



**How the Affluent Consumer Perceives and Experiences Hedonic  
Luxury Destination Brands: The Case of Dubai.**

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By

Nof A. Al-Sufyani

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## **Abstract**

Destination branding is a growing interest amongst researchers, nevertheless, it is still in its infancy (Hosany and Gilbert, 2010; Berrozpe, Campo and Yagüe, 2019). The focus is shifting from the tangible aspect of travellers' experiences, to the intangible aspect where the destination brand identity and self-congruency is being addressed. This research expands on existing theories concerned with the relationship between destination brands and visitors in terms of loyalty and symbolic consumption to build a theoretical framework that demonstrates how the affluent consumer perceives a luxurious hedonic destination brand by examining visitors' thoughts, emotions, motivations and behaviour patterns.

The research is guided by established models and theories to understand the perceptions of luxury seeking cultures in hedonic destination brands. The study follows Holt's (2004) myth making model, and therefore applies the concept of myth markets in the formation of the affluent consumer groups of a hedonic destination brand for the first time. As this is pioneering in the field, it was crucial to apply an interpretivist approach using the case study methodology. The research was also guided by other influential theories and models such as Hedonic Consumption theory (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982) and the Theory of the Leisure Class (Veblen, 1994) to help guide data collection and interpretation. This was in aim to understand how affluent consumer groups emerge, what they consume in a hedonic destination, how they perceive luxurious destinations in relation to their identities (Gazley and Watling, 2015; Berrozpe, Campo and Yagüe, 2019), and self-congruity (Ekinici and Hosany, 2006; Ekinici, Sirakaya-Turk, and Preciado, 2013; Japutra, Molinillo-Jimenez and Ekinici, 2019 and Usakli and Baloglu, 2011) and how this could, potentially, impact the success of a destination brand with hedonic and luxurious position.

The main aim of this study is to understand how affluent consumers perceive the luxurious hedonic destination brand of Dubai, in an attempt to create a blueprint for emerging destination brands' DMOs to attract the luxury seeking market(s). The blueprint is demonstrated in a theoretical framework that introduces some universal concepts, which can be applied by others destination brands and their DMOs. Other concepts are specific to the cased destination brand of Dubai.

As this research applied a qualitative case study, data collection was via focus groups, in-depth interviews and photo analysis. Data interpretation was done by the researcher, and guided by existing theories related to the study. The sampling used the snowballing technique by participants' referral, based on psychographic criteria, with a sample size of 55 participants who were grouped into 12 focus groups, keeping a 5 to 4 participants' average in each group. The researcher then revisited 7 of the participants for further information and photos discussion. As for the in-depth interviews, a sample of 5 participants (who were in managerial positions in Riyadh who worked with Dubai branches, headquarters and clients), were interviewed, one of them was contacted again for further information and photo sharing. After reaching the data saturation stage, data was analysed into thematic codes following the methods of Strauss and Corbin (1998), and Gibbs (2007).

Findings of this study were categorised into three main sequential parts: (1) types of affluent consumers and their psychographic profiles, (2) their symbolic consumption patterns and symbolic benefits, and lastly (3) the interactional communication as part of the overall hedonic luxury destination experience. This developed a framework which demonstrates specifically how Dubai is perceived and experienced by affluent consumers,

and how luxury destination brands can be built their experiences as hedonic and luxurious destination in the general sense.

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## **Chapter ONE: Introduction**

## **1.1. Research Background**

The concept of tourism began in Western Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as it was a modern social arrangement of relaxation and leisure, and it has since then included many types of tourism such as pilgrimage, business, and sports tourism (Walton, 2012). Marketing plays a major role in attracting visitors to a destination; this is seen in multiple campaigns done by cities, countries, and even places. Examples of this include the “Malaysia Truly Asia” campaign in 2007 (Tourism Malaysia, 2014), where they capture the essence of the destination and encourage travellers to visit. From a marketing perspective, a destination is defined as the place where tourism activities are offered; destination marketing is considered a pillar in the tourism system (Boora and Gupta, 2019). Place and destination branding concepts are ambivalent, but the main difference is that the term ‘destination’ indicates tourism, while ‘place’ includes all aspects of the surrounding environments (Kasapi and Cela, 2017).

The marketing of a destination must take into consideration the strategic objectives of the destination’s stakeholders, along with the sustainability of local resources. Destinations should differentiate their offerings and create partnerships between the public and private sectors locally in aim to manage the overall experience (Buhalis, 2000; Morrison, 2013). Destinations aim to be the first choice for tourists (Pike, 2017), due to the impact tourism has on the economy of the hosting country. Tourism benefits stakeholders such as service providers (taxis, hotels, and restaurants) and small and medium business owners. On a larger scale, the government benefits from tourism as it acts as an economic development tool by encouraging investments, raising employment rates and therefore contributing significantly to the GDP of a country and its locals (Sharpley, 2014).

The role of tourism is increasingly viewed as a key economic activity; it has become a significant tool of overall development in many countries. Generating about 10 per cent of employment around the world, it is responsible for 10.4 per cent of global GDP (WTTC, 2018). Promoting tourism attracts regional investments, generates commercial opportunities, and supports multiple industries surrounding the promoted area. Tourism upgrades local life through better local infrastructure, for example. It can also reduce poverty through creating jobs for any skill level. Moreover, tourism can impact countries on a socio-cultural level such as the case in Indonesia, where hosting tourists improved the attitudes of locals by learning how to accept differences, enhance their understanding of different lifestyles of other cultures, and have healthier lifestyles overall (Zhuang, Yao and Li, 2019).

Tourism destinations concentrate their efforts on becoming known globally as brands (Cîrstea, 2014), and some have achieved becoming super brands like New York City, London, Paris, Rome, and Egypt. These destination brands have very different identities amongst each other, yet they are globally known and highly visited (Dias and Cardoso, 2017). They each have their unique associations where, for example, New York City is known as the land of opportunity (the big apple) (Greenberg, 2009), Paris, on the other hand, is the city of love (Downie, 2015). Nevertheless, what they all have in common is that they are rich in history and they are old tourism destinations. In the current tourism scene, many destinations have emerged, islands have been developed with five-star hotel resorts to become more attractive to tourists. However, the real threat to these established destinations is the rise of the artificial destinations, where natural landscape and history is no longer a requirement to compete in the tourism market. Destinations like Dubai,

which is the case of this study, has established its competitive position amongst tourism destinations by building all attractions from beaches to theme parks, in a luxurious presentation (Muonemeh *et al.*, 2018). Cities like Dubai, Las Vegas and Atlantic City were artificially created, some on nothing but desert (Kattiyapornpong and Miller, 2012; Buncle, 2015). These destinations have succeeded in becoming globally known and attractive to many tourists, sharing hedonism in the formation of their identities. Thus, a new type of tourism was created in addition to the existing leisure, business, sports and religious tourism. Hedonic tourism is purely based on pleasure and wild experiences (Salti, 2018).

A tourism destination is considered competitive if its market share (number of visitors) and financial returns are increasing (Michael, Reisinger, and Hayes, 2019). The progress of tourism usually impacts other economic activities, and could replace the industries that have been there before. Tourism arrivals internationally grew over 1.3 billion in 2017; this is 6.8 per cent from the previous year. This is considered the most substantial single-year increase in percentage since the year 2009 (Rosen, 2018). Amongst current top and emerging destinations, the decision of travellers is increasingly difficult, as these destinations are diverse and idiosyncratic. Destination competitiveness influences the economic wealth of locals in the country (Haarhoff and Gany, 2017). This is due to the complex nature of the tourism industry and the diversity of stakeholders shaping the destination (Reisinger, Michael, and Hayes 2019). Because of this, emerging destinations and developing countries are focusing their economies on developing quick luxury projects instead of slowly building their tourism industry to its service economies (Thirumaran and Raghav, 2017). Countries that adopted this strategy of developing



luxury resources and attractions are countries like the United Arab Emirates (Zembowicz, 2009; Zaidan, 2016), Maldives (Scheyvens 2011; Zubair and Bouchon, 2014) and Kazakhstan (Koch 2014; Fraser and Kim 2016). Luxury tourism plays a significant role in developing a destination; however, it lacks attention from scholars compared to other domains in the tourism field. There is currently no one-specific template for becoming a luxurious hedonic destination that can be adopted by emerging destinations (Thirumaran and Raghav, 2017).

There is, in short, a clear need for a study on affluent consumer's perceptions and motivations, and what creates intense loyalty to destinations, to understand what it takes for emerging destination brands to be positioned as a luxury destination. Currently, tourism development studies offer factors such as the five A's of tourism, which are (1) attractions, (2) access, (3) accommodation, (4) Amenities, and (5) activities (Khan, 2008). Another proposed conceptual model of Tourism Destination Competitiveness and Attractiveness (TDCA) by Vengesai (2013), suggests that the destination's supply factors and visitors' demand factors support the creation of an environment that nourishes tourism, and will achieve consumer satisfaction. Destination competitiveness could be related to offering a more satisfying experience to visitors than other destinations. The 'destination experience environment' is suggested to relate to TDCA positively and is assumed as the key factor in shaping it, enriched by the existence of attractions and activities, and supportive factors. Reputation, branding and pricing are suggested to moderate the relationship. The limitation to the existing models is that they focus on the tangible/ functional side of the destination experience and dismiss the intangible side which is the story of the brand that influences the emotional, symbolic and experiential

aspects of consumption, referred to as the essence of the destination. Current models neglect the multisensory triggers that provoke feelings and thoughts, and affect the activity choice. Research on the conscious and theory-based application of hedonic tourism experiences that provoke specific emotions is in its infancy (Miao, Lehto, and Wei, 2014; Malone *et al.*, 2014; Ma *et al.*, 2016).

Thus, this research aims to form a framework that captures affluent consumers' perspectives on the emotional and cognitive level, to understand what creates strong loyalty to luxurious destination brands, and understand what helps a destination become luxurious and attractive for hedonic needs. This will help outline the core, attractive, features DMOs must focus on in their planning and strategy to attract affluent consumers. The study cases Dubai as a luxurious hedonic destination brand and examines its features from the consumer perspective by exploring their perceptions, motivations and experiences. The study also explores how luxury destination brands are constructed and the reasons behind the intense loyalty of its visitors. The destination profile will be discussed later in this chapter.

## **1.2. Research Core Concepts**

This research focuses on three main areas: destination branding, hedonic consumption and luxury, and cultural branding and myth making. A discussion of how these areas came together is presented in the relevant scholarship section in this chapter. However, they will be defined in this section for clarification. In order to understand the relationship between them, it is important to understand destination branding and how it emerged, and what does it mean for a brand to be culturally and emotionally relevant. Lastly, a discussion of hedonism and hedonic consumption in the context of tourism, and affluent consumers of

luxury will be given. As this research is focused on the affluent consumer traveller, it will examine trends and facts about destination brands' visitors, and in particular, Dubai's visitors. Brief definitions to introduce these core concepts will be presented in the following section.

Destination brands are spatial personalities created with consistent and unique identities that separate destinations apart, it is about combining all associations with a geographic place under the same brand, this includes economy, technology, tourism, business, and investments. The main goal is capturing the essence of the destination, in a consistent way that allows symbolic and experiential consumption of that place (Acharya, 2010). Marketing these associations is then achieved through positive image building (Cai, 2000). Creating a brand for a destination is viewed as the most powerful tool at use for destination marketers (Morgan and Pritchard, 2002).

Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) defined hedonic consumption as the side of consumer behaviour that is concerned with the multisensory, imagination, and emotions during a product experience. Hedonism is also defined as: the pleasurable life, *hedone* of Greek origin means that the only good life is the pleasurable life (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2002). This means that consumption becomes for the pure purpose of pleasure. Hedonic consumption is dynamic, as far as the meaning of pleasure goes, it is elastic amongst consumers, and thus, pleasure can range between an extravagant meal, a massage, and drugs. Hedonic consumption, therefore, is symbolic where the consumption is more of what the product means, rather than what it does. Therefore, this research also focused on symbolic consumption, how it is built on emotional benefits and how it helps shape personalities of buyers (Elliott, 1999; Belk, 1988).

Veblen (1899) coined the concept of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure. He defined luxury as something unusual compared to daily living needs. He argued that conspicuous consumption is the purchase of goods or services to visibly display wealth rather than covering basic needs. Luxury is also defined by dimensions of social communication because luxury is bought as a way of expressing a social status (Bourdieu, 1984). Research suggests that luxury products have hedonic and psychological values of affluent consumers (Vigneron and Johnson, 2017; Atwal and Williams, 2017; Jain and Mishra, 2018). Affluent consumers use the conspicuousness of luxury to express who they are, and to create identities that belong to the aspired group. This means that the social status associated with a certain luxury brand can profoundly affect the adoption of it amongst affluent consumers seeking status and position (Vigneron and Johnson, 2017).

Cultural brands, on the other hand, are highly symbolic brands, and are integrated into social settings. Cultural brands are functional brands with symbolic meanings and values given by cultures (Holt and Cameron, 2010). The value of a cultural brand is in what it symbolises to consumers who use it for the story it tells, to help them construct their identities, and thus, what it means is more valuable than what it does, (Holt, 2012). Brands can have cultures of their own, in which brand users integrate into their individual and social identities (Batey, 2015). According to Holt (2004; 2012; 2016), iconic brands are created through myth making, meaning brands with a cultural approach support a new ideology that conflicts with tradition, and to apply this, brands must identify which traditions to skip, something called the 'cultural orthodoxy' (Holt, 2016). A myth market is a market that is a result of a shift or change in social values that creates anxieties in that market, brands become culturally involved and act as resolving factors to these anxieties,

as an attempt to become iconic (Holt, 2004). Customers buy culturally-based products in order to live the stories they tell (Holt, 2016).

### **1.3. Research Gap**

In reviewing the literature, it was found that the main gaps in the existing literature were that there is an emphasis on destination marketing in the literature far more than destination branding. Research by Palmer and Bejou (1995), Buhalis (2000), Palmer (2004), Pike (2007, 2012) and Pike and Page (2014), mainly examine destination marketing players and organisations. Their research is concerned with functional marketing processes and does not discuss the role of destination branding. On another note, place making is addressed by researchers like Kotler and Gertner, (2002); Skinner, (2008); Kavaratzis and Ashworth, (2010); Campelo, (2017). However, the term place is wider in definition than the term destination. Branding in terms of ‘destination’ suggests a tourism side, whereas ‘place’ branding includes all relations of a place with its surrounding environments, such as political, foreign investment, trade, immigration and media. Also, destination branding and place branding might mean country, region or city (Govers and Go, 2009).

This research also found a gap in the existing literature on destination branding and tourism concerned with consumer response and construct. The literature is mostly concerned with the destination offerings and functionality, and there is a lack of literature concerned with the intangible aspect of the destination (Hosany and Gilbert, 2010; Berrozpe, Campo and Yagüe, 2019). There has been limited research on self-congruity, destination brand identification, and symbolic consumption of destination brands (Ekinci and Hosany, 2006; Usakli and Baloglu, 2011; Ekinci and Sirakaya, 2013; Gazley and Watling, 2015; Berrozpe, Campo and Yagüe, 2019, and Japutra, Molinillo-Jimenez and Ekinci, 2019),

where studies examine self-congruence and destination brand identification and how they influence the behaviour and brand attachment of tourists.

Another gap was found in the literature related to hedonism and hedonic consumption in the tourism context. Currently, research on consciousness and theory-based application of hedonic tourism experiences that trigger specific emotions, is in its infancy (Miao, Lehto, and Wei, 2014; Malone *et al.*, 2014; Ma *et al.*, 2016). For example, the Consumption Emotion Scale (Richins, 1997; Faullant *et al.*, 2011), ignores examining how a consumption experience of tourists could develop a specific emotion (Johnson and Stewart, 2005). Cognitive appraisal theory studies pleasure in theme parks (Ma *et al.*, 2013), tourists' emotional experiences in consuming hedonic destinations (Hosany and Gilbert, 2010) and service experiences (Su and Hsu, 2013). Emotional responses of tourists towards destinations is studied on a limited level; it is also more focused on the positive emotions rather than the negative ones (Hosany, 2012; Prayag, Hosany, and Odeh, 2013; Liu *et al.*, 2019; Prayag *et al.*, 2017; Sharma and Nayak, 2018). Hosany (2012) suggested strategic segmentation of tourists based on their goals and advertising of content that enhances self-concepts and shows destination congruence. This has been attempted by a limited number of researchers (Prayag *et al.*, 2013; Weaver, Kwek, and Wang, 2017; Scott and Le, 2017). Research on understanding the role of emotions in the outcome of the tourist experience is rapidly growing (Bigné, Matilla, and Andreu, 2008; Hosany, 2012; Ma, Gao, Scott, and Ding, 2013; Tlili and Amara, 2016; Pestana, Parreira, and Moutinho, 2019). There has been limited qualitative research exploring emotions in the context of tourism experiences.

In luxury tourism literature, luxury is selectively limited and elite specific and the focus is usually on a specific class of travellers (Hansen and Wanke, 2011; Thirumaran and Raghav,

2017). On the other hand, several studies look into the impactful transformation of luxury travellers' perspectives when they encounter retail shopping and other amenities (Pritchard, Morgan and Ateljevic 2011; Dion and Arnould 2011; Bendell and Thomas 2013). There is limited attention to affluent consumers in the literature in terms of wealth. Currently, the literature mostly suggests that luxury tourism is for elite and wealthy consumers. This fails to address the new trends in consuming luxury, where it is no longer highly limited and exclusive. The aspirational classes need further investigation and research (Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2006; Thirumaran and Raghav, 2017). The emerging aspirations of the consumers to be affluent and how this relates to destinations should be acknowledged.

Another research gap was that there is limited literature on cultural brands and myth making. There is currently only a small amount of literature on consumer brands and myth making, and this is mostly done by Douglas Holt who mainly focuses on men as consumers (e.g. Budweiser and Jack Daniel's). Holt's model has only been used in cultural branding to the modern British Conservative Party (Smith and Speed, 2011), where they explain the phenomenon in UK politics by considering political brands as cultural brands. They also suggest that a political party gains a long-term competitive advantage when it is compatible with the common culture in society. Another application of Holt's model is found in the *"Outposts of Britain" the General Post Office and the Birth of a Corporate Iconic Brand, 1930-1939* paper by Heller (2016). This paper examines the construct of iconic corporate branding of the General Post Office in Britain during the 1930s by historically analysing the establishment of the public relations department to respond to anxieties found in the British society. Therefore, the study adapted Holt's myth market model. Holt's model was

also used in the de-iconisation of brands theory developed by Testa, Cova and Cantone (2017) where they present an analysis of the iconisation, de-iconisation and re-iconisation process of a brand by exploring the relationship between a change in society and brands, i.e. myth making. Acknowledging destination brands as brands with stories and symbolic meaning that impact consumers on an emotional level is ignored by most destination branding and marketing literature. The literature has failed to apply the conceptual framework of cultural myth making and branding to destination brands.

Literature combining destination branding with hedonism, a term which is heavily used in this research, is still developing. The focus here is on artificial/ man-made destinations with no natural resources like land and weather. This has been studied by Hosany and Gilbert (2010) where they examine aspects of the tourist's emotional experience in hedonic destinations; the research identified three significant measurements to represent the Destination Emotion Scale which are: joy, love, and positive surprise. A paper by Goossens (2000) focused on the motivational and emotional aspects of consumer choice using hedonic factors to evaluate destination attributes. This research studies the impact of hedonic cues and hedonic consumption of Dubai visitors through experiential marketing. It also draws a link between hedonic consumption and the DMO's communicational efforts and the offered experiences in the destination during a traveller's visit. Understanding how experiences engage with and evoke emotions, or how emotions guide consumer activities is neglected, there is a need for further investigation for Hirschman and Holbrook's (1982) work. Research in travel and tourism is beginning to look into the intangible side of the experience; however, this is still in its infancy (Malone *et al.*, 2014).



Most current destination branding literature cases natural and historic destinations like Byrne and Skinner (2007) on Dublin and Ireland, Botti, *et al.* (2009) on France, and Teye and Paris (2010) on Caribbean tourism. These cased destinations are touristic by their nature and history. However, many emerging destinations are choosing to develop quick projects rather than taking steps towards service economies. These projects heavily rely on luxury, which makes luxury tourism of significant role in the current tourism market. There is not enough attention from scholars to help developers of destinations on the use of luxury to attract affluent consumers (Thirumaran and Raghav, 2017). Destinations such as Las Vegas and Dubai are built on luxury (Buncle, 2015), flashy objects like cars, buildings and hotels, and drastic experiences, such as extreme sports, man-made beaches, artificial parks, and casinos.

The previously mentioned gaps relate to the research problem; there is no one template for destinations aiming to use luxury to attract affluent consumers. Scholars neglect the hedonic consumption of a luxury destination in relation to new cultural trends of luxury consumption. Thus, the researcher will apply a qualitative and inductive approach to examine the discourses and social practices, brand perceptions, and perceived meanings by affluent consumer travellers to a luxury and hedonic destination through a case study of Dubai. This is to obtain an in-depth understanding of the consumption of a luxury tourist destination by affluent consumers. This makes this research one of the first to apply qualitative research tools through a case study with an interpretive and inductive approach. This approach is used to understand affluent consumers' motivation, symbolic benefits, experiences, and how they consume the luxury destination, casing Dubai.

Current research papers, whether published before, or during the writing of this research, applied a quantitative approach using survey-based data collection tools. This research examines destination brands by applying in-depth interviews and focus groups, where the researcher conducts face-to-face and in-depth discussions with the participants about their thoughts, emotions, intentions, and interpretations. This enables the researcher to explore the symbolic benefits and perceptions of affluent consumers (whether wealthy or aspiring) in an inductive manner to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences. This research relates to current literature in examining destination brands from an intangible perspective of visitors, self-congruency and destination brand identity. This research expands on the value of intense loyalty that comes from self-destination congruency. It also introduces an in-depth examination of affluent consumers (whether wealthy or aspiring), and their role in the value co-creation process. This paper introduces a strategic segmentation of affluent tourists of Dubai, which can help destination stakeholders better understand tourists, and create enhanced experiences for them.

#### **1.4. Research Context**

This section of the chapter will explore the previously mentioned topics in the context of Dubai, UAE. Information used in this section is extracted from multiple platforms such as the Department of Tourism Commerce Marketing (DTCM) of Dubai, and other marketing and tourism reports.

After defining each of the core concepts of the research, it is important to discuss them in relation to the destination brand of this research; Dubai. In a modern society, brands enter all aspects of one's life; economic, social, cultural and even religious. Over time, the brand image becomes associated with a level of credibility, quality and satisfaction in the

consumer's mind. Nigel Hollis (2008) – Chief Global Analyst in Millward Brown – defines ‘global brand’ as one that surpasses the origin of its culture and builds strong and trustworthy relationships with consumers across many countries and different cultures. In developing value, ‘brand perception’ is more important than reality (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998). This means that the emphasis is continuously shifting from functional benefits to symbolic and emotional benefits. The brand impacts perceptions by transforming the experiential aspect of consuming a certain existing product (Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy and Pervan, 2015).

This research was inspired by the city of Dubai, United Arab Emirates, when it started rising rapidly amongst usual touristic destinations such as London, New York, Paris, Italy, and Greece. To understand the success story of Dubai, this section will present a brief history on how it all started. The official website of the Government of Dubai (2018) published that when oil was discovered in 1966, Sheikh Rashid employed its revenues to support infrastructure development in Dubai’s schools, hospitals, roads and a modern telecommunications network. The rapid development process started in 1959, where a new port and terminal buildings were built at Dubai International Airport. An additional runway that could receive any kind of aircraft was built in 1960. In 1970, the largest man-made harbour in the world was created at Jabal Ali, and a free zone was formed around the port. Dubai's strategy for development was becoming unmistakable to many, showing visionary leadership, high-quality infrastructure, an expatriate-friendly environment, zero tax on personal and corporate incomes and low import duties. This resulted in Dubai rapidly becoming a business and tourism hub for the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region

to the Indian subcontinent and from South Africa to what is now called the CIS (Commonwealth Independent States) countries.

In the 1960s, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, who was the ruler of Abu Dhabi, and Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum imagined a federation of the Emirates in the region and accomplished that by 1971. They joined Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Fujairah and, a year later, Ras Al Khaimah, form the United Arab Emirates. The country became one of the richest in the world with a per capita GDP in excess of USD17,000 per annum. However, it was in the 1980s and for the following ten years, that the Dubai government took a strategic decision to become a major international tourism destination. Return on tourism investments was very high over the years, and the destination now embraces dream hotels, extraordinary architecture and world-class entertainment and sporting events. Dubai has the only hotel rated seven stars in the world (Burj Al Arab hotel). Dubai also has the tallest office tower in the Middle East and Europe at 350 meters high (Government of Dubai, 2018).

Moving on from the history to the present, World Travel and Tourism Council research shows that in 2016, tourism contributed 64 billion US dollars to the United Arab Emirates' economy, which will approximately double during the next ten years (WTTC, 2017). In 2015, the tourism total contribution to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) was 36.43 billion US Dollars, growing by 4.4 per cent in 2016, followed by 5.4 per cent per year, reaching a predicted 64.47 billion US Dollars, 11.2 per cent of GDP, by 2026. These numbers were announced in the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2016 United Arab Emirates* report. The report provides facts and insights of the increasing value of the country's travel and tourism industry, applying

its strategy to enhance tourism-related infrastructure development in order to attract an increasing number of business and leisure travellers from across the globe (WTTC, 2017).

According to the WTTC's report (2017), the United Arab Emirates aim to become one of the world's leading tourism destinations. In 2015, UAE ranked 28<sup>th</sup> out of 184 countries in terms of the relative importance of travel and tourism's total contribution to GDP. Dubai was also positioned 21<sup>st</sup> amongst thirty top 'must visit' destinations in TripAdvisor in early 2017. As for the size of the tourism sector and GDP contribution, it ranked 105<sup>th</sup>. Although the forecast growth of 2016 ranked as the 42<sup>nd</sup> country out of 184 countries. The growth of the tourism industry increases the number of job opportunities. The benefits are mainly to restaurants, hotels, travel agents, airlines and other passenger transportation services. The WTTC revealed that in 2015, travel and tourism directly impacted 330 thousand jobs, almost 6 per cent of total employment. This was estimated to rise by 3.8 per cent in the year 2016 and by 4.3 per cent per year to 520 thousand jobs by 2026. This forecast indicates a 5.4 per cent rise per year in terms of spending over the next ten years. Visitors of the UAE in 2015 spent 26 billion US Dollars. This was expected to grow by 3.3 per cent in 2017, when 15.76 million international tourist arrivals were expected (WTTC, 2017).

Leisure travel spending generated 79 per cent of direct travel and tourism 26.65 billion US Dollars in 2015, compared to 7.08 billion US Dollars of business travel. Leisure travel spending was expected to grow by 5.4 per cent in 2026. On the other hand, business travel spending was expected to grow by 0.3 per cent in 2016 and by 4.4 per cent annually in 2026. This represents the growth path and potential of the UAE's travel and tourism sector as it continues implementing large projects aimed at leisure visitors. The DTCM's annual performance report shows that Dubai received 15.92 million international visitors

(VisitDubai, 2018). In a report by Pacific World of Destination Index (2014), Jestine Alfred (Destination Manager, Pacific World) said that Dubai with its always-changing attractions is always receiving many revisits because of the on-going existence of something new. The emirate is able to create and preserve the interest in investments and development in the destination. By 2020 Dubai is aiming to receive twenty million tourists and therefore, the emirate's development will not end, the interest in luxury and high-end offerings is back in the sector of tourism, and Dubai offers a wide range to attract any type of visit. Another report by ZAWYA of Thomson Reuters (MENA) (2018), it is mentioned that three of four visitors were families and couples along with 14 per cent individuals, 8 per cent were friends, and 3 per cent were colleagues of total visitors. These visitors' purposes were split into 74 per cent of leisure purposes, with those visiting friends and relatives making up 14 per cent of the total, and business travellers 12 per cent. The report also stated that 99.3 per cent of surveyed travellers were satisfied to level that they would become 'likely promoters' or 'active advocates' of Dubai, recommending the destination to friends and family (ZAWYA, 2018).

Dubai is positioned as one of the most luxurious destinations in the world (Jones, 2018). Dubai focuses its reputation on its renowned skyline, sandy beaches, modern architecture, exclusive shopping, and indulgent spas. The destination appears to have a glossary exterior that many perceive as fake and soulless (Jones, 2018). However, the Arabian culture is used as a theme in multiple hotels such as Jumeirah, One and Only Mirage, and Arabian Courtyard Hotel. Arabian culture is also the basis of some activities like safari and camping in the desert, quad biking on dunes, and lavish dining experience in the desert (Visitdubai, 2020). These outings are offered in a luxurious surrounding. Dubai offers multiple

luxurious accommodations within the Desert Conservation such as Al Maha (luxury collection resort and spa), and Bab Alshams (resort and spa). Luxury villas, transport, and dining is offered in these full-scale luxury accommodations (familytravel, 2020). Overall, Dubai's luxury hotels offer a wide and creative range of extravagant services that pleasure all senses from beach butlers to designer spas, to the first seven-star hotel in the world; the Burj Al-Arab (Hedley-hymers, 2020).

Dubai offers shopping malls that are known for their vast spaces and endless options, Dubai is said to be made for the 'shopaholics' (Jones, 2018). Home to many designer brands such as Gucci, Chanel, Valentino, Manolo Blahnik, and many more, Dubai malls offer an environment for spending an entire day. Skiing in the desert is possible in Ski Dubai; which is an indoor ski slopes resort in the Mall of the Emirates. It occupies 22,500 square meters and features five slopes (Skidubai, 2018). Dubai offers extreme sports at a top level. The TripAdvisor page of Skydive Dubai reads: "*Enjoy a taste of A-lister life without the high price tag*" as it offers a shared deluxe yacht cruise off Dubai, along with a luxurious breakfast (skydivedubai, 2020). This demonstrates that even extreme sports, are accompanied with a hedonic experience. This experience is also offered indoors in Inflight Dubai, and on an even smaller scale, in City Centre Mirdif. Dubai is determined to give all its visitors a taste of luxury. In their official website, 'Visit Dubai' have multiple categories for things to do in the emirate, most of which are focused on experiencing luxury. Dubai also offers luxury to visitors on a budget and offers competitive deals on pampering, shopping and dining (Visitdubai, 2020).

Dubai is built on hedonic experiences (Madichie and Blythe, 2011). Many places in Dubai seem to be built to fulfil fantasies, Jumeirah Al Qasr hotel, for example, is inspired by one-

thousand and one Arabian nights, and it offers a reality of the regal fantasy (Jumeirah, 2020). Many theme parks are built in top-class styles for children and adult to experience different themes from paradise to Bollywood (Cutler, 2018). Experiences in Dubai focus on pleasuring the senses, from soft bed sheets, fine dining and drinking, live music, and countless servants in hotels and beaches (familytravel, 2020). Hotels and activities that have Arabian night themes like Jumeirah Al Qasr, and Al Maha Hotel and Resorts focus on portraying a story to be lived by guests by surrounding them with Arabian lanterns, carved wooden armchairs, and billowing drapes, with large terraces (Johnson, 2020). The 'Palazzo Versace' hotel promises its guests of an experience of living like Italian royalty, where it surrounds the guests with the Versace uplifting colours and handcrafted designs to materialise the experience.

Dubai is known for its shopping malls and outlets (Jones, 2018). Shopping has a strongly hedonic side, especially in comparison to online shopping. Hedonic motives such as role playing (being an important customer), distraction (looking at interesting new products), self-indulgence (relief of any stressed), learning (being the first to know about products), physical activity (shopping while on holiday), or sensory stimulation (Madichie and Blythe, 2011). In Dubai malls, shoppers can intersperse their luxury filled day with a lavish hedonic meal accompanied with the finest wines and champagnes in the luxurious restaurants that are scattered around the mall (Jones, 2018).

Dubai offers hedonic experiences such as shopping in luxurious malls, wine and beer tasting experiences, camel riding, exclusive yacht cruises, and private island hotels. These experiences involve all sensory facets of customers. From living fantasies, to pleasuring all senses, Dubai visitors are treated with exclusivity and luxury. Service providers rely



heavily on hedonic aspects to compete in this destination (Madichie and Blythe, 2011). Dubai visitors derive experiences that fulfil their individual and social hedonic needs (Peter and Anandkumar, 2016).

Dubai has been developing at a surprising rate during the past twenty-five years (Almansoori, Milne and Bull, 2020). From Bugati Taxi service to Lamborghini police cars, Dubai offers extreme luxury experiences like the ‘Culinary Flight’ in the renowned Burj al Arab, the first seven-star hotel, (Hedley-hymers, 2020), to a high-end district designated for restaurants, private beaches and luxurious rooms. Many of Dubai’s luxurious experiences are by high-end fashion designer brands such as Bulgari’s hotel and spa, Versace’s hotel, and Armani’s hotel. In the literature, Dubai has been called ‘consumer-oriented’ (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990), the ‘Instant City’ (Bagaeen, 2007), ‘City of Gold’ (La Carmina, 2013), ‘Mega Dream of luxury’ (Nadkarni and Heyes, 2016), and ‘Smart City’ (Khan *et al.*, 2017). Dubai has excelled in the luxury offering luxury in its many forms, including affordable luxury (Heyes and Nadkarni, 2019). An example of this is ‘The Palm,’ which is a man-made island with luxurious resorts and beach hotels. Dubai has the largest mall in the world (based on the total area) (tourophia, 2017), the tallest skyscraper (Warren and Hadden, 2020), and the fanciest hotels (Jacobs and Zheng, 2018). This is all created in a modern way that is aimed at a specific type of lifestyle.

### **1.5. Research Questions**

The research’s main question is, how do affluent travellers experience Dubai as an exemplar of a luxurious hedonic destination brand? In answering this question, the research aims to produce a framework that could offer Destination Marketing Organisations

(DMOs) and stakeholders in luxury tourist destinations the perceptions, motivations, and experiences of affluent groups of travellers. The research cases Dubai as a luxury destination brand and participants have been chosen based on secondary data extracted from the latest statistics published by the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing of Dubai (DTCM) in the year of the data collection stage of this research. The framework addresses the current need to form core features that help professionals build luxury destination brands that appeal and serve the affluent groups. The framework also lends itself to scholars by contributing to current literature and future research. Therefore, there is a need for the following secondary questions to further examine the areas related to the luxury destination brand perceptions of affluent travellers, their motivations, experiences, and consumption. This will give a holistic view in order to answer the main question and guide producing the framework. The secondary research questions are as following:

Q1. What is the practice and discourse of different segments of affluent consumers in Dubai? What are the characteristics of these consumers and their motivations for consumption?

Q2. What factors are involved in the consumption experience of Dubai, in terms of motivation, benefits-sought, interpretation and behaviour of affluent consumers?

Q3. What is the nature of hedonic consumption amongst affluent consumers to Dubai? What are the underlying motivations for their consumption of hedonism?

Q4. What is the nature of the consumption of luxury by affluent consumers to Dubai? What are the underlying motivations of this consumption?

Q5. How is Dubai's luxury and hedonism communicated amongst affluent visitors to Dubai? What meanings and symbolic values are conveyed?

### **1.6.Aim and Objectives**

This research aims to answer the main question by examining affluent travellers' experiences and consumption of the luxurious destination brand; Dubai. This aim will be achieved through the following objectives:

1. To carry out empirical research and collect data to understand affluent consumer motivation and behaviour.
2. To understand and analyse the different segments of affluent consumers visiting Dubai, and establish their motivation, brand engagement and behaviour.
3. To examine reasons behind affluent consumers' activities in Dubai, and the effect of these experiences on them.
4. To relate the choices of affluent consumer groups to their socio-cultural environment to find patterns that can be used for theory and application.
5. To examine how affluent consumers interpret Dubai's luxury and hedonism, and how it impacts their self-concept.
6. To bridge gaps found in the current related literature to aid a holistic view of the relevant areas.
7. To conceptualise the process of constructing luxurious destination branding through the development of an A Posteriori framework based on an inductive approach that utilises research data and existing theories.

8. To provide advice to marketing organisations, and related parties, on how to develop and enhance their emerging and evolving destination brands by integrating luxury, and hedonic experiences to attract affluent consumers.

## **1.7.Theory and Methodology**

### **1.1.1. Relevant Scholarship**

As the research faced a lack of existing models and literature concerned with luxurious destination brands, and affluent consumers, from an intangible perspective, it was necessary to adopt a qualitative and inductive approach through case study methodology. Because this research aims to form a new framework for scholars and professionals' benefit, it is important to rely on relevant existing theories and models to help guide the research, and data collection and interpretation process. This research will use multiple models such as Hirschman and Holbrook's (1982) theory on hedonic consumption, along with Elliott's (2010) model on emotionally driven choice. Also, Veblen's (1899) leisure class and conspicuous consumption theory and Vigneron and Johnson's (2017) on luxury, Holt's (2012) cultural branding and myth making model, Schmitt's (1999) experiential marketing theory, and Fill and Turnbull's (2016) interactional model of communications. The mentioned models are the main guiding theories; however, other literature on the same areas will be used for reviewing purposes.

The main areas of this research are: Destination Branding, Hedonic Consumption and Luxury, and Cultural Branding and Myth Making. These areas came together because of the research motivation; Dubai's ultimate luxurious lifestyle that attracted tourists from around the globe to become one of the must-visit tourism destinations (TripAdvisor, 2017; Itinere, 2019; Almansoori and Bull, 2020). The research looks at the experiences of loyal

visitors to Dubai, their motivation, and behaviours. Thus, it became clear that understanding Dubai efforts linked academically to the destination branding area. As for hedonic consumption and luxury theories, they are important in guiding data collected from affluent consumer groups. Their emotions and thoughts were interpreted under an academic umbrella that covered the symbolism behind consumption, along with definitions that will help make sense of found data. Because these travellers are consumers of luxury, the literature concerned with it is repeatedly linked to culture and society. Therefore, the researcher will review the literature on the relationship between culture, consumer and brand. This is where Holt's (2004) myth making clarifies the road for the collected data to be categorised and linked to each other. Holt's (2004) model on cultural branding and myth making helps pave the way for the research objectives by understanding how the segmentation process of visitors to Dubai takes place. As Dubai is a luxurious destination brand, it is important to understand definitions of luxury and themes in the academic context. Veblen (1899) identified that luxury is a socio-cultural tool used to express one's status. He also found that the conspicuousness of luxury is crucial to the leisure class, as people consume luxury to communicate their wealth. This theory helps in identifying how different affluent groups interact with the luxury experienced in Dubai.

This research aims to explore the intangible side of the consumer's experience; therefore, it is important to understand how they feel and what they think during the consumption of the destination. Hedonic consumption theory demonstrates consumer behaviour from a pleasurable and intangible aspect. It is the consumption that relates to the multisensory, fantasy and feelings perspectives when using a product (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). Their theory is concerned with the usefulness of the hedonic perspective in the product

experience. This theory helps in understanding feedback from participants of this research and guides their profiling, their interpretations and behaviours. For marketers to be able to create an environment that enables hedonic consumption, experience is of high importance (Atwal and Williams, 2017). This is where literature found its way to the marketing strategy that engages consumers and creates real-life experience that helps brands be remembered by getting consumers to experience the brand. This strategy is called experiential marketing (Galletto, 2017). The highly influential work of Schmitt (1999) on experiential marketing, mostly followed the work of Hirschman and Holbrook. They emphasize the symbolic meanings, subconscious processes, and nonverbal cues resulting from consumption in an experiential view (Schmitt *et al.*, 2015). While Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) focused on affection, daydreaming, and pleasure, Schmitt (1999) looked into the behaviour of consumers as a situation like “grooming in the bathroom”. Theories used in guiding this research intersect in several points. Therefore, it was necessary to look into both theories as they complemented each other by looking at affective, cognitive, and behavioural aspects of consumer who are the main focus of this research.

This guided the interview questions and sequence. It also allowed the researcher to interpret the collected data in academic terms, and link the findings to the main research aim. This research suggests a link amongst the theories and introduces a new framework that defines the core features needed for destination brands to attract affluent visitors, and build a bond with them.

### **1.1.2. Methodological Approach**

This research aims to examine individuals in an in-depth and inductive approach. For the research methodology, case study will be applied because it describes and analyses an

individual matter or case of a phenomenon that is investigated in a real-life setting (Yin, 1989). The purpose of a case study is to identify variables, and the nature of interactions between the participants. Also, between the participants and the destination (theoretical purpose). Another purpose could be to evaluate the performance of progress in development (practical purpose). This means, one case study could serve both purposes simultaneously. The case study approach used is an instrumental one; where one or more cases are studied to provide insight about an issue and improve understanding of the case rather than generalisations beyond it (Stake, 2013). The reason for choosing a case study strategy is the qualitative and inductive nature of the study. Among other reasons for choosing a case study strategy is the flexibility that a case study allows for in-depth exploration (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1989; Ghauri, 2004; Silverman, 2019).

The collected data were coded in an attempt to reduce data and break them down to categories that make understandable themes (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Gibbs (2007). Thematic coding approach, was done by the line-by-line analysis of the collected data and word analysis (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). The data is grouped after analysis and discussed in three findings' chapters in aim to answer the research questions. As a result of this inductive approach, there will be no theoretical framework prior to data collection. However, the literature review will help guide the data collection and interpretation process. The suggested theoretical framework of this research is A Posteriori and inductive, which means that it emerges from data and findings as a result of the conducted study.

### **1.8. Research Significance and Contribution**

The significance of this research includes two types of contribution: theoretical and

applied. The theoretical contribution of this research is in addressing the found research gaps, add to existing literature, and create future research opportunities. This research is amongst the first to examine affluent groups' experiences, perceptions and motivations when visiting luxury destinations in a qualitative approach. This is because the current literature on destination branding and tourism is not concerned with the consumer response and construct, as much as the functionality of the destination. The theoretical significance is in linking the notion of hedonic consumption with luxury destination branding, and contributing to the existing literature of destination branding and luxury tourism literature. This research will also contribute by further defining the relationship between hedonic consumption and experiential marketing concepts. A significant contribution will be in the new framework that links concepts and define new areas. These areas will be; linking myth making and cultural branding to destination branding literature, exploring the affluent groups' experiences in-depth, and defining the link to luxury and its symbolism and meanings.

As for the applied aspect of the research significance, this is for the benefit of destination marketing organisations (DMOs), service providers, and advertising groups. The outcome of this research is significant to an emerging type of destinations, which is heavily built on modern luxury. A luxurious and hedonic destination brand is considered to have an ephemeral effect, due to the nature of hedonism by definition. This pressures modern destinations to build and integrate a communication strategy that is based on evolving hedonic symbols and cues in order to gain a more permanent bond between the destination and the visitor. This research will present a strategic segmentation of affluent consumer groups based on Dubai visitors, making it the first research to present myth markets of



affluent groups in the context of destinations.

## **1.9.Overview of the Thesis**

The structure of this research will be as the following:

### **1.9.1. Chapter One: Introduction**

In the introduction chapter, the research background and current situation in the tourism industry will be discussed. Explaining the importance of tourism to a country's status clarifies the significance of the research problem and aim. The core concepts are discussed after that in this chapter to explain the main research area and help define the research gaps and research problem. After that, the cased destination Dubai is introduced in the research context section, discussing the profile and history of Dubai. This chapter then moves on to introduce the research main question and secondary questions, which aim to develop the main question's answer. To develop answers, it is important to clarify the aim and objectives of this research, which is discussed after the questions. The chapter then introduces the relevant scholarships that helped guide this research and the methodological approach that was applied using case study to investigate the phenomenon of Dubai's success as a luxury destination. The last section of this chapter is a brief discussion of the research significance and contribution, both theoretic and managerial.

### **1.9.2. Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The literature review chapter plays an important role in the guidance of conducting the research. This chapter looks into the destination marketing and branding, cultural branding and myth making, literature on travellers' motivations and behaviours, hedonic consumption and luxury, and experiential marketing. Each section will go into reviewing

current literature on related topics, linking them, and finding the correct areas that should be further researched.

### **1.9.3. Chapter Three: Methodology**

The methodology chapter presents the research philosophy and paradigm. The research applies an interpretive method by using the case study approach. The chapter defines and discussed the chosen research strategy. The data collection methods are focus groups and in-depth interviews. The researcher also uses photos of visitors as a supporting tool. The chapter discusses the sampling technique and presents an overview of the research participants. As for the data coding and analysis, it follows a thematic coding model, discussing thematic codes in findings chapters. Finally, the chapter presents how the generalisability, reliability and validity issues in the research were ensured, what the limitations are and what ethical issues to consider.

### **1.9.4. Chapter Four: Myth Markets of Hedonic Destination Brands**

This chapter attempts to answer sub-questions related to strategically segmenting Dubai visitors according to their behaviour and motivations. It is important to present an overview of myth markets and cultural branding model, as this theory helped guide the segmentation and analysis of these markets. The chapter presents three psychographic profiles of Dubai visitors as thematic codes. Each thematic code discussed in-depth in terms of who they are, their travel patterns, how they spend their stay and their lifestyles. The chapter concludes with contrasting the segments to find what they have in common and how they are different from each other.

### **1.9.5. Chapter Five: Hedonic Consumption and Enhancement of The Self**

This chapter is linked to sub-question concerned with symbolic meanings and hedonic consumption. What luxury means, and what results come from the trips of these groups is discussed. It presents an overview of symbolic consumption and tourism, enhancing the self through consumption, along with luxury consumption. The chapter links each of the found myth markets in the previous chapter, with their symbolic sought benefits on an individual, and social, level with their symbolic consumptions. The chapter then discusses the thematic codes extracted from the collected data to form shared consumption stages amongst them, and defines their different interpretations of each stage.

### **1.9.6. Chapter Six: Interactional Communication of Luxurious Destination Brands.**

This chapter discusses the communication aspect of the affluent groups' experiences in Dubai. This chapter presents communication efforts targeted at the participants, along with their communicational content to express their experience. The chapter discusses social media, social meaning and communities, and links destination branding to myth markets. An in-depth analysis of the communicated message of Dubai as a destination brand, how it is communicated to and amongst participants. The chapter discusses the thematic codes of communication formed by analysing the data.

### **1.9.7. Chapter Seven: The Luxury and Hedonic Destination Experience Framework Model Discussion.**

This chapter is where the research questions are answered. Each question is discussed to demonstrate how all themes come to form a holistic blueprint of understanding luxury

destination brands' visitors, and how these affluent consumers think, feel, and behave in the setting of a luxury brand. The suggested framework is introduced in this section, and it is discussed in-depth to form an overall link between the findings, the research problem, and current literature.

### **1.9.8. Chapter Eight: Conclusion**

The conclusion chapter presents a summary of the research. It discusses how the research questions have been answered and how the research objectives have been met. The chapter also discusses the theoretical and managerial contributions of the research. After that, the research limitations are presented, followed by the future research agenda.

**Chapter TWO: Literature Review**

## **2. Introduction**

This chapter reviews the current literature related to the research area. As this research is concerned with the experience of affluent consumers and their perceptions of luxurious destination brands, the review will firstly go through destination marketing literature and stakeholders to understand how destinations are operated and how destination brands are developed and communicated. This will help in defining the relationship between the destination brand and its consumers. It is essential to understand how these affluent consumers think and behave to know how they create bonds with luxury brands in general, and hedonic luxury destination brands specifically. This chapter discusses literature concerned with hedonism and hedonic consumption, the meaning of luxury and what it represents, and the importance of experience in luxury consumption. The literature review will also discuss the role of cultural branding in the formation of myth markets, in an attempt to draw the link between the affluent consumer culture and the consumption of luxury and hedonic destination brands.

This chapter explains destination brands and how the identity and image create the brand equity. This is done by communicating with an emotional and cultural approach to attract myth markets. Therefore, the chapter reviews the literature concerned with cultural branding before moving to the area of affluent consumer culture and luxury. The literature review draws the link between destination brands and consumers and their motivations, then narrows down to luxury, hedonism, and experience to focus on the area of this study, which is affluent consumers' perceptions when experiencing a luxury and hedonic destination brand.

## **2.1.Destination Marketing**

In 2018, an uninterrupted growth of over eight years in international tourism was recorded by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation's Annual report. International tourism grew by eighty-four million tourists in between 2016 and 2017. This demonstrates a high consistency of growth in the tourism industry (UNWTO, 2018). This part of the literature review will discuss Destination Marketing, Destination Stakeholders and Sustainability, Destination Branding, Destination Identity, Image and Equity, Destination Branding and its Components, Consumer Motivation, Consumer Traveller Behaviour, Consumer Traveller and Symbolic Benefits, and Consumer Traveller and Social Media.

Wahab, Crampon, and Rothfield (1976) presented the first definition of destination marketing: The management process that the National Tourist Organisations and/or tourist enterprises go through. The definition was later developed to include the communication of a combination of tourism products, services, and experiences that visitors encounter in a geographical area with political barriers (Buhalis, 2000; Boora and Gupta, 2019). Destination marketing enables tourism, which in return is coordinated within the area's strategic development plan by the destination marketing organisation (DMO), and directs the tourism optimisation to boost the overall benefits for the region (Pike, 2017; Pike and Ives, 2018). The existence of destination marketing organisations became crucial in the coordination of planning, development, and marketing of tourism (Morrison, 2013). Pike (2004) defined destination marketing organisations (DMO) as any organisation, at any level, which is responsible for the marketing of an identifiable destination. DMOs play a significant role in positioning the destination and communicating that position to targeted tourists (Michael, Reisinger, and Hayes, 2019).

Tourists are faced with a hyper-choice market when deciding on the destination. The competition between destinations in the tourism market has pressured the destinations into becoming more involved in applying place branding strategies and developing these strategies to present a unique selling proposition (Pike 2017; Michael *et al.*, 2019). According to Pike, Murdy, and Lings (2011), DMOs are encountering the ultimate challenge in reaching a differentiation that would affect the decision-making process on the consumer level, as these DMOs are in a cluttered market of competitors offering similar benefits. This crucial competition during the 1990s caused the discipline of customer relationship management (CRM) to surface as a vital tool in branding and in building a customer-driven strategy on the grounds of marketing. Subsequently, it evolved into co-creation and customer participation. Therefore, making a clear shift from one-way communication with stakeholders, to staying in touch with them to finally including them in the value creation process (Gronroos, 2017; 2020).

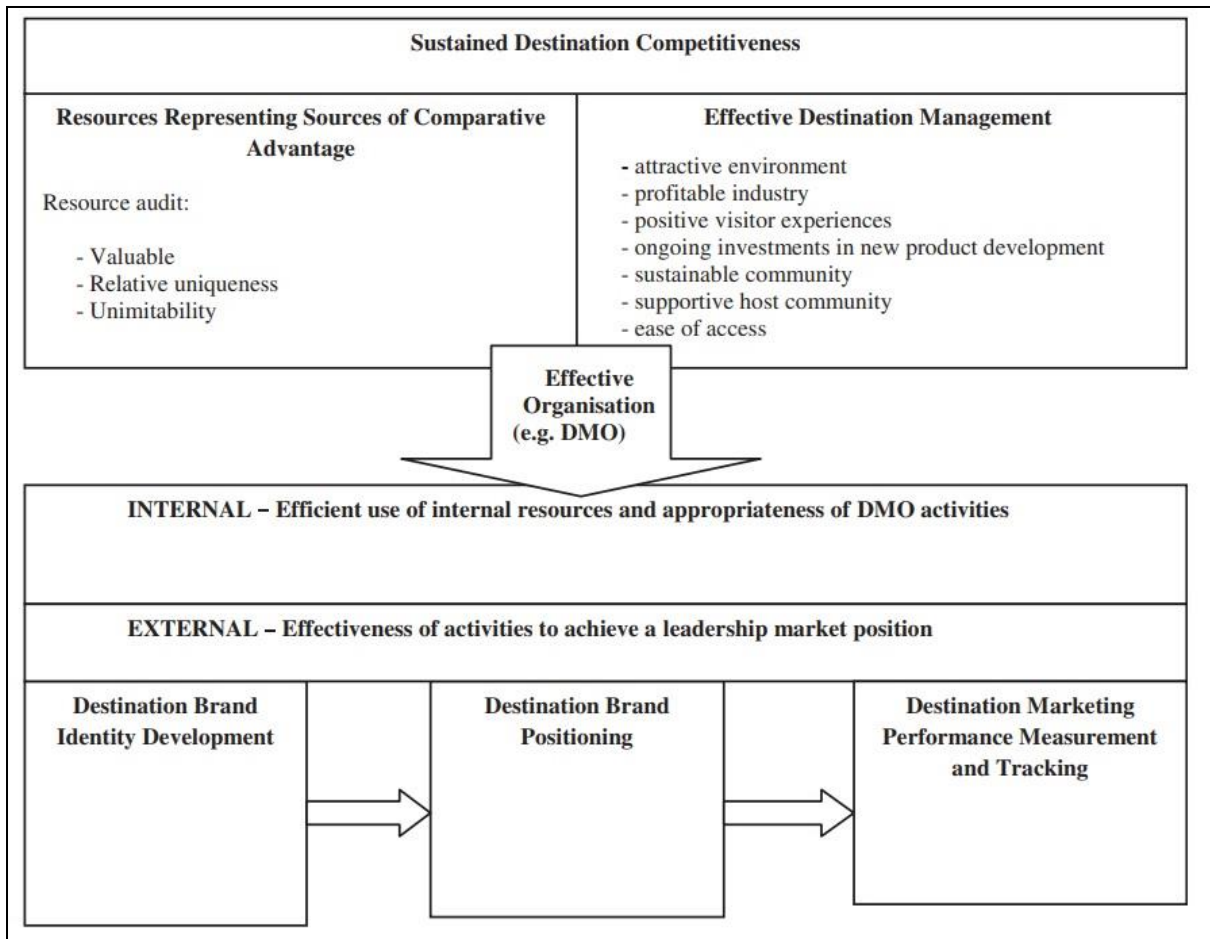
Pike and Page (2014) presented the first narrative analysis of destination marketing since the research area originated in 1973. They focused their paper on questioning the extent of responsibility that falls on DMOs concerning the competitiveness of the destination. According to Pike and Page (2014), destination marketers face limitations as they are unable to change the official name or geographic border of the destination they represent, they cannot control the quality of the actual 'visitor experience.' In comparison to the promised experience in marketing efforts, they do not have much control over the contact with visitors. Instead, they have to rely on survey responses and the reviews on social media; they have no control over the local society's acceptance of visitors, nor the attitude towards them in creating a tourism-friendly setting. Furthermore, destination marketers



have limited control over access issues such as airline agreements and the development of transportation infrastructure; they cannot influence the management of the natural environment. Some of the other limitations faced by destination marketers are that they have limited effect on stakeholders' product development and their prices and their marketing efforts. Lastly, they are profoundly affected by politicians and stakeholders for continuity of funding (Pike and Page, 2014).

All destinations aim to be at the top, and this creates destination competitiveness. Pike and Page (2014) proposed a destination marketing framework (see figure 2.1.). They argue that destination marketing must have two elements to achieve a sustained destination competitiveness. The first element is resources that have the potential of competitive advantage. A competitive advantage is anything considered to attract visitors (Denicolai, Cioccarelli, and Zuchella, 2010). As a starting point for any destination resource audit, the resource must be 'valuable' in terms of either cost-cutting or increasing profit or both. A resource of competitiveness must be 'unique' in relation to competitors, and finally 'inimitable', meaning not reproducible by competing destinations. The second element of sustained destination competitiveness is effective destination management, in which the competitive advantages would have no value if there were no deployment of organisation planning and management. An example of this is the case of Russia, which is rich in resources but lacks the appropriate representation and market position (Kimbu, 2011).

Figure 2.1. Destination Marketing Framework



Source: Pike and Page, (2014)

The suggested categories of success factors in effectively managing destinations are: an attractive environment, profitable industry, positive visitor experiences, ongoing investments in new product development, a sustainable community, a supportive host community, ease of access, and effective organisation (Pike and Page, 2014: p.209). The destination marketing framework suggests that the universal need for organisational effectiveness applies to both elements, and this is the primary concern of DMOs, and is analysed from two perspectives. The first perspective is internal, in which audits are taken according to the efficiency of resource used, the objectives it meets, and the suitability of activities. The second perspective is external, DMO performance and activities are

considered in terms of their effect on the destination's market competitiveness. This presents a vital role for the destination image and how it is positioned in the mind of consumers. The destination marketing framework then shifts to the external-effective organisation, and discusses the three core elements impacting the destination as a brand in the mind of consumers.

Branding destinations is more complicated than branding products for many reasons; the most important two are that destination marketers control only to some extent the delivery of the brand promise, due to the numerous stakeholders. The other reason is that, although the primary goal of branding is to motivate brand loyalty, the DMOs hardly get in touch with visitors to encourage a repeat visit. Destination branding will be discussed later in this chapter. As for the destination marketing framework, Pike and Page (2014) adopted Aaker's (1991) brand process, which presents three main components: (1) the brand identity, which is the desired image of the brand in the market; (2) brand image, which is the actual image held by consumers about the brand; and, (3) brand positioning, which is marketing communication efforts to achieve congruence between the brand identity and brand image. The framework suggests that the destination should develop a brand identity and communicate a clear position in the market. This must be measured and tracked in terms of performance; however, there is very little research in this area (Pike and Page, 2014).

Marketing destinations entails applying a customer focused approach, which requires highlighting the consumer traveller and focusing on their needs and interests, rather than focusing purely on the sales generated by this market. Building a relationship with visitors supports the goal of the destination as a brand, which is to provoke emotional triggers and

increase the pace of the repeat behaviour in visitors. This relationship is then extended to the stakeholders, who become part of the co-creation (Campelo *et al.*, 2014; Anh and Thuy, 2017; Gronroos, 2020). They therefore, make the destination marketing effort more focused on the integrated marketing communication approach which strategically adopts an identity-centred approach across all touch-points in a creative manner (Mak, 2011; Királová, 2019). Integrated marketing communication is defined as a process of creating and maintaining relationships with customers and stakeholders while controlling communication amongst these groups strategically across all functions in the business to encourage a data-driven and purposeful dialogue with them (Porcu, Barrio-Garcia and Kitchen, 2012; Orazi, Spry, Theilacker, and Vredenburg, 2017). The role of stakeholders and visitors becomes key in the brand identity creation; destination marketing, therefore, strategically guides this participation approach.

Seeing places as a products accounts for the services, attractions, infrastructures, activities and resources offered in the touristic destination. Any change in the demand in a tourism market may result in a change in the arrangement of this collection as a destination marketing response (Karavatzis *et al.*, 2017; Giovanardi *et al.*, 2018). This poses the risk of concentrating on the physical aspect of the place and treating it as a stagnant phenomenon when, in fact, the focus should also involve the intangible and dynamic nature of tourism destinations, which are culturally valuable phenomena (Lucarelli, 2018). Tourism is the most intangible aspect of the service industry; people save money and time in order to leave their stresses behind and purchase what later becomes a memory (Bhattacharya and Kumar, 2017; Das and George, 2018). Lichrou, O'Malley, and Patterson (2014) argue that the cultural context is what transforms the tangible environment into the

scenery. A narrative view identifies the culturally meaningful processes as those which transforms the physical and tangible parts of a place into a tourism destination (Lichrou *et al.*, 2008). Narrative is how the reality of society and individuals is built, (Megehee, and Spake, 2012; Lundqvist *et al.*, 2013; Mossberg and Eide, 2017), it is how a ‘destination’ is built, through incorporating this story across all stakeholders. This will be discussed further in this chapter.

### **2.1.1. Destination Stakeholders**

DMO operations are mainly marketing communications, and planning, implementing and monitoring this to communicate the destination brand position in the market. Nowadays, all marketing communication efforts must be consistent with the brand identity (Pike and Page, 2014). This includes all stakeholders involved in the brand co-creation process. Celuch (2019) defines stakeholders of destinations as: persons, or groups, who have an interest, whether directly or indirectly, in the operations of the destination marketing agencies. These groups can be recognised as significant stakeholder actors if they are potentially impacted, positively or negatively, by the destination activities. Also, if these persons or groups produce efforts that the DMO values, or if they have control over the existence of necessary resources of the DMO’s efforts, then they are considered as stakeholders (Ferrell *et al.*, 2010; Celuch, 2019; Wondirad *et al.*, 2020).

A stakeholder with direct interest could be anyone with benefiting party from the DMO and its members, to hotels, restaurants, attractions, and taxis, in addition to visitors and competing destinations. As for indirect stakeholders, these are categorised according to the strength of their impact on the destination marketing process. They range from strong, such as is the case with service industry suppliers, or weak like real estate agents, and those in

the legal and professional fields. They are still considered necessary because of the role they play in influencing the direct stakeholders' decisions. This falls under the proposed conceptual framework by Line and Wang (2017), where it is suggested that the market-orientation approach is considered in the destination marketing context, however, it lacks compatibility with the unique structure of destination marketing. This multi-stakeholder market orientation acknowledges the connectedness of all players; the multi-stakeholder approach views the stakeholder marketing as value-creation networks, this theory can be offered within the field of destination marketing (Line and Wang, 2017).

In a stakeholder-orientation approach, stakeholders act as the foundation for a broadened conception and theory of marketing management and a step broader than the market-orientation approach; the stakeholder perspective suggests that 'process' is most important and that all stakeholders play a role in the brand's value (Merz, He and Vargo, 2009; Gundlach and Wilkie, 2010). This is apparent in the tourism destination setting, when visitors and providers co-produce interaction and development experiences (Hankinson, 2007; Saraniemi and Kylanen, 2010). Conflicts can easily occur when some stakeholders take advantage of resources for short-term benefits. Finding a middle ground for all interests is difficult, if not impossible. However, it is crucial to long-term sustainability and the more diverse the stakeholders and customers, the more complex the brand becomes (Wondirad *et al.*, 2020).

Zehrer and Hallmann (2015) studied which factors destination suppliers consider more critical in competitiveness, and whether they are different amongst various stakeholders. They suggest that developing a destination is the responsibility of several private entrepreneurs, who can consequently have influence on their destination's competitive

edge in the market. Zehrer and Hallmann (2015) identified seven entrepreneur categories: hotels, restaurants, The DMO of that specific destination, transport companies, retailers, activity suppliers and 'others'. Therefore, the same kind of competitiveness amongst stakeholder categories exist amongst destinations. Moreover, the cooperation and relationship could happen amongst different categories and different stakeholders. This means that stakeholders have to work continuously on their collaborations to reach the continued success of their destination. Their research confirms literature that suggests that the destination's vision, mutual objectives and a successful plan, are required amongst stakeholders in order to achieve competitiveness (Waayers, Lee and Newsome, 2012; Wondirad *et al.*, 2020). The significant variables for competitiveness focus on the relationship with the consumers and what the stakeholders believe might be important for them (Zehrer and Hallmann, 2015).

Destinations are the most challenging units to manage and market. This is because of the complex nature of the relationship between local stakeholders on the one hand, and the stakeholders and tourists on the other (Buhalis and Amaranggana, 2015; Johnson, Rickly and McCabe, 2020). Another reason is the diversity of stakeholders involved in the production of tourism market offerings (Pike, 2017). The destination experience involves places, resources and a mixture of tourism facilities and services, and each of these fundamental parts belong to people living in the destination, with their interests, whether personal or professional. Tourists, however, perceive the destination as a brand containing a combination of sellers and services. Before visiting a destination, an image of the destination is built by the tourist, along with expectations, which are created and fed by personal experiences, word of mouth, online reviews, advertisements and common

interests (Munar and Jacobsen, 2014; Stylidis, Shani and Belhassen, 2017). Tourists ‘consume’ the destination as an experience that is shaped by many role players. They encounter circumstances and situations that with a variety of tourism service providers, including taxi drivers, hotels, restaurant and café waiters and local attractions, such as museums, shopping centres, theatres, landscapes and parks (Hritz and Cecil, 2019). Experiencing encounters creates an overall experience of the place, which affects the decision of the tourist to revisit or otherwise (Buhalis and Amaranggana, 2015).

## **2.2.Destination Branding**

A commonly used definition of destination brands is Ritchie and Ritchie’s (1998) definition: a name, symbol, logo, wordmark or other graphic that not only differentiates, but also identifies the place; it carries the idea of a memorable travel experience that is solely related to that place (p.18). This definition restricts a brand to being a mere symbol of the place; it suggests that a brand is linked to differentiation over competitors. Destination brands are not simply images and are much more than simply logos. They are a carrier of the destination’s identity and are communicated through branding tools and marketing communication (Qu, Cao, and Xu, 2020). Further developments of this definition went on to include a more general view of all activity that helps to mould the brand image, consistency, and emotional responses to the brand which play a role in reducing the purchase risk in tourists (Hashim, Mohd Yasin and Ya’kob, 2020). Other definitions of value in marketing literature, describe value as the exchange between benefits and expenses, they also include a third element, which relates to competition, emphasising that customers evaluate and compare alternatives when making a decision.



Accordingly, the concepts of *brand* and *value* appear to have common structures, and, therefore, both brand and value co-create (Iglesias, Ind and Alfaro, 2017).

Destination branding as a research area contains multiple components, such as product, service, experience, corporate branding, and diverse customers (Balakrishnan, Nekhili and Lewis, 2011; Karolak, 2018). Permana (2018) suggested that the difficulty of studying destination branding is because a brand image is a person's perception and interpretation. Brand image is what makes the perceptual difference when destinations are similar. Therefore, there is a close correlation between a favourable image and the intention to visit, as tourists perceive the destination as a brand that consists of suppliers and service (Permana, 2018; Papadimitriou, Kaplanidou and Apostolopoulou, 2018; Perpiña, Camprubí and Prats, 2019). Tourism can play a role in confirming or transforming a target customer's self-image and helps fulfil a social need when matched with the customer's reference group (Balakrishnan, Nekhili and Lewis, 2011). Research shows that consumers use projective techniques to relate brand image characteristics (Yolal, 2018).

Merz *et al.* (2009) divide the evolution of branding theory into four parts that are used when understanding the development of the destination branding theory and practice. If we were viewing the brand and its value from different angles, the first angle would be goods-focus; brand value is embedded in physical goods. The second angle is value-focus; this perspective emphasises the creation of the brand image for the customer. The third angle is relationship-focus, which highlights the brand relationships and the brand as a promise. Finally, the stakeholder-focus acknowledges brands as a dynamic and social process between the brand and all stakeholders (Merz *et al.*, 2009). A successful destination is one that finds the balance between the right target customers and locally provided tourism

products and services. For tourism destination brands to compete, they must offer a unique selling proposition for travellers, and this can be achieved by extensive research to formulate the tourist package that will fit the expectations of the targeted customers (Garrod and Fyall, 2017). Marketing research also helps shape the destination brand image and directs the tools used in communicating this image to targeted customers. Destination branding research should be expanded upon, before, during and after the tourist visits (Ryan and Page, 2012; Mainolfi and Marino, 2018; Solomon, 2019). This data should be collected and coordinated by multiple parties involved with the tourist to ensure an informative and wholesome result and to eventually guide the tourism marketing efforts and strategies of the destination (Robinson, 2012).

The importance of defining concepts in this section is clear to avoid overlapping. Research clarifying concepts like ‘destination branding’, ‘nation branding’, ‘city branding’ and ‘place branding’ and the relationships between them seems to be blurred (Pike, 2008; Balakrishnan, 2008; Briciu and Briciu, 2019). However, it is agreed amongst scholars for the most part ‘destination brand’ symbolises the tourism dimension of a place, putting it under ‘place branding’ as a subfield (Hanna and Rowley, 2012; Kasapi and Cela, 2017). ‘Place’ refers to a holistic concept, and that includes ‘destination’ (UNWTO, 2009). The term ‘destination’ branding suggests tourism. The literature defining ‘city branding’ on the other hand, agrees on the complexity of the concept and therefore, attempts to give explanations as opposed to definitions (Kasapi and Cela, 2017; Bagla, A. (2019). A city brand means that consistent brand factors should be established to maintain a positive image to be uniquely associated with the city as the destination (François *et al.*, 2017). City branding is applied in cities that wish to rebuild and redefine their image (Morgan and

Pritchard, 2007; Todua, 2019). Moving on to the definition of ‘nation’ branding, Anholt coined the term “Nation Brand” in the 1990s and defined it as the peoples’ perceptions of a nation’s capabilities. This includes areas such as export, governance, tourism, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, and people (Giannopoulos, Piha, and Avlonitis, 2011). Moreover, since ‘tourism’ plays a key part in the notion of nation branding, the link with destination branding as a concept becomes clear. It shows a relationship of ‘field-subfield’ between the two (Giannopoulos *et al.*, 2011; Briciu and Briciu, 2019).

From this, branding, (whether it is a destination, place, nation, or city), is about turning an area into a product (Morgan and Pritchard, 2011; Vukić, 2013). It is important to construct the frame of the destination marketing and destination branding relationship. In an interview by Place Brand Observer (2015) with Tom Buncle, marketing chief of destination Scotland and managing director of Yellow Railroad Consulting, he explains that a destination brand cannot be created. Destinations like Las Vegas and Dubai are different cases as they are manufactured. However, a destination, according to Buncle (2015), is a place that has existed for generations and known for its natural landscape, culture, locals, history, and buildings. After defining what is considered a destination, branding it is about identifying assets in destinations that are unique and strong enough to compete for potential visitors. Buncle (2015) elaborates on the stories associated with those assets are marketing communications. To sum up, the destination brand is ‘who’ this destination is, and destination marketing is everything done to communicate who the destination is in terms of identity –to reflect a strong brand equity.

When it comes to communicating ‘who’ the destination is, it is important to understand the main components of the destination brand (DBC) according to what customers value

(Hankinson, 2005). Brand associations of various market offerings are different and are influenced by brand familiarity. This finding suggested that DBCs might change as consumers move up various stages of the decision-making process, since the consumption of destination sub-products will differ during the entire process (Wearing *et al.*, 2016). Firstly, *functional brand components* are originally tangible and are commonly defined as being measurable (Hankinson, 2005). Functional destination brand components depend on the core function (or service) of the brand, which is linked to practical needs (Vinyals-Mirabent, Kavaratzis, and Fernández-Cavia, 2019). It was once estimated that twenty percent of the products' perceived image comes from the functional performance of that product (Wood, 2007). Secondly, *symbolic brand components* are generally extrinsic to the product and are linked to the intangible components. They are the benefits surrounding the core product and are found in the non-product characteristics. Symbolic DBCs satisfy a higher level of need, many authors mention needs such as: expressiveness, pride, prestige, emotional standards and social acceptance (Balakrishnan, Nekhili, and Lewis, 2011; Rowley and Hanna, 2019). Since they are psychological, they cannot be directly observed. Lastly, *experiential components* may be seen in how the brand relates to the customer self-concept, emotions, uniqueness, customer lifestyle and standard of living. Experiential components are defined as symbolic components that represent the needs of a higher level. In the three-levelled brand model, higher levels represent emotional and value services, which are simply non-product attributes that surround the core product function (Tasci, 2016). These brand associations are created by destination marketers to build a destination identity, to communicate a desirable image that will increase the overall equity. This is discussed in the following section.

### **2.2.1. Destination Brand Identity, Image and Equity**

Cai (2002) was the first to differentiate between the development of destination brand identity and its image, suggesting that the relationship between a brand and its image is through brand identity, and thus making it key in destination brand building. Destination image has been heavily researched; however, there is little literature on its branding and destination brand identity (Tsaour, Yen and Yan, 2016). The brand identity is the vision the destination aims to create, as perceived in the marketplace. A brand identity includes the values, main competitors, positioning statement, characteristics, symbolic and emotional benefits, targeted group(s), heritage and experiences promised by the destination. Destination brand identity is also defined as the soul of a place and determined by the interaction of the brand's organisations, its place and its stakeholders (Hanna and Rowley, 2011; Tsaour, Yen and Yan, 2016). Culture, identity and image of a place are constantly interacting, in a physical and emotional sense, and with internal and external stakeholders in the place-identity and branding process (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). In the development of brand identity, some authors note that brand personality might be applied to destinations (Usakli and Baloglu, 2011; Pereira, Correia and Schutz, 2012).

There is very little literature on the subject of demonstrating destination brand identity currently available. However, many DMOs publish their outlines online, for example, Visit Scotland, Tourism Queensland, Tourism New Zealand (Pike and Page, 2014). To classify elements of destination brand identity, Saraniemi and Komppula (2019) propose a modified view of Saraniemi's (2009) claim that the central components of the destination brand identity are the destination's culture, environment and stakeholders. Destination structure includes organisational structure and products unique to the destination;

destination strategy; and destination communication efforts undertaken by the DMO, for instance. They increase the core components to values, meanings, history and stories and their myths, location and natural and socio-cultural resources. The importance of interactions between internal and external stakeholders becomes vital in creating the image and experience. Lastly, the marketing communications expand to include designs of physical places to create memorable experiences (Saraniemi and Komppula, 2019). The fact remains that designing a brand identity for as large an entity as a destination is a complicated process (Anholt, 2010; Tsaor, Yen and Yan, 2016; Saraniemi and Komppula, 2019). The main challenges are faced when effectively involving the local society in building the brand identity, when agreeing on a route with a diverse and extensive variety of dynamic stakeholders, and finally, when collaborating with them to support the brand position and brand identity communication (Pike and Page, 2014). All brand associations that are unique to the organisation and carry its symbolic benefits, heritage, and the experiences it promises, are perceived by the consumer (Keller, 2003; Sääksjärvi and Samiee, 2011).

There are several arguments about the relationship between destination brand identity and destination image (Wong and Teoh, 2015). In earlier research in the area, some researchers, such as Pritchard and Morgan (2001); and Lim and Weaver (2012), suggest that they are closely related. Others (Cai, 2002; Jensen and Korneliussen, 2002; Govers and Go, 2003), suggest that a destination brand is not a destination image, although it is built through it. However, there is now a general agreement that the relationship between destination brand and image is an interrelated one, and the image is a core element when developing a destination brand (Pike and Page, 2014; Folgado-Fernández *et al.*, 2017). Chen and Tsai

(2007) define the destination image as a combination of destination brand, entertainment, nature and culture, and landscape. It is a representation of knowledge, feelings and overall perception of a particular location in the consumer's mind. On the other hand, Kim (2018) suggests that a favourable image of a destination is created by the destination's attractive landscape, shopping opportunities, cultural exchange, infrastructure, safety, and activities (Madden, Rashid, and Zainol, 2016).

Other researchers relate the brand image to the consumer's feelings and thoughts, which will eventually influence their choice. To them, brand image is what differentiates brands in the mind of consumers (Severi and Ling, 2013). Whereas brand identity involves the identification of an organisation, and its consistency is formed by features such as organisation-personality, culture, position, vision, and relationships (Mindrut *et al.*, 2015). Gunn (1972) was one of the first to identify the different ways in which cognitive images are formed. Gunn's (1972) seven-phase theory was used as a base for the conceptual framework of many studies. The theory entailed a constant building and adaptation of images that are conceived at various levels, specifically: organic, induced, and modified-induced. The organic image is created by gathered information from unbiased sources such as schools, books, television, and the experience of acquaintances. The induced image is created by marketing efforts, such as advertising and brochures form tourists' services. The modified-induced image is the result and evaluation of the visitor's actual experiences of the destination. The confirmation of the traveller's pre-visit image of the destination inspires confidence in the brand; the traveller would even consider repeating the visit.

When a traveller is satisfied, it is very difficult to change their perception of the destination's image. In marketing in general, and tourism specifically, destinations must

meet or exceed the expectation of travellers, which were based on pre-images and this would result in their satisfaction (Endah *et al.*, 2017; Chenini and Touaiti, 2018; Almeida-García *et al.*, 2020). To a traveller, their personal experience, along with recommendations through personal connections, are usually seen as the most reliable sources of destination information; they reaffirm satisfaction with the visit and the reality of the destination. Images are slow to change; therefore, constant monitoring of traveller images is important –this is the importance of the destination image and how it is recognised in tourism literature. When tourists are faced with two destinations within the same price group, image is what influences the destination choice (Wu and Li, 2017; Almeida-García *et al.*, 2020). Destinations nowadays face rapid competition in tourism; therefore, they each must create a unique and distinctive identity in order to attract travellers (Kyriakou and Aspridis, 2016). Due to the difficulty of being tangibly unique, (in addition to how powerful emotional and personal marketing can be as mentioned earlier in this paper), destination marketers utilise the power tool of branding and creating an image. Tourism images influence a tourist during the decision-making process, and due to the effect, they have on the final destination choice, tourism images are vital (Lee, Lee, and Lee, 2014). They are also important because of the influence they have on the level of satisfaction the tourist experiences during the visit, and this plays a role in terms of creating positive word of mouth and recommendations, and a role in the tourist’s decision to revisit. Different image components are the reason behind the preference of a destination given the range of choice in the chosen category, while, depending on the type of destination; an affective image works as a mediator for shaping the destination image as a whole (Stylos *et al.*, 2016; Almeida-García *et al.*, 2020).



In their study, Lim and Weaver (2014) found that an affective image was strongly related to two out of the three destinations included in their study. South Carolina linked to the ‘South Carolina beef’ and Florida linked to ‘Florida oranges,’ while Georgia did not link as strongly to the image of ‘Georgia peaches.’ Cognitive images impact on the products associated with the brand of each destination. Regarding Georgia, the results showed that the respondents’ previous experience of Georgia was the lowest percentage amongst the three destinations. The results also showed that the destination image could influence the tourists’ preferences for certain products that are associated with a destination brand. Lim and Weaver (2014) suggest that the impact of a destination image can be transferred to products associated with that destination brand, and this is what they considered to be a brand extension. Stern (2006) explained the metaphorical meaning of brands as follows: when a brand is compared to a tangible object, and the brand’s attributes can be compared to human beings, a brand stimulates tourists’ cognitive word pictures. Tourists have a group of mental associations in the metaphor affective brand image with products associated with the brand.

Communicating a brand identity with meanings creates a brand image that carries out favourable associations and embodies a perceived quality to result in brand loyalty (Severi and Ling, 2013). Destinations create a brand identity to achieve a favourable image in the mind of potential tourists, as this impacts the overall brand equity. The aim of this is to build a bond with visitors that will turn them from consumers to advocates who participate in the process of creating value for the brand. Brand equity is the total perception of a brand in the marketplace and is driven mostly by its positioning and personality (Sääksjärvi and Samiee, 2011). Brand equity is the value that is added to the brand as a result of high brand

loyalty, awareness, perceived quality, and associations (Severi and Ling, 2013). Brand equity is multidimensional; it includes functionality, shared image, significance, trustworthiness, and identifications (Anselmsson *et al.*, 2017). This means that brand equity is the extension of brand loyalty and brand knowledge (Krishnakumar, 2009; Shamma and Hassan, 2011; Mokhtar *et al.*, 2018). Brand equity can be measured from a financial perspective by calculating the organisation's market value. It can also be measured by customers' reactions to brands names (Severi and Ling, 2013). Brand equity is an essential success measurement tool to the organisation because the perception of a brand affects both the financial and non-financial aspects of an organisation (Shamma and Hassan, 2011; Mokhtar *et al.*, 2018). Brand equity includes: (1) brand loyalty: which is a behavioural response that is manifested by decision-making processes over time in comparison to alternative brands; (2) brand personality: used by consumers to express and enhance their personalities, (3) brand associations: what representations the brand stands for, (4) brand awareness: brand recognition and recall, and (5) perceived quality: performance of the offering meeting the consumer's expectation (Gill and Darwa, 2010; Lee and Leh, 2011).

Brand equity is, therefore, the overall value that is added when the brand enjoys high awareness amongst current and potential target market(s). Communicating a brand identity with meanings creates a brand image that carries favourable associations and perceived quality to result in brand loyalty (Severi and Ling, 2013). Destinations create a brand identity to achieve a favourable image in the mind of potential tourists and be clearly positioned in the marketplace. This is an aim to build a bond with visitors that will turn them from consumers to advocates who participate in the process of creating value for the

brand. Building the consumer expectations is a promise a destination can then fulfil during the visitor's experience, which will influence the level of satisfaction. This will be discussed in the following section.

### **2.2.2. Consumer Traveller Behaviour and Motivation (Authenticity, Experience and Co-creation)**

Consumer behaviour is one of the most researched topics in the marketing and tourism fields, usually described by terms such as 'travel behaviour' or 'tourist behaviour'. Consumer behaviour concepts in the field of tourism address all activities involved in acquiring, using and disposing of market offerings; this also includes decision processes pre and post these activities (Engel *et al.*, 1995). Existing literature concerned with travel behaviour could be described as divided (1) because individual studies have reproduced some consumer behaviour models taken from marketing and general management fields and used them in tourism research. (2) Another reason is that the generalisation of research findings is obstructed because results of multiple studies cannot be compared due to differences in the research backgrounds (i.e. tourist types and/ or destinations). (3) Also, the experimental approach is in its early stages, often resulting in mistaken causality effects. Lastly (4) limited longitudinal and/or holistic approaches to understanding the behaviour have been applied (Cohen *et al.*, 2014).

Travel motivation is what triggers people's behaviour; it is a major force in persuading tourist behaviours (Hsu and Huang, 2008; Pearce, 2011; Whyte, 2017). It is defined as an internal psychological trigger that comes from an unfulfilled need, which then pushes the person to take action in order to fulfil that need (Yousaf, Amin, and Santos, 2018).

The consumer decision-making process involves a multistage process in making a purchase decision and in relation to this process, researchers in the area of tourism and researchers in the consumer behaviour area have had similar observations and speculated that a traveller's travel purchase process is not a single-stage process, in-fact, it is multi-phased (Pereira, Gupta, and Hussain, 2019). An influential recreation behaviour model by Clawson and Knetsch (1966) suggests that an individual's travel behaviour can be understood through a five-phase action; it starts with the (1) anticipation (arranging and thinking about the trip). Then, (2) travel to the destination, (3) on-site behaviour and activity, (4) return travel (going back home), and lastly, (5) recollection of the entire trip (reflection on memories). The first phase is the most important in travel and tourism marketing promotion, image building and encouraging actions by tourists, here is where it has been suggested that the destination image is a major predictor of intentions to visit (Phau, Quintal and Shanka 2014; Madden, Rashid, and Zainol, 2016). When making a decision, a traveller depends on the mental images associated with the destination (Pike, Kotsi, and Tossan, 2018).

The tourist's satisfaction is defined as the result of the sum of interactions that occur in the traveller's experience at a destination, compared to the expectations they had about the destination (Albayrak and Caber, 2018). Therefore, the travel experience is a continuous interaction between the traveller and the social situation and physical environment (Kim and Chen, 2019). Evaluation of the satisfaction level, (or indeed dissatisfaction level), is considered to be achieved by the assessment of the difference between the expected image and the actual experience. On the other hand, the traveller's final built image is based on the satisfaction level of the traveller's experience, and therefore, image alterations of the

destination occur. Much research of tourism and recreation has studied the reasons behind people's travel and the individual's travel purchase behaviour, and has focused on the image of a touristic destination and the tourist's perception of an attitude towards a destination (San Martín and Del Bosque, 2008; Whyte, 2017).

Consumer satisfaction and loyalty are behaviours highly determined by consumer expectations (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996). Discrepancy theory suggests that the satisfaction of a consumer is determined by the difference between perceived and expected experiences, and actual experiences (Andereck *et al.*, 2012). Tourist experience and satisfaction have been considered a result of the authenticity of cultural attractions (Ramkissoon and Uysal, 2011). The experience is more memorable when tourists perceive authenticity and a sharp cultural contrast; this is moderated by the visitor's characteristics and ability to adapt (Antón *et al.*, 2019). Authenticity is essential in the tourism area because of the experiential nature of tourist services (Sidali and Hemmerling, 2014). It is, however, a complex construct widely researched in many areas and has been associated with terms like genuine, real, trustworthy, tradition or origin (Antón *et al.*, 2019). In the context of tourism, there is currently general agreement regarding the notion that authenticity is not based on a fixed and closed understanding of place and culture, but that the authenticity of the experience is subjective and is determined by visitor perception (Castéran and Roederer, 2013; Sidali and Hemmerling, 2014). When consumers look for authenticity in market offerings and experiences, within themselves, this is called "authenti-seeking" (Yeoman, 2007). Authenticity is an important measure to tourists when evaluating their travel experiences (Chang *et al.*, 2011), though not all of them search for it with the same degree of intensity (Özdemir and Seyitoglu, 2017).

Research suggests that heritage, culture, natural landscapes and cuisine, can be unique assets that demonstrate the potential to attract authenticity seekers (Chang *et al.*, 2011). Notably, authenticity is a personal characteristic, as it is an evaluation unique to the person (Hillel *et al.*, 2013; Newman and Dhar, 2014) which people must experience and determine for themselves (Gilmore and Pine, 2007). The interest of many tourists has shifted from the usual tangible sights to see, to the desire to experience the intangible expressions of culture, thus increasingly tourists look for expressive experiences filled with meanings (Goolaup *et al.*, 2018; Antón *et al.*, 2019). Tourism activities are considered creators of experiential authenticity (Yeoman *et al.*, 2007). This is linked to tourist loyalty, where perceived authenticity and cultural contrast result in a joyful and memorable experience, and so positively influence future tourist intention to recommend the experience and/ or repeat it (Kolar and Zabkar, 2010). From ‘personal experience’, and according to the concept of customer experience management or CEM – developed by Schmitt (1999) (cited in Keller and Lehmann, 2006; Hakala and Lemmetyinen, 2011), places when considered as a brand fall into five forms of experience category. These five categories of personal experience are defined as: (1) sensory experience (sensory perception), (2) felt experience (emotions), (3) thought experience (creativity and cognition), (4) action experience (physical way of behaving and lifestyle) and (5) relation experience (with the locals and/or their culture).

According to Gnoth (2002), emotional relationships are the key factor in creating a nation brand, as this is where geographic spaces develop meanings. This is in the emotions and associations people have when thinking of a geographic space. The co-creation concept also applies to citizens by involving and allowing them to select what they believe should

represent their nation (Hakala and Lemmetyinen, 2011). The end-user, in this case, the tourists, are building the nation brand. Therefore, a nation brand must relate to them by translating its values through emotional benefits (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). The identity of people drives place brands, and focusing on their needs and wants would be reflected in the nation brand and its creation (Campelo *et al.*, 2014).

When tourists' experiences are unique, authentic and memorable, this may encourage them to share their experiences on social media platforms and therefore generate electronic word of mouth (Kim, 2018). From this, the notion of value co-creation is defined as the combined efforts where consumers and organisations improve in some respects (Anh and Thuy 2017). The focus in tourism has shifted recently to emphasise all forms of involvement by the tourists, as opposed to the more passive consumer model of previous years. (Pera, 2017). Tourists are not only consumers in a destination; they actively engage with it to produce their own experiences (Miles, 2014). Tourists become a part of the making process of the places they visit (Richards, 2011). Visitors who review service providers in the tourist destination play a major role in the co-creation process of these companies; one traveller's experience can become available to numerous community members and, consequently, guides their future purchase behaviour (Shaw, Bailey and Williams, 2011). How consumers take part in the co-creation, meanings, values, and experiences with providers through consumption is an area of growing interest amongst researchers in the tourism field (Cabiddu *et al.*, 2013). Vargo and Lusch (2008) have compared the traditional goods-dominant logic of marketing with the service-dominant logic suggesting that customers become co-creators of value and have demonstrated that the importance has shifted from tangible goods to intangible experiences and relationships with customers (Vargo and

Lusch, 2008; Vargo *et al.*, 2008). Co-creation of services is viewed as the new way of creating value, for customers and service providers; this happens when the tourist is able to co-construct the service or experience to better-fit goals and needs (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

Value co-creation refers to a collaborative process in which consumers and firms improve in some respects (Anh and Thuy, 2017; Lee and Kim, 2019). Service-dominant logic researchers argue that value comes from collective interactions between service providers and consumers (Vargo and Lusch 2008). This view suggests that frequent interactions, open communication, and constant exchange of communication are drivers of value co-creation (Prebensen and Xie 2017). It has also been argued, however, that value is an idea based on the experience that results from interactions of various players in numerous stages (Lee and Kim, 2019). More specifically, value-in-use by customers is subjective to their experiences with staff and employees-value delivered by service providers like hotels (O’Cass and Sok, 2015). In this view, interactive experiences are the drivers of value co-creation. Consumers can co-create value within brand communities, as value is visible when it is portrayed and controlled by customers; this enriches consumer engagement and builds brand equity. Therefore, organisations can develop added value to their brand by productively utilising willing customers as resources (Schau *et al.*, 2009).

Brand customers sharing their experience with others; become directly involved in the life of the product. The process creates meaning to the brand in co-creating its identity and symbolic value. Working customers represent consumers who create cultural and meaningful value to market offerings, and by this, consumers add to the value of brands (Cova and Dalli, 2009). This means that there is a new approach that recognises brands as



social practices that comprise of multiple stakeholders, and this creates a new focus on how brand value is co-produced with consumers (Brodie *et al.*, 2009; Hatch and Schultz, 2010; Frow and Payne, 2011; Iglesias, Ind, and Alfaro, 2017). Interactions between destinations and consumers co-create their identity, and in order to achieve this, these consumers must be highly motivated (Black and Veloutsou, 2017).

### **2.2.3. Consumer Traveller and Social Media**

Technological advances transform communication amongst consumers from what was private and only shared within a small circle of contacts, to a global platform shared by tourist and firms. This web 2.0 growth allowed for ‘real-time’ posting and sharing of tourism experiences, this, in return, fuelled personal virtual identities (Munar, 2010). Social media is an important analysis tool for analysing tourists’ attitudes; the rising number of purchases and recommendations to others proves this. Social media allows tourists to share their opinions and experiences through various platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. This type of transparency in self-presentation could influence the brand’s reputation and image positively or negatively (Surugiu *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, Web 2.0 communication can hardly be described as B2C communication; in fact, it is growing into a C2C setting. This fact indicates the need to execute strategies and tools based on the user-generated content (Fotis *et al.* 2012).

There is a lack of an official definition for social media (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010); it can be explained as Internet-based platforms that contain consumer-generated content. It contains impressions in multimedia formats created by consumers, usually about experiences, and shared online for easy access by other impressionable consumers

(Blackshaw, 2006). A summary of thirty definitions in 2011 (updated 2020), was collected by Cohen (2020) from up to eighty social media experts. They are grouped into these thematic considerations (1) social media consist of online tools, applications, platforms and media, and therefore depends on information technology; (2) social media is made up of peer-to-peer communication networks, which enable the interactive web's content formation, cooperation and sharing by applicants and the public, which, in turn, can introduce both general and considerable changes to communication channels amongst communities and individuals; and, (3) social media connects users, who turn into a virtual community affecting people's behaviours and real life.

Social media sites have become a significant source of information that helps travellers in planning their trips, and might ultimately guide their decision-making process and the way they behave (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Hudson and Thal, 2013). Potential visitors trust experiences shared by others, and will be significantly influenced by them in making their final decisions in travel plans (Fotis *et al.*, 2012). Different users of social media have different influences on tourists, “travel opinion leaders” or “central travellers” have a significant impact on the delivery of information to other users, due to their broader travel experience (Yoo *et al.*, 2011). For this, many social media platforms encourage consumers in posting and sharing their travel-related comments, opinions, and personal experiences, which then serve as information for others. Tourism is an information-focused field, and it is essential to understand changes in technologies and consumer behaviour that impact the dissemination and availability of travel-related information (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). It has been suggested that understanding the structure of online tourism-related information available to tourists is a significant step for the development of successful marketing

strategies and improved information systems in tourism (Xiang *et al.*, 2008; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010).

Web 2.0 has an impact on tourist behaviour due to enabling visitors to create, communicate, interact and share their experiences (Cabiddu *et al.*, 2013; Cheng and Edwards, 2015). Travel websites, i.e. Travel 2.0, emerged due to the tremendous influence Web 2.0 had on the tourism sector, travel 2.0 allowed tourists to share their experiences (Miguéns *et al.* 2008). The significance of social media in the tourism sector is due to the trust travellers place in other travellers' opinions and experiences made available by the digital social interactions among traveller communities in social media platforms (Munar and Jacobsen, 2014; Dijkmans *et al.*, 2015; Hudson *et al.*, 2015). TripAdvisor, for example, has become a popular platform for seeking advice and recommendations by tourists; hence, it is considered a social media platform (Cabiddu *et al.*, 2013; Munar and Jacobsen, 2014). TripAdvisor often influences the decision-making process of travellers, and it has an immense effect the popularity of tourism businesses, and hotels more specifically (Miguéns *et al.* 2008).

Social media platforms, in particular, are where social media influencers were born. These influencers are opinion leaders to their groups, and have a powerful influence on buying into the brand. Influencer marketing generally refers to communicating and executing marketing strategies by employing individuals who influence actual and potential customers (Brown and Hayes, 2008; Ge and Gretzel, 2018). Social media influences different stages of the decision-making process for a tourist. Traveller's go through the following stages when making a decision: (1) consider, (2) evaluate, (3) buy, and (4) enjoy, advocate and bond (Hudson and Thal, 2013). Social media is used in the

first stage by DMOs to engage and encourage the consideration of travel decision-makers; campaigns are increasingly aiming to drive traffic to tourism websites (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009). The second stage is when consumers reach out to marketers and other sources for information; this is where online brand communities play a major role in evaluating options (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006). The buying stage is more likely to occur online, given that the travel sector accounts for around a third of all global e-commerce activities (Carey *et al.*, 2012). After purchasing, consumers usually begin a deep brand connection as they interact with the brand and its experience. They enter a self-initiated, extended relationship with the brand, sharing their experience with it online through social media. In this scenario, social media makes the “evaluate” and “advocate” stages increasingly important (Court *et al.*, 2009).

Social media have created a place for consumers of similar interests to come together and form a community that share trusted opinions, experiences and recommendations (Hudson *et al.*, 2015). Travel communities are on platforms like Facebook, Airbnb, and TripAdvisor. In the past, cultural innovation came from the side-lines of society, from marginal groups, social movements, and artistic circles that challenged tradition. The media were the mediators between the conventional and the new in markets. Social media has changed everything and merged geographically scattered cultures and communities. According to Holt (2016), cultural influence became extensive and direct. The new crowdcultures come in two forms: (1) subcultures, incubating new ideologies and practices, and (2) art worlds, which come up with new and significant shifts in entertainment. While organisations are finding it challenging to develop a branding model that works on social media, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat

seem to be leaders in driving culturally relevant moves. The majority of brands, on the other hand, are acting like cultural mutes, despite substantial investments. Brands must start shifting their focus away from the platforms themselves and towards the real power: crowdcultures. The lines between consumption, culture, and ideology are blurrier than ever as brands enter cultural and social arenas, where they function as identity symbols carrying worldviews (Pineda, Sanz-Marcos, and Gordillo-Rodríguez, 2020). By utilising the power in crowdculture, organisations and succeed in cultural relevance with cultural branding (Holt, 2016).

### **2.3.Cultural Branding and Myth Markets**

Cultural branding in a socio-cultural context suggests that functional products can generate symbolic values (Holt, 2004; Holt and Cameron, 2010). Cultural branding offers a theoretical framework that outlines the relationship between the consumption of symbolic value, and its social and ideological dimensions (Pineda *et al.* 2020). Cultural branding is based on the role that culture plays in creating brand value through meanings attached to products and brands. These meanings are given to brands by cultural environments therefore, associating consumption with social relationships. This means that brands are influenced heavily by cultural dynamics (Heding *et al.*, 2020). Brands' cultures and meanings are suggested to have surpassed commercial success and have become a culture of their own, meaning they hold far more value in the socio-cultural context than their product category (Batey, 2015). The symbolic dimension of branding is associated with the 'cultural forms' concept. This means that seeing brands as cultural forms is recognising that branding is a particular type of communication, which tells stories in a market offering

setting, directed at consumers, and promising to satisfy unfulfilled desires and needs (Cayla and Arnould, 2008; Pineda *et al.*, 2020).

Torelli *et al.* (2010) identify three main themes the definition of cultural brands: they are rich in cultural symbolism, and: (1) they symbolise culturally significant values, needs, and desires; (2) they are associated with various elements of cultural knowledge, values and other cultural icons; and (3) incidental exposure to them can bring to mind the associated cultural meanings. Initially, Holt (2004) defined cultural branding as the process that guides the shaping of brands into cultural icons and suggested that if a brand can transform into a cultural icon, it is capable of expressing collective identities, and therefore, expressing what consumers want to be (Holt, 2012). In cultural branding, the brand promotes a new ideology that clashes with tradition, and to apply this brand must identify which traditions to skip, something called the ‘cultural orthodoxy’ (Holt, 2016). It is important to note that cultural branding is not simply about breaking out of clutter, it is also about appearing culturally relatable and in sync with specific crowdcultures (Holt, 2016; Khamis, 2019).

Waits (2011) came up with five principles to create a cultural brand: (1) identify a disruption in society, as in the case of Ben and Jerry’s ice-cream during the 80s in positioning the brand as an antidote to the Reagan period, as powerful detachments occurred between liberals and conservatives. The brand was associated with peace, love and harmony, and the rebirth in counterculture. (2) Creating a sense of community in consumers, bringing like-minded consumers together and fuelling the overall brand experience. (3) Creating an experience with the consumer; this is done by focusing on the customer environment (décor and music). (4) Offering reliable products and services that

stand on their own, in addition to an experience. Lastly, (5) cultural brands are supported by consistent brand operations –the image that surrounds the best cultural brands surpasses the product to include the experience, story, community, and infrastructure that conveys it all consistently (Waits, 2011).

Customers of cultural brands such as Coke, Budweiser, Nike and Jack Daniels value the brand's story mainly for its identity value. Used as self-expressive tools, these brands are filled with stories that consumers can relate to their own identities. Holt adds an important novel dimension to understanding how brands make a significant jump to icon status. Implementing a cultural-branding, identity-myth and storytelling strategy, make it easier for consumers to follow brands because those brands personify the ideals that they value, brands that help them express who they aspire to be. A brand that achieves this for customers more than other brands becomes an iconic brand (Holt, 2012). The value of this 'relatable' identity has less importance for brands in low-involvement, business-to-business, critical service delivery, and highly technical categories. Identity value can affect a brand's success, as demonstrated in the case of Ogilvy and Mather's global advertising campaign for IBM and Richard Branson's public relations efforts for Virgin Airways. From mind-share branding to cultural branding, their roots can be traced back to the unique selling proposition of advertisers in the 1950s, where each product was sold via strong communication of a sole unique benefit to its consumers. The power of the brand is inherent within these mental associations that a consumer finds when moving up the stages from primary functional assets of the product to the soft values, opinions, and feelings that consumers associate with the brand.

However, Holt (2006) argues that when it comes to emotional branding, the simplest mind-share assumption is that the brand consists of a set of ideas that should be managed continuously with a consistent message throughout all brand activities over time. Emotional branding, as suggested by its name, stresses how this brand-soul should be communicated. Brand managers should build emotional appeals into their branding activities, which, in return, are used to help grow emotionally oriented relationships with core customers. Emotions seem to sell –emotional, and attitude branding is where storytelling strategies are used (Godin, 2005). Values and symbolic meanings used in these stories are created by cultures, whereby culture is based on common embedded values and thoughts. Customers buy culturally-based products in order to live the stories they tell (Holt, 2016). When women buy a Chanel handbag, they are not carrying a bag; instead, they are carrying a story, an identity, and they experience the identity myths. Therefore, cultural branding managers have to find the most appropriate myth market in order to become iconic.

The way that myth markets work is when the ideology in a particular culture shifts and a gap is created, leaving concern and worry in the public consciousness. Identity brands then base their communications on closing these gaps, and therefore, the public feel better about themselves when buying and consuming products from this brand. Holt (2004) explains the process and structure of a myth market with what he calls a ‘cultural contradiction.’ There are three main blocks of a myth market: (1) national ideology: a system of concepts that make up the link between individuals, families and community, and the nation. National ideology is typically the most potent ground for consumer’s demand for myths. (2) Cultural contradictions, as many individuals aspire to the nation’s ideology, they face



problems fitting it with their lives. Therefore, creating tension between ideology and the individual, which creates anxiety. As national ideologies develop models for living, the gap between these models and everyday living creates a need for symbolism and myths that will manage these contrasts. The third block is (3) populist worlds; they are the raw ingredient of myths; they are seen as “folk cultures”, and they are not motivated by commercials or politics. Brands rely heavily on these populist worlds to create their myths, which provide them with imaginary connections to the world (Holt, 2004; 2012; 2016).

Myth markets occur when contradictions in the national ideology happen. Cultural brands compete to give the most compelling story that will symbolically bridge the gap between these cultural differences. In the real world, it can be seen in the popular culture of entertainment, where everyone is talking about these ideologies, myths are much more than just entertainment, they are the primary platform to engage with the nation’s culture. This is where brand iconicity occurs, being associated with specific cultures under a category driving cultural innovation. Iconic brands resolve gaps by offering a symbolic resolution that will help people adjust their self-understanding and aspirations. Identity brands satisfy these beliefs creating value for their customers; contrary to what the mind-share model predicts, iconic brands create a social network of loyal customers who try to create a commitment to these brands in everyday decisions.

### **2.3.1. Consumer Traveller Symbolic Benefits**

In a previous section, travel motivation was defined in the broader sense as triggers of behaviour and a persuasion force (Hsu and Huang, 2008; Pearce, 2011; Whyte, 2017). Motivation is an urge that comes from unsatisfied needs, triggering consumers to fulfil that need by taking action (Yousaf, Amin, and Santos, 2018). This section will discuss

motivation in a more specific way, focusing on the symbolic benefits that travellers seek. It will also attempt to explain how consumer travellers are motivated by symbolic values that create a myth market for destinations. However, there has been limited research regarding the intangible experience of the destination brand: (Hosany and Gilbert, 2010; Berrozpe, Campo and Yagüe, 2019). Gazley and Watling (2015) have examined tourists by combining self-concept, self-congruity, motivation, and symbolic consumption behaviour. This research focused on the symbolic meanings that tourists seek in buying tourist products, and in experiences, they derive from visiting destinations. The study suggests that tourists look for similarities between their concept of selves and the products they buy before making a decision, and therefore, destinations must individualise their products and experiences based on the symbolic benefits sought by tourists. Another paper by Ekinçi and Sirakaya (2013) suggests that there is a relationship between the symbolic consumption of tourism destination brands and consumer loyalty in a Mediterranean resort city. They found that self-congruence, brand identification, and lifestyle-congruence are key elements in building loyalty to destination brands, and therefore, the success of the destination brand. These papers acknowledge that there is consumption that goes beyond the functional offerings of a destination (e.g. location, weather, and accommodation), and in fact, that there are meanings that are carried out through the visit. These meanings turn into feelings and thoughts that are expressed by travellers through consumption. Self-congruency is a recurring factor, and it is suggested that it correlates with the tourist's satisfaction level, resulting in the success or failure of the destination brand. This means that the more similarities a tourist finds between themselves and the destination brand personality, the higher their satisfaction levels, and as a result, the more they become loyal.

Self-congruity is defined as the process of matching (some dimension of) a consumer's self-concept with the product-user image. The more the similarity is between self-concept and the brand, the greater the probability that consumers will adopt the brand. Research in tourism has identified a significant relationship between tourists' satisfaction level and tourists' self-image/destination-image congruity (Chon 1990; Beerli, 2007; Sirgy, 2018). Specifically, the higher the congruity between the tourists' self-image and the destination image, the higher the satisfaction. Self-concept consists of four aspects; the (1) actual self-image: how consumers view themselves, (2) the ideal self-image: how consumers prefer to see themselves, (3) the social self-image: how consumers think others view them, lastly (4) The ideal social self-image: how consumers wish to be seen by others (Sirgy, 1982). Finding similarities between one's self and the destination's personality is a significant motivator to travel (Frias, 2019). This was introduced by Sirgy and Su (2000), where all four dimensions of the self, correspond with four types of self-congruity: actual, ideal, social, and ideal social self-congruity. These translate into self-concept motives: self-consistency, self-esteem, social consistency, social approval motives, consecutively.

A study by Ekinçi and Hosany (2006) also explored whether or not tourists recognised personality qualities in tourism destinations, and what this meant to destination brands. They found that tourists did perceive destination personality and related this to their personality. This process positively influenced tourists' perceptions of the destination's image and recommendation intentions. Consequently, managing destination brands must focus on effective differentiation and positioning through communication of the destination brand's personality. Berrozpe, Campo and Yagüe (2019) identified a measuring scale of brand identification to be used by DMOs to create destination brand loyalty, and confirmed

that when tourists identify with a destination brand, they are able to express their social self and feel that they belong to a social group. This supports Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk, and Preciado's (2013) findings. Japutra, Molinillo-Jimenez and Ekinci (2019) studied destination brand loyalty from cognitive and emotional perspectives and found a relationship between self-congruence and culture, and brand attachment. Usakli and Baloglu (2011) also apply self-congruity theory in their research where they studied the brand personality of Las Vegas, and its similarity to the tourists' selves, and how that influences their behaviour. They suggest that similarities between the destination brand personality and tourist's actual and ideal selves result in return visits and recommendation.

Symbolic consumption of goods is demonstrated in cases such as souvenirs, which are seen as memory touchstones –they play a role in constructing the self of the buyer (Cater, Poguntke, and Morris, 2019). This is done through associations between the object, the destination, and the owner. Objects can carry meanings of the destination brand, and therefore, help construct and express the owner's self-concept. The symbolic consumption of tourism destination brands, is based on self-congruence, brand identification, and lifestyle-congruence (Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk and Preciado, 2013). When tourists find that a destination brand, and all the meanings that it carries, helped them define and express their self-concepts, whether actual or ideal, and their social identities, they build an intense bond of loyalty between themselves and the destination (Kuenzel and Halliday, 2008). These symbolic meanings associated with destination brands and their similarities to tourists' selves, impact on their future decisions on tourism destinations and recommendation intentions (Ekinci and Hosany, 2006; Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk and Preciado, 2013). Different destination brands and their symbolic meanings, therefore, have

common meanings for different groups of tourists. This results in Greece Goers, United States Goers and Ibiza Goers, for example. These groups travel to these places and become associated with certain social groups who have symbolic similarities to the destinations they visit. This helps destination brands in becoming differentiated amongst competing destinations and positioning based on the personality traits communicated by the DMO.

Existing theories on travel motivation do not take in to account some of the current variables such as the power of social networks that feeds word of mouth (Madden, Rashid, and Zainol, 2016). Reference groups, opinion leaders and social media influencers have a great impact on the motivation to travel to a certain destination. Reviews and posts by others influence the brand reputation and image, and promised experiences by the brand (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). Tourism in the age of Web 2.0 is no exception to the changing market conditions. Due to technical advances, the fast-paced growth of social media created major opportunities for the hospitality and tourism sector (Buhalis and Law, 2008; Edo-Marzá, 2016). These advances are transforming how information about tourism and experiences are spread. Social media platforms allow travellers to digitise and share online experiences and knowledge (Buhalis and Law, 2008; Volo, 2010; Jacobsen and Munar, 2012). Participation is encouraged on review sites and platforms (Streitfeld, 2011). This will be explained further in the next section.

### **2.3.2. Attitude Branding**

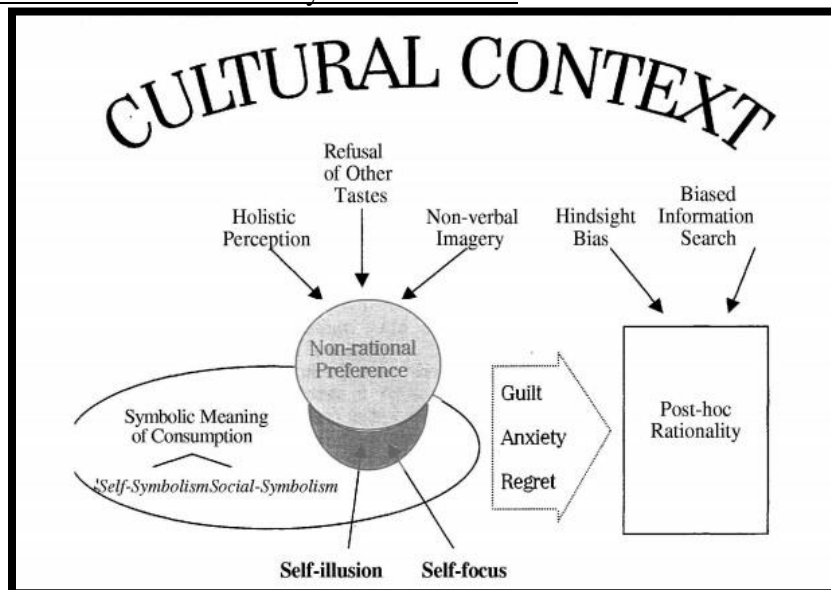
In a market full of stimulation, consumers are driven by their feelings and emotions (Elliott and Percy, 2007). Values and symbolic meanings in cultures become stronger when they are thoughts and emotions that make up stories that consumers can buy into and live out these stories (Holt, 2012). This means that attitude branding is a form of cultural branding,

i.e. the emotional form. This has caused marketers to develop a new approach to branding, known as attitude branding. This occurs when the organisation chooses to place stress on the feeling of the brand as opposed to the product consumption. Attitude branding can be defined as the decision to symbolise a more substantial feeling, which is not necessarily related to the product or the consumption of it. Nike, Starbucks and Apple Inc. all use attitude branding (Gupta, 2009). Attitude Branding is about triggering emotions and feelings and is based on how consumers 'feel' about the brand. It is about how the brand is perceived in relation to the consumer's self-concept, identity, or even who they aspire to be. This approach understands brands as identity enhancers for the consumer, and tools of self-expression. An example is Converse shoes, and how, by wearing them, consumers think "I am not just expressing what I like to wear, I am expressing who I am". (Saunders, 2014; Dessler, 2017).

When applying attitude branding, a brand is looking to surpass colours and logos, and become a trigger of the right emotion to that will push 'lookers' to become 'buyers' (Dessler, 2017). In order for brands to do that, they have to be sure that they relate the brand to the desired lifestyle. For example, branding with a luxury lifestyle, will show an increase in interest amongst consumers who desire this lifestyle. Brands should also associate in consumers' minds with feeling and freedom of self-expression. As an attempt to step away from seeming to brainwash consumers, the brand must give the buyer a feeling of being able to express themselves by using the brand offerings. When applying attitude branding, brands need to communicate vital words that enhance the buyer's emotion, making them feel great when buying into the brand (Saunders, 2014). However, it is not easy to predict the emotional response of consumers (Elliott and Percy, 2007). The model

of emotionally driven choice (Figure 2.2.) in the cultural context suggests that the higher the involvement of the decision-making process, the more consumers look for emotional and symbolic values. Whereas with the lower involvement products, consumers merely look for the brand that keeps the promise. Consumer's symbolic meanings are constructed socially (Elliott, 2010); therefore, marketers are focusing on the target market emotions.

Figure 2.2. Model of Emotionally Driven Choice



Source: Elliott, (2010)

Attitude branding is where a company chooses to represent a feeling that does not have a direct connection to the product, such as Nike's "Just do it". Nike's slogan is one of the most expensive slogans, yet it is not related to the brand's offerings for the most part. Their branding strategy endorses a lifestyle and an emotional bond with the consumer. Demonstrated in advertisements, the function of the product is barely mentioned; instead, the advertisements are about athletes accomplishing their goals. This is also seen in other organisations that choose attitude branding with logos and slogans unrelated to the actual offering. For example, Starbucks' logo has no link to coffee. They try to connect with the consumer's lifestyles and feelings. This branding style helps spread ideas and the company

name. Starbucks started as one small store in Seattle, and through attitude branding, (which was presented in its logo and mood setting), it has become a global phenomenon found in almost every country. Success and attitude branding contribute enormously to the global success of a company (Gupta, 2009).

Brands that are known globally with universal associations are iconic (Saviolo and Marazza, 2012). Iconic brands are highly cultural and symbolic to consumers who use them for the story they tell, to help them construct who they are. Therefore, the value of a brand is in its symbolism (what it means) as opposed to its function (what it does) (Holt, 2004). According to Holt (2004), the four fundamental elements to creating iconic brands are: (1) *Necessary conditions*, whereby the performance of the product must at least be acceptable, preferably with a reputation of having good quality. (2) *Myth-making*: meaningful storytelling invented by cultural insiders, they have to be seen as genuine and respected by consumers for their stories to accept them. (3) *Cultural contradictions*: mismatches between main ideology and emerging trends in society. (4) *The cultural brand management process*, which is all about engaging in the myth-making process in making sure the brand maintains its position as an icon.

Culture is embedded in building a successful brand according to many studies (Holt, 2004; Gupta, 2009; Saviolo and Marazza, 2012; Holt, 2016). Multiple studies (Gürhan-Canli, Hayran, and Sarial-Abi, 2017; O'Sullivan and Shankar, 2019; Le Nguyen *et al.*, 2019) have shown that marketplace cultures define their symbolic limits by where the continuous struggle to lead lifestyles occurs. This is what 'myth making' addresses in Holt's (2004) elements of building iconic brands; it is a new trend that is created inside the culture which contradicts the culture's traditional ideology. Doing this relies heavily on emotions, as they



act as powerful motivators for consumption (Atwal and Williams, 2009). Immersed in a marketplace full of competing brands, storytelling becomes a powerful tool to connect with consumers who share the same values as the brand. Storytelling is when brands use a narrative to form brand communities of shared experiences, desires and values, turning these communities into brand advocates (Hughes, Bandoni, and Pehlivan, 2016). Successful marketers apply storytelling and myth making when communicating with a hitherto undiscovered group and framing a story in the words, images and interactions that strengthen these people's preferences, triggering their feelings and emotions away from any anxieties they have (Holt, 2012). First impressions are where the story starts, and a successful story affects how a consumer experiences the product or service.

#### **2.4.Hedonism and Hedonic Consumption**

Hedonism is a way of living, defined by openness to pleasurable experiences. Hedonism is believed to be 'the Good Life is the pleasant life' (Feldman, 2010; Casaló, Flavián, and Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2017). The word hedonism is from *Hedone*, a Greek word for pleasure, satisfaction and happiness, and it is about seeking pleasure to avoid stress (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2002; Veenhoven, 2003). Hedonism, in the context of marketing, has attracted controversy. Critics claim that consumer marketing relies on the idea that the meaning of life is discovered through acquisition, and that the main reason for existence is the consumption of materialistic and hedonic experiences (Ayadi, Paraschiv, and Vernet, 2017; Abdullah and Zulkifli, 2018). There is an on-going debate about the values of hedonism. While some celebrate it as natural and healthy, others compare hedonism with gluttony and moral deterioration (Frey, Gallus, and Steiner, 2014). It is suggested that hedonism breaks social connections because pursuing personal pleasure desensitises

people. Therefore, they start caring less about others than themselves, which relates to the previously mentioned view that hedonism is about vanity and egoism at its core (Schiffer and Roberts, 2018).

Pleasure-seeking, however, comes naturally to human beings. It is also argued that stress is decreased after pleasurable practices, making hedonism healthy (Taylor, 2016; Andrić, 2019). Hedonism may raise one's happiness in the sense that it might be seen as a result of 'enjoyable experiences' and the consequent de-emphasising effect on unpleasant ones, meaning that pleasure and joy improve one's ability to tolerate problems faced in life. This ability comes from the raised tolerance for stress that results from focussed and controlled pleasurable experiences. This, in its turn, leads to another positive effect of enjoyment; it makes people more social. People socialise over a drink, and they go out for good food. These enjoyable social experiences bring people closer and strengthen their connections. Another positive aspect of hedonism is that it has positive effects on physical health, and therefore, contributes to happiness (Taylor, 2016; Lopez, 2020).

When consumers go through a hedonic consumption, they are consuming products that satisfy their multisensory, emotional arousals and fantasies (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). Consumer research acknowledges the significance of enjoyment, pleasure, and happiness and the role played by products and experiences that cause them. Most notably, Hirschman and Holbrook's (1982) influential paper created a revolution in the field as it changed the way marketing looked at the consumer's experience of product usage from an emotional and imaginative perspective. They helped conceptually define hedonic consumption (Alba and Williams, 2013). Hedonic consumption focuses on the "experiential" aspects of the consumption experience, which is subjectively based.

Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) differentiated between traditional and hedonic product consumption, and they found that consumer research from the hedonic perspective expands the focus on sensory facets used by consumers to perceive and experience products. Hedonic mental-constructs are proposed to direct emotional desires in product choice, according to Maslow (1968; cited in Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). It has been acknowledged by motivation researchers that in some situations, emotions overcome economic decision rules that are based on logical rationalisation of consumers. It is also suggested that consumers fill products with idiosyncratic meanings that enhance attributes they hold.

Hedonic consumption is based on the desired reality of consumers because it is linked to imaginative constructions of reality rather than what they know to be real. A consumer has an internal construct of reality, and this may not always match the reality in the external world, which means that they can fantasize about being a certain character in a movie or concert, thus making that a reason to attend –for example, consuming pornography to fulfil sexual fantasies, or smoking cigarettes to fulfil masculinity fantasies of becoming a Marlboro man. There is a link here between hedonic consumption and myth making. Where the internal reality and external one, are not congruent; individuals use products, brands, experiences, and all the symbols and meanings they carry, with aim to bridge the gap and create an altered reality. Therefore, fantasies are both a significant cause and consequence of hedonic consumption. Hedonic products create a new reality and an absorbing experience when consumed (Swanson, 1978; cited in Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). A hedonic consumption approach also looks at subcultural groups and helps identify and learn about cultural sources of real and fantasy images that direct the product adoption

process and product experience of consumers. Subcultural groups differ in their view of what products are suitable for hedonic consumption. Consumers of many hedonically-experienced products are described differently in social class profiles, for example, opera-goers are stereotypically older, more affluent and higher in social status than theatregoers. This indicates to consumers what is appropriate for their social class.

Consumption nowadays might be seen as the tool which enables people to picture the scenarios that will let them realise their needs, and this is the key to modern hedonism as (Shobeiri *et al.*, 2016). Experiential responses happen throughout consumption, but it also during the collection and processing of information in tourism promotion material. Following this, consumer travellers start to reflect upon the destination marketing stimuli (Goossens, 2000). These responses usually occur through sensory or cognitive information processing. The gathered information becomes important on condition that it proves relevant for someone at the comparison stage of the decision-making process. How the leisure service and hedonistic experience will feel plays a massive part in choosing between alternatives (Latour, 2019). Therefore, destinations are chosen based on the information gathered by travellers and how they imagined that experience would feel like. It is how consumers react to destination marketing stimuli. The consumer is initially emotionally involved with travel promotional stimuli, and when that involvement is established, the consumer will use imagery during the processing of information. Imagery is linked to the individual's intentions, and behavioural intentions are subject to change more when elaborated imagery is used. Processed imagery is self-related imagery, the intentions will be affected more than by imagery that does not relate to the self, and thus the more real and

emotional the imagery, the more the behavioural intentions are likely to change (Prayag, Hosany, Muskat, and Del Chiappa, 2017).

#### **2.4.1. Hedonism and Tourism**

Research in travel and tourism is starting to focus on the intangible aspects of the experience; however, this is still in its infancy (Malone *et al.*, 2014). The experiential side of tourist consumption is especially relevant to the hospitality and tourism industry because experience is the main product that is being offered by the destination (Miao, Lehto, and Wei, 2014). Taking vacations is a type of leisure full of expectations of fun, pleasure, satisfaction, and memorable experiences (Sirgy 2010). Holiday travel has a ‘getaway’ feeling; it is full of experiential characteristics, and is consumed for hedonic reasons. Tourists evaluate their holidays after they are done to see if they have satisfied their intended goals, and this would reflect in their emotions (ranging from positive to negative) (Hosany, 2012). Tinsley and Eldredge conducted a fifteen-year programme to examine the psychological needs satisfied by leisure experiences in (1995). They proposed a needs-based classification of several leisure activities groups, such as innovation, physical pleasure, intellectual stimulus, self-expression, originality, (indirect) competition, relaxation, belongingness and service. However, before this, Iso-Ahola (1980) suggested that people’s need for relaxation and leisure is culturally learned and passed on, as opposed to the theory that people have these needs as rational thoughts. Often, leisure needs act as an individual’s simple motivational force, which is the basic need for optimal arousal controlled by a core motivation. Aho (2001) found the relationship between feelings of pleasure and a satisfying outcome.

Research has recently been focusing on emotions and tourists' experiences in the tourism sector (Sirgy, 2010; Picard and Robinson, 2012; Mitas *et al.*, 2012; Nawijn and Biran, 2019). Hosany's work (Hosany and Gilbert, 2010; Hosany, 2012; Prayag, Hosany, and Odeh, 2013) is largely dedicated to pleasurable destinations and hedonic forms of tourism. Studies on determining factors of tourists' emotions have shown that congruence (Hosany, 2012), autonomy (Nawijn, 2011) and relatedness (Mitas *et al.*, 2012) are core factors. Destination marketing has long acknowledged the physical and multisensory nature of tourist experiences and aimed at enhancing sensory insinuations in promotional content (Pan and Ryan, 2009). However, there is a lack of research into how these emotions impact the subsequent choice of activity and how experiences induce feelings (Malone *et al.*, 2014). Researchers have explored emotions in the context of tourist experiences, seeking out pleasurable activities and spiritual experiences (Gnoth, 2002; Goossens, 2000; Barrett *et al.*, 2007; Frijda, 2005; Hosany, 2012; Malone *et al.*, 2014; Crespi-Valbona and Mascarilla-Miro, 2020). The study of tourists' emotions has many approaches. However, the conscious and theory-based application of hedonic tourism experiences to prompt specific emotions is in its infancy (Miao, Lehto, and Wei, 2014; Malone *et al.*, 2014; Ma *et al.*, 2016). For example, the Consumption Emotion Scale (Richins, 1997; Faullant *et al.*, 2011), does not examine how a tourist's consumption experience results in a particular emotion (Johnson and Stewart, 2005). Cognitive appraisal theory, was used to study pleasure in the setting of theme parks (Ma *et al.*, 2013), tourists' emotional experiences in consuming hedonic destinations (Hosany and Gilbert, 2010) and service experiences (Su and Hsu, 2013).

Hosany (2012) studied the determinants of tourists' emotional responses towards destinations and found that evaluations of pleasantness, goal congruence, and internal self-compatibility acted as the core determinants of love, joy, and positive surprise. This helps destination stakeholders better understand tourists and therefore create better experiences for them. Stressing the importance of understanding tourists' goals, Hosany (2012) suggests strategic segmentation of tourists based on their goals, and advertising of content that enhances self-concepts and shows destination congruence. Although the research on understanding the role of emotions in the outcome of the tourist experience is rapidly developing (Bigné, Matilla, and Andreu, 2008; Hosany, 2012; Ma *et al.*, 2013), there has been little qualitative research exploring emotions in the context of tourism experiences. Understanding how experiences engage and evoke emotions, or how emotions guide consumer activities remains limited, even with the need for further investigation on Hirschman and Holbrook's (1982) work existing for some time (Malone *et al.*, 2014).

Cross and Walton (2005), historically analysed the emergence of modern leisure in their book, 'The Playful Crowd' with an insightful analysis of what they termed twentieth-century 'pleasure places.' This includes theme parks, seaside resorts, and touristic destinations in general. The Playful Crowd studies four major entertainment venues: (1) Coney Island, (2) Blackpool, (3) Disneyland, and (4) the North of England Open Air Museum at Beamish. The importance of their research is because of the value it adds to the tourism literature by examining the mass consumption of tourism and leisure over time, also by recording the developments throughout a century in specific areas. Another reason is that it investigates the formation of a modern market for amusement parks with a global perspective, comparing attractions in Britain and the United States. They examined reasons

behind groups who seek pleasure and who are usually wild groups, being considered joyful and friendly group. Applying the 'playful crowd' pleasure-seeking group principle to the twentieth century, they explore how societies create many sorts of playful crowds on feast days and holidays. They address 'industrial saturnalia' and define it as the need for a break from the rules of urban (industrial) life. The new playful crowd in the twentieth century, according to Cross and Walton (2005), had much in common with old feast day celebrators (the pre-industrial crowd), except that the modern groups (playful crowd) even though seemingly harmless politically, were more threatening culturally and ethically. Despite all the differences between the cased destinations, they attracted crowds with a somewhat conflicting blend of playfulness and morality that 'gave adults permission to act like children' (Cross and Walton, 2005). There is a link here with notions of myth making, cultural branding and, culture and consumption, demonstrated in groups finding a bond that brings them together, and away from the tradition, and leaving them with feelings of satisfaction and ease.

There is fairly little research on hedonic tourism, and the tourism literature addresses emotions on a far broader scale. The main point with regard to emotions, hedonism and tourism is its intangible aspect, i.e. the experience that the tourist goes through, and the congruency of goals they find in a destination. When the destination seeks to provoke the intangible, it has to employ the tangible to communicate this. This is seen in the service industry and infrastructure of the destinations and the experience settings. Hotels, for example, aim to be better than competitors by giving guests a pleasurable experience and positive emotions (Walls *et al.*, 2011). Consumers with psychological characteristics such as materialism and hedonism, have favourable attitudes toward luxury restaurants (Lee and



Hwang, 2011). Luxury has a socially driven meaning that transcends self-constructed meanings. This is done through storytelling which is seen as having more effect on personal achievements (Correia, Kozak, and Del Chiappa, 2020). And since travel and tourism are leisure activities in their nature, it is necessary to understand how luxury is linked to hedonic tourism activities in terms of consumption, meanings and luxury goods, culture and self. This is discussed in the following section.

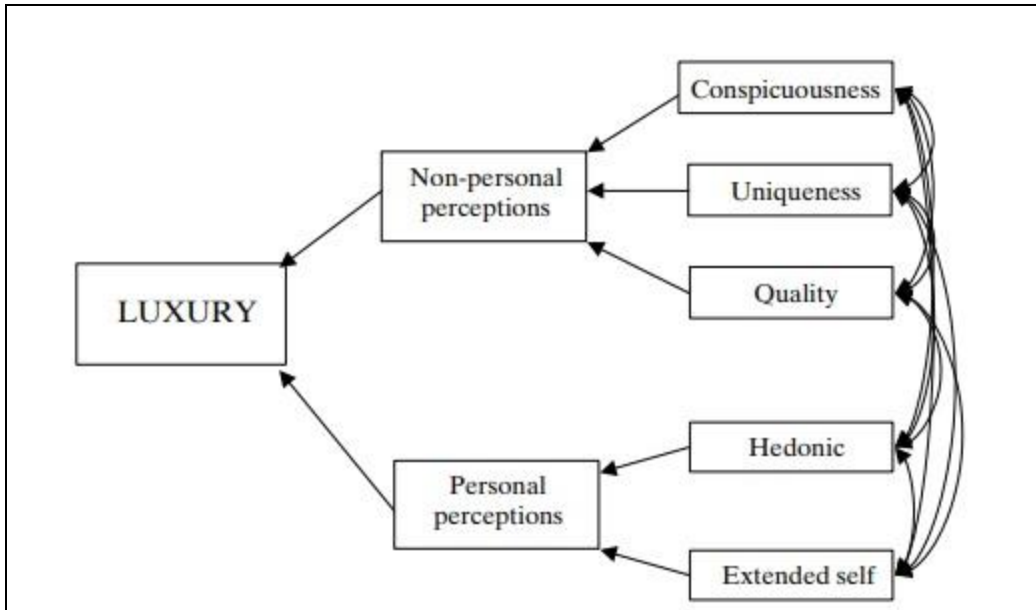
#### **2.4.2. Luxury and Conspicuous Consumption**

The position of luxury brands depends on both the product attributes and the consumer's socio-economic status. The level of luxury can be demonstrated in terms of the distinction between whether the product is perceived as accessible or not by the consumer (Alleres, 1990; Christodoulides *et al.*, 2009; Kim and Johnson, 2015; De Silva *et al.*, 2020). Veblen (1899) defined luxury as something that is different from the usual in terms of daily living needs. He argued that people use the visible consumption of luxury goods to indicate wealth, power, and status, as opposed to the notion that luxury is an old ideology, which is seen as an important and negative value for organising society throughout Western history. Many definitions have been suggested; some authors suggest that buying a luxury brand is a way to express a social status, and therefore, the dimension of social communication defines luxury (Bourdieu, 1984). Baudrillard (1972) had a similar view, suggesting that objects gain their value essentially by meanings that are given to them in society. In a commercial culture, luxury is seen as a measurement tool to divide individuals distinctively. This is supported by Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimension, in which being wealthy, having a high status and being powerful are all measured by materialistic possessions in certain cultures –especially cultures which place a high value on more

masculine qualities which is the case with Arabic cultures (Hofstede, 2001). According to Hall's (1990) cultural dimensions, Arabs also have a high-context culture which means that they rely more on non-verbal communication. Luxury conspicuousness communicates wealth, through materialistic objects (Veblen, 1899; 1994; Granot *et al.*, 2013).

The definitions of luxury are classified into two categories: the product and the perception (Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2012). Luxury products are defined as conspicuous goods bought by affluent consumers to display their wealth (Granot *et al.*, 2013). Brands demonstrating elements such as excellence, high transaction value, exclusivity, artisanship and premium price are referred to as luxury brands (Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2016). Luxury brands have key characteristics such as brand identity, product integrity, brand signature, premium price, exclusivity, heritage and experience (Fionda and Moore, 2009; Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2012; Dikdoğmuş, 2018). As for perceptions, brand luxury offers an experience of premium treatment throughout the purchase process. In an attempt to measure brand luxury, The Brand Luxury Index scale was first suggested by Vigneron and Johnson (2004), see figure 2.3. In a later study, six dimensions were suggested according to affluent consumer perceptions; (1) very high price, (2) uniqueness, (3) aesthetics, (4) excellent quality, (5) hedonism, and (6) Extended-self (social value) (Christodoulides *et al.*, 2009). In their conceptual framework, Vigneron and Johnson (2004) propose two orientations of perception in luxury: non-personal and personal. Non-personal-oriented perceptions refer to perceived conspicuousness, uniqueness and quality. On the other hand, Personal-oriented perceptions are concerned with hedonic needs and refer to the extended self.

Figure 2.3. Suggested Brand Luxury Index Framework



Source: Vigneron and Johnson (2004).

Luxury Goods are symbols of personal and social identity. A luxury car, for instance, transports passengers like economic cars, i.e. from one point to another. However, people desire luxury cars because they state to everyone else that they have the means to buy them (Truong and McColl, 2011; Isaksen and Roper, 2016; Song, Huang, and Li, 2017; Ferrer, 2019). In Veblen's (1899) leisure class theory, it is suggested that a person might gain self-esteem by moving up on the social scale, however, to rise socially, this requires making this acknowledged by others by displaying it, as opposed to simply possessing wealth and power. Moreover, since the introduction of the Theory of Leisure Class (Veblen, 1899), luxury and its consumption received a lot of attention in both the academic and professional fields. This is due to the fact that luxury is a fundamental driver of affluent consumer preference and consumption of market offerings (Kim and Lee, 2015). There has been research suggesting that in the consumption of luxury, the product must possess hedonic

and psychological values of affluent consumers (Vigneron and Johnson, 2017; Atwal and Williams, 2017; Jain and Mishra, 2018).

Status seeking and appearances mainly motivated western consumption of luxury between the 1980s and 1990s. However, materialistic luxury emerged as the modern consumption of luxury amongst emerging affluent markets such as Russia and China (Atwal and Williams, 2009). They are material cultures and are more concerned with physical possessions rather than intangible attainments such as the development of intellect or character. Richins and Rudmin (1994) argue that a materialistic person depends on physical possessions to express their self-definition socially. This supports Veblen's (1899) notion that conspicuous luxury helps move individuals up in social classes.

Lifestyle trends that communicate social status are still a strong motivator of present western luxury consumption (Li, Li, and Kambele, 2012). The word 'Luxury' is being used more often in our daily lives. Google Trends indicates that the use of the word has doubled between 2004 and 2010 (Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2012). As the concept of luxury is not new, it has developed multiple definitions during the last two centuries since Veblen and Voltaire. This transformation is due to the growth of brands. Brands target consumers who are becoming more anxious to belong and be able to express their individuality in society, meaning, to belong and to be distinguished.

This is reflected in the developments in non-functional demand. Classified as 'Snob effect', 'Bandwagon effect', and 'Veblen effect'. The snob effect has both interpersonal and personal meanings, meaning that there is an emotional desire when buying luxury goods, