience, reflecting their status and wealth (Radón, 2012). The intellectual experience of passengers in a first-class cabin improves their hedonic well-being (H_{4b}). This finding is supported by previous studies, which suggested that intellectual stimulation improves a person's hedonic well-being (Joshani et al., 2020). The ability of individuals to be in physical proximity to communicate with others (i.e. behavioural engagement) in an exclusive environment enhances their sense of personal prestige (H_{5a}) because they can socialise with people with a similar status or have the privilege of communicating with individuals from a higher social class (Zhan & He, 2012). The sense of prestige of first-class passengers exerts a significant influence between their sensory (H_6) and behavioural (H_7) experiences and their hedonic well-being. Thus, this finding confirms that passengers' sense of prestige is an important mediator between their experience and hedonic well-being. Moreover, passengers' sense of prestige and hedonic well-being are interrelated rather than independent outcomes of a luxury experience.

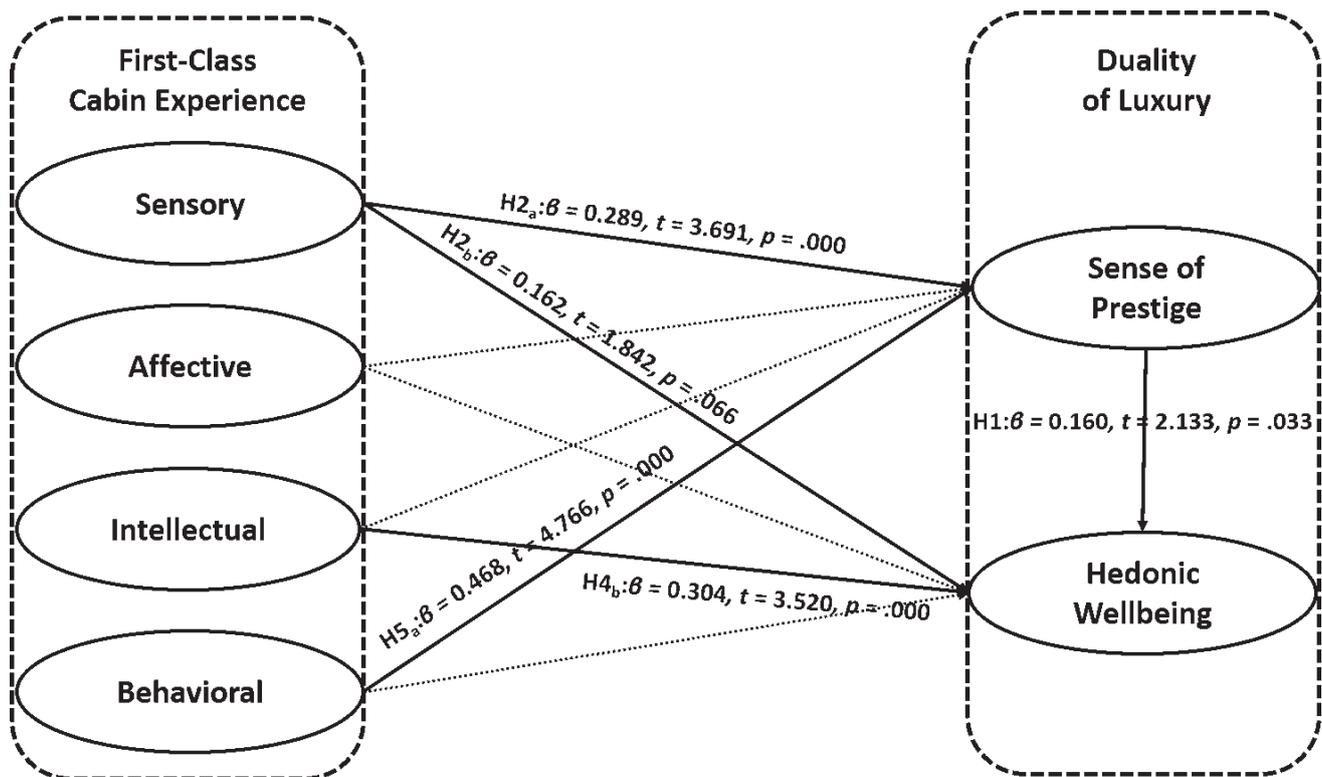


FIGURE 1. Luxury experience model of passengers in the first-class cabin

Conclusion

Theoretical and practical contributions

First, an experience in a first-class cabin is luxurious because such experience provides a sense of prestige and hedonic well-being to passengers, which all luxury experiences must provide. Second, passengers' sense of prestige enhances their level of hedonic well-being, challenging the concept that sense of prestige and hedonic well-being are independent outcomes of luxury experiences, as proposed by Kapferer and Bastien (2012). Third, the affective experience of passengers in a first-class cabin exerts no significant effect on their sense of prestige or hedonic well-being. This finding suggests that passengers seek personal tangible gratification by being recognised or improving their quality of life rather than feel an emotional connection with a brand.

In terms of practical contributions, airlines should focus on increasing passengers' sense of prestige and hedonic well-being by creating cabin experiences that affect their sensory, intellectual, and behavioural experiences. Additional emphasis should be placed on sensory experience because it is the only experience dimension that affects passengers' sense of prestige and hedonic well-being. Another suggestion is to focus on how to intellectually stimulate passengers in a first-class cabin. Flight attendants can be trained in areas such as wine/food, or be knowledgeable about the destination to engage in intellectual conversations with the passengers, and consequently, increase passengers' well-being by learning something new. Lastly, airlines should search for opportunities to allow passengers to increase their physical engagement during a first-class cabin experience. The additional ability of first-class passengers to move around provides them with a high sense of prestige because they feel special for having access to exclusive areas granted only to first-class passengers. This objective can be accomplished by providing a "standing lounge" or an "exercise area".

