

# Connecting transformative luxury with individual and collective well-being: a conceptual approach

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## Abstract

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**Purpose** - The tension between individual and collective well-being is at the core of the macromarketing perspective and Transformative Luxury Research (TLR) has recently begun to consider this in the context of luxury consumption. This conceptual paper reviews TLR in the setting of the tourism and hospitality industry.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study is based on a literature review in the field of marketing and tourism management

**Findings** - We propose a Transformative Luxury Research Management Model, which identifies the link between TLR and well-being, as well as four elements that are important for the success of luxury innovations: risk; trust; ethics; and ambidextrous management practices. Further studies will be able to apply this conceptual model in diverse luxury markets to develop more industry-specific versions of it but should always maintain the model's focus on individual and collective well-being to ensure that it supports the growth of transformative luxury in the future.

**Practical implications** – The research has highlighted the benefits (individual and community well-being) of transformative research in the field of luxury products and services, but also the requirements (taking risk, trust, and ambidextrous management) to achieve this transformative stage.

**Originality/value** – The study provides a guideline to be followed by the luxury yachting industry to reach its transformative potential

**Keywords** - Transformative luxury, well-being, tourism, luxury accommodation

**Paper type** – Conceptual article

## **Introduction**

Multidisciplinary research in the field of luxury is a growing trend (Batat & Manika, 2020; Gurzki & Woisetschlager, 2017). Given recent developments in luxury research, research from a micro perspective highlights the subjectivity and multidimensionality of the luxury concept and focuses on the luxury consumer and the luxury producer, whilst research from a macro perspective focuses on the ways in which luxury consumption influences society's happiness and well-being (Gurzki and Woisetschlager, 2017). From both micro and macro perspectives, the concept of well-being plays a pivotal role as a wide-reaching construct, guiding marketing strategy and tactics, public policy and the evaluation of the impacts of marketing practices on communities and society at large (Sirgy, 2021).

Along with this trend, Transformative Luxury Research (TLR), has emerged as a new perspective that examines the relationships between luxury, ethics and well-being. TLR seeks to advance research that creates positive outcomes in luxury marketing, by promoting marketing practices that increase consumers' well-being (Batat & Manika, 2020). Despite the recent growth and interest in luxury research due to the luxury sector's dynamic and ever-changing nature, studies from a conceptual perspective are still rare, with few studies seeking to examine the sustainable, ethical, and well-being dimensions of the sector (Batat, 2021; Batat & Manika, 2020).

Against this backdrop, this study focuses on under-researched ethical and well-being dimensions of luxury. Thus, the study adopts a position which goes against the traditional assumption that luxury products and services (such as luxury cruising for example) are merely superficial, unethical and unsustainable (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016; Kapferer & Michaut, 2015), but instead, define and describe luxury as contributing to the advancement of quality of life,

happiness, and well-being (Ahani, Nilashi, Ibrahim, Sanzogni & Weaven, 2019). This study is therefore deeply rooted in the field of Transformative Consumer Research (TCR), a research approach which aims to enhance consumer well-being and quality of life (Mick et al., 2012). TCR has evolved over time in response to marketing strategy and practices which have encouraged conspicuous consumption at the expense of socially relevant issues, such as poverty, addiction, sustainability, and the improvement of well-being (Baker & Saren, 2016).

Another concept of importance to this study - well-being - has become a major aspect of macromarketing research (Laczniak and Santoss, 2018; Shapiro, Tadjewski and Shultz, 2009) both from an objective perspective by taking into account the standard of living, and from a subjective perspective, analysing consumer perceptions (DeQuero-Navarro, Stanton & Klein, 2021). TCR and wellbeing can therefore be considered as within the purview of macromarketing, a perspective also supported by the fact that TCR arose because of the perverse impacts of ‘standard’ marketing practices (Baker & Saren, 2016), and also due to the fact that the end goal of macromarketing is consumer well-being, associated with customer satisfaction (Sirgy, 2021).

To define the relationship between luxury and the societal well-being perspective of macromarketing, we argue that ‘trust’ is the common denominator between luxury and macromarketing, and therefore, central to defining the relationship between the two fields. In the tourism and hospitality contexts, sustainability can only be achieved if all stakeholders are involved (Cayla & Peyrache-Gadeau, 2019; Kirschner, 2019; Reid & Accordia, 2002) and if they all benefit from the industry (S raphin et al, 2020). When some stakeholders are left less well-off than others, not only it is unethical (Hudson & Hudson, 2017; Lovelock and Lovelock, 2013), but it can lead to mistrust and subsequently, conflicts amongst them (S raphin et al, 2018).

## **Transformative Consumer and Luxury Research and Tourism and Hospitality**

### *Stakeholders*

In macromarketing research, sustainable and ethical practices are important issues examined to enhance quality of life for consumers, households, communities, countries, and regions. Likewise, sustainability is a central topic in tourism and destination management (Maguire, 2020; Weaver, 2006). Alongside emphasising the need for long-term strategies, and the achievement of positive socio-cultural, environmental, and economic outcomes (Maguire, 2020), existing literature on sustainable practices in tourism also emphasises the importance for stakeholders of working together (Byrd, 2007; Renkert, 2019) to enhance inclusion and alleviate social divides. However, there is no consensus regarding the range of stakeholders involved in the industry, and what their role should be (Hergesell & Dickinger, 2013; Higham & Font, 2020; Tuan, 2020; Xu & Sun, 2020), hence one of the reasons sustainability in tourism is still an unachieved objective (Font, 2017; Hall, 2019).

### *Knowledge Management*

Similar to sustainability, Knowledge Management (KM) may pose challenges in the application and extension of TCR and TLR to tourism and hospitality. KM represents the ability of an organization or sector to process and action new knowledge (McTiernan et al., 2021). For KM to be effective, a strong network and trust amongst the members of this network is needed (McTiernan et al, 2021). Recent research reveals that currently, this is not the case in the tourism industry and related sectors (Font, 2017; Hall, 2019; Hergesell & Dickinger, 2013; Higham &

Font, 2020; Tuan, 2020; Xu & Sun, 2020), due to difficulties in creating effective collaborative networks, as discussed later in this article.

Other reasons for ineffective KM practice in tourism and hospitality include the seasonality of the workforce; the variety of providers; the variety of geographical, cultural, and other contexts; the fragmented tourism policies put in place by governments; the lack of sense of shared commitment which is particularly evident in the private sector; and the lack of cooperation between academia and industry (Belmonte-Urena, Plaza-Ubeda, Vasquez-Brust & Yakovleva, 2021; McTiernan et al, 2021). Certainly, for luxury tourism services such as luxury cruising, the seasonality of the workforce, the diversity of providers within and across geographical / country boundaries pose KM challenges.

## **Theoretical Perspectives**

### *Transformative Consumer Research (TCR)*

TCR involves, first and foremost, the field of Consumer Behaviour (CB), a field of research that now stands on its own, separate from marketing, although some still argue that it is a sub-discipline within marketing (Hogg & Lawson, 2016). When CB first appeared, it was mainly explored from a psychology perspective, although now it is discussed from a plurality of perspectives including sociology, anthropology, socio-linguistics and even literary criticism (Hogg & Lawson, 2016). In terms of focus, CB has gone through different phases of research, starting with a focus on segmentation issues in the 1950s; then in the 1960s, the focus was on consumer decision making; followed in the 1980s by research on affect and emotions; in the 1990s, research focused on consumer experiences; and finally, the early 2000s on consumer culture theory (Hogg

& Lawson, 2016). From these different perspectives, it appears that consumption is a behaviour triggered either by consumer psychology, which can include affect, emotion, mood, memory and value and/or by the macro-sociological context of consumption, such as culture, family, social class, welfare and well-being (Hogg & Lawson, 2016). The results of research in CB are widely used for branding and advertising purposes, for the segmentation of customers, to set pricing, and for innovation purposes such as the development of new products (Hogg & Lawson, 2016).

Just as TCR appeared due to a range of social problems related to consumption, such as health issues and addictions, it could be argued that TCR started as a reactionary response to an issue or a shock, which Brooker and Joppe (2014) associate with incremental innovation. However, contemporary research in TCR is more associated with terms such as improvement, encouragement, dissemination, long-term implications and policy and so the construct has moved towards something more pro-active, which is associated with radical innovation (Brooker & Joppe, 2014).

Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the identification of overtourism in 2017 (S raphin et al, 2018), demonstrated that the tourism industry was experiencing a significant shock, which manifested itself as an overflow of visitors going to the same destinations, at the same time, causing distress within the local population, the development of dislike for visitors, and a poor experience from the visitors' perspective (Ballester, 2018; Ver ssimo, Moraes, Breda, Guizi & Costa, 2020). In response to this, tourism and hospitality became the subject of a phase of transformative research, which required a re-thinking of the ideology of tourism (Burrari, Buda & Stanford, 2019), the creation of transformative strategies, and a new focus on contraction (Favre, 2017). More recently, the tourism industry has experienced significant challenges and decline due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent data on the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector across

the world suggest an 80% year-to-date decline in international tourism compared to 2019 (pre-pandemic), which represents 1 billion fewer international tourist arrivals, a loss of US\$ 1.3 trillion in total export revenues from international tourism, and 100 to 120 million direct tourism jobs being put at risk (UNWTO, 2021). Therefore currently, it is evident that a new phase of transformative research and strategy is needed in the rethinking of tourism and hospitality, which will now have to focus on redevelopment of the industry. This will require responsible and sustainable solutions for both tourism consumers and tourism producers in response to the significant challenges posed by the pandemic, which avoid the pitfalls of overtourism identified in tourism's last growth phase.

In both these cases (of either contraction or redevelopment) sustainable strategies for the tourism industry are needed, and these strategies can be assimilated by Transformative Consumption Thinking (TCT) and Transformative Consumption Actioning (TCA). Both terms are coined by this study and are adapted from Kemper, Ballantine and Hall (2019) who explain that under the influence of educators, learners can become sustainability thinkers (individuals with critical thinking and questioning attitude); actioners (individuals looking to encourage change in individuals and/or community), and transformers (individuals wanting to unlock changes in the surrounding environment). TCT could be defined as the phase when governments and industry are starting to rethink the industry's marketing approach, and consumers are also reviewing their holiday choice (Milano, Novelli & Cheer, 2019).

Similarly, TCA represents a contraction/redevelopment strategy from the perspective of industry stakeholders (Milano et al, 2019; Séraphin et al, 2018), and from the perspective of communities and society at large, placing their well-being and quality of life before the economic benefits generated by the industry (Gonzalez, Coromina & Gali, 2018; Ivlevs, 2017; Namberger,

Jackish, Schmude & Karl, 2019; Panayiotopoulos & Pisano, 2019). Transformative consumption will be possible when radical innovations happen in the industry, and certainly, the external threat of COVID-19 is still driving radical change in tourism and hospitality (Jamal & Budke, 2020).

TCR, whether in tourism or other sectors, involves finding a balance that meets the needs of all stakeholders. Taking the example of Destination Marketing Organisations, Gowreesunkar, Séraphin and Morrison (2017) explained that the main challenge facing these marketing companies is to find a balance between their existing roles (i.e., a focus on driving consumption through promoting, selling, etc) and new roles (i.e., promoting and ensuring responsible consumption and sustainable political, economic, social, environmental and technological practices). TCR can therefore be seen as having the potential to inform ambidextrous management practices, which are management approaches based on a combination of opposites (Mihalache & Mihalache, 2016; Rothenberg, 1996), associated with terms such as sustainability, motivation, performance improvement, value creation and customer loyalty (Vo-Thanh, Séraphin, Okumus & Koseoglu, 2020). Despite this seeming benefit, bringing opposites together entails risks for the stakeholders involved as there is no guarantee that ambidextrous strategies will work (Mihalache & Mihalache, 2016; Vo-Thanh et al, 2020), hence the importance of trust, and establishing trusting transactional relationships amongst stakeholders.

### *Transformative Luxury Research (TLR)*

Despite the fact that this study is presenting TCR (and to some extent macromarketing) as something new, the intention to extend luxury to the masses, and more broadly speaking, the motivation for this to contribute to the well-being of the community is not new. Research from Quickenden and Korver (2007) demonstrates that even in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century there were already

attempts to give access to luxury products - such as silver plate - to consumers other than just the rich.

Notwithstanding this historical perspective, research generally presents luxury as a vector for some individuals to signify their status, power, to indulge in personal pleasures, and to express their individuality, uniqueness, and identity as part of a process of self-transformation (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2017). However, despite the fact that price is central to the perception of luxury, it is no longer perceived as being reserved to a limited group of individuals, since lower-priced brands are now promoting themselves as luxury (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016). This is an example of the transformation of luxury. Another form of transformative luxury comes from luxury producers changing their business model to rely on producing their goods in low-wage countries, for cost efficiencies which allow their products to become more widely available (Kapferer & Michaut, 2015).

The perspectives of TLR have not yet been explicitly applied in tourism and hospitality, despite a recent growth in research into luxury products and services in this industry (Lloranta, 2022). Most recent research in this area has focused on delimiting the scope of luxury research in tourism and hospitality, identifying the products involved and the linkages between them. As the luxury segment of the tourism and hospitality market has grown, more research has started to consider this in a more holistic way, identifying well-being benefits from luxury consumption, in both hedonic and eudaimonic senses (Lee, Boger and Heyes, 2021) and in terms of the social context for luxury (Correria, Kozak and Del Chiappa, 2020). The following section examines the relationship between ideas of individual and collective well-being and luxury consumption, in more depth.

### *Individual and Collective Well-being*

Well-being and Quality of Life (QoL) are synonymous (McAllister, 2005), and concern the level of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) of an individual with life, meaning that the terms are also linked with happiness or unhappiness (Croes, Ridderstaat & van Niekerk, 2018; Dolnicar, Lazarevski & Yanamandram, 2013), often used as metrics to evaluate well-being (Ivlevs, 2017). Having said that, QoL/well-being, or happiness, is influenced by a range of factors, including age, gender, household size, family structure, level of education, income, job security, economic context, geopolitics, weather, human development index, and health (Bimonte & Faralla, 2016; Ivlevs, 2017; MacAllister, 2005; McCabe, Joldersma & Li, 2010; Van Nirkerk, 2016). This list of factors influencing well-being/QoL and happiness are both materialistic (related to money) and non-materialistic (related to a sense of self-fulfilment and appreciation of life). This dichotomy was highlighted by Rivera, Croes and Lee (2016), but also by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999). Well-being is now perceived as so important in policy terms that happiness is now used as a factor to evaluate development, and policies are developed to improve happiness (Schroeder, 2015).

TCR and TLR can play a role in individual and collective well-being since they are both about a form of consumption that fosters consumers' well-being using an ambidextrous management approach, balancing materialistic leverage tools (such as access to luxury products at affordable costs) and non-materialistic tools (such as shifting the paradigm of consumption towards well-being of the group, instead of solely individual hedonism). This ambidextrous approach permeates TCR and therefore TLR. In tourism for instance, Ivlevs (2017) and Uysal, Sirgy, Woo and Kim (2016) argue that tourism is no longer about solely delivering a good experience for visitors, in other words simply meeting their needs, but that the tourism industry is

now also responsible for ensuring a good experience for locals and the wider community. Consequently, a current challenge for the industry as it begins to plot a regrowth strategy, is to meet the needs of both locals/community and visitors.

As research shows, there are many factors influencing an individual's happiness and well-being (Bimonte & Faralla, 2016; Ivlevs, 2017; MacAllister, 2005; McCabe, Joldersma & Li, 2010; Van Nirkerk, 2016), and luxury, which is to a large extent about tailor-made experiences (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2017), has the potential to make an individual happy. The new transformative dimension of luxury, however, should be focused on luxury as contributing to the happiness of the many, i.e., collective well-being. For this to happen, where there are stakeholders that are traditionally opposed (such as consumers with high incomes versus those with lower incomes) and stakeholders that may have different interests at stake (such as potentially opposing government, business and consumers interests), a transformative consumption approach could be used to foster an encounter between these different groups. Such an encounter would contribute to the development of social capital, which enables collective action, cooperation, shared norms and values, and trusting relationships (S raphin & Yallop, 2020). Undoubtedly, this encounter between consumers (visitors) and businesses (tourism luxury providers) would involve some risks.

Taking the example of TCR more generally, and TLR more specifically, based on an ambidextrous management model or approach, both involve a certain level of risk, risks which can be mitigated by developing trust, i.e., enabling trusting ethical relationships between stakeholders (Yallop & Mowatt, 2016). However, transformative consumption approaches hold out the opportunity and promise of developing valuable experience of working collaboratively to create social capital and well-being, as each party involved must trust each other for the approach to take root.

### *Theoretical Framework*

As an interdisciplinary field, macromarketing focuses on marketing-society interactions and, through TCR and TLR, delve into investigations of different marketing systems, justice and ethics in markets, and responsible and sustainable marketing. As such, TCR and TLR denote a shift of focus and paradigm, moving from individual interests (not always ethical and sustainable) to community interests (often considered more virtuous and sustainable). To achieve this transition, several determinants are required, and amongst these are: (1) an ambidextrous management approach (i.e., balancing of materialism with non-materialism/anti-hedonism perspectives, and ensuring individual hedonism, while benefiting a larger group or community); (2) the willingness to take some risk; (3) and finally, a certain level of trust. The outcome of this shift of focus and paradigm is the achievement of increased levels of well-being of the individual and then, that of the wider community. TLR has the potential to achieve this due to the main characteristic of luxury, which is its ability to tailor-make products and services.

The fact that the ambidextrous management approach is one of the determinants for the transition to TLR, sheds light on the Janus-faced character of management strategies, meaning that for every positive outcome of the strategy, there may be a negative impact (Sanchez & Adams, 2008), which is also a reminder of the creative destruction theory of Mitchell (1998) who suggested that the creation of something necessitates the destruction of something else. From an ethical perspective, this requires careful consideration of normative ethics and the moral principles used in driving these strategies, and, equally, in mitigating the associated risks, such as, for instance, employing a utilitarian approach that prescribes actions that maximise happiness and well-being for all affected individuals (Scarre, 1996), which Veenhoven (2004) describes as great principle for happiness.

Risk is therefore the starting point of any transition; trust, the necessary ingredient for a successful and ethical transition; and an ambidextrous management approach, the means for all of this to work. TLR therefore provides a framework for analysing the transition from one form of luxury focusing on individual hedonism, to a more ethical form of luxury which also benefits the community, and not just the ‘happy few’. This transition will be the result of risks taken by some individuals and organisations. As TCR and TLR are new approaches, hidden risks, in other words, ‘unintended consequences of some decisions’ (Edger & Oddy, 2018: 181) could be argued to be quite high but, equally, these are also a good opportunity to gauge the resilience of a sector and/or of an organisation (Edger & Oddy, 2018).

The proposed Transformative Luxury Research - Management Model or TLR-MM is primarily a marketing system, i.e., a system showing all the parameters, connections, and outcomes within the subsystem of production, and subsequently consumption of TLR, which enables a better understanding of the context, and strategy to be adopted (DeQuero-Navarro et al, 2021), illustrating here that TL can contribute to individual and collective well-being. The TLR-MM would be expected to be effective when the key features of luxury are used in such a way that can ensure individual hedonist and eudemonic well-being, while benefiting a larger group, or a community through an ambidextrous management approach.

## **Conclusions and Further Research**

The TLR-MM model proposed in this research (figure 1) can be used to identify the aspects of transformative luxury involved in an innovative new product or service, and is open to the addition of new elements, so long as the core of the model remains well-being, and this well-being is conceptualised as both individual and collective. This core helps to position any analysis carried

out using the model within the purview of TLR (Batat & Manika, 2020), which stands opposed to the assumption that luxury products and services are necessarily superficial, unethical and unsustainable (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016; Kapferer & Michaut, 2015), identifying instead that luxury has the potential to contribute to quality of life, happiness, and well-being (Ahani, Nilashi, Ibrahim, Sanzogni & Weaven, 2019). We suggest that the ambidextrous management approach identified in the model will always be needed, given the competing priorities of profitability and sustainability, but the nature of different markets will mean that the emphasis on different elements within the model will vary, and more could be added.

Also, focusing on various industrial contexts of the tourism and hospitality industry (such as luxury cruising for instance) may lead to specific elements of the proposed TLR-MM model having more significance and be particularly pertinent to the launch of new products and services (Ballester, 2018; Veríssimo, Moraes, Breda, Guizi & Costa, 2020). In the luxury cruise ship industry for example such key elements of the TLR-MM model will constitute risks, ethical and sustainability issues surrounding air and water pollution, waste management practices, and general environmental sustainability business practices. Future research should seek to apply and test the TLR-MM model in various luxury contexts (including luxury cruising), and comparatively, to evaluate its conceptual value.



Figure 1: 'Prototype' Transformative Luxury Research - Management Model (TLR-MM)  
Source: The authors

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