Limitations and future research

The major limitation of this research was that it focused on passengers from only one international airport in the south-eastern part of the US, restricting the generalisability of the study. Second, although the respondents were at the airport planning to take a flight, the researchers had no way of verifying whether they had actually taken a first-class flight over the past 12 months. This study focused on first-class cabin experience, restricting its generalisability to the airline industry. For future research, subsequent studies will conduct focus group discussions among first-class passengers to determine which onboard activities stimulate their sensory, intellectual, and behavioural experiences. Another research project can examine which types of experiences in airport lounges affect passengers' sense of prestige and hedonic well-being.

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Appendix

TABLE A1: Dimensions and measurement items

Dimensions and measurement items	Loadings
Sensory (Brakus et al., 2009)	
1. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines makes a strong impression on my visual sense or other senses.	0.840
2. I find travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines interesting in a sensory way.	0.903
3. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines appeals to my senses.	0.921
Affective (Brakus et al., 2009)	
1. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines makes me feel like I am a part of the first-class "family".	0.903
2. I have strong emotions for travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines.	0.879
3. Travelling first-class on luxury airlines is emotional.	0.833
Intellectual (Brakus et al., 2009)	
1. I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter travelling first-class cabin on luxury airlines.	0.905
2. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines stimulates my curiosity and problem solving.	0.927
3. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines makes me think.	0.867
Behavioural (Brakus et al., 2009)	
1. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines reminds me of actions and behaviours when I use this service.	0.872
2. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines results in bodily experiences.	0.875
3. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines is action oriented.	0.869
Prestige (Baek et al., 2010)	
1. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines is very prestigious.	0.883
2. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines has high status.	0.918
3. Travelling in first-class cabin on luxury airlines is very upscale.	0.860
Hedonic well-being (Diener et al., 1985)	
1. In most ways, my life is close to my ideal.	0.840
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.	0.854
3. I am satisfied with my life.	0.917
4. So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.	0.830
5. If I could live my time over, I would change almost nothing.	0.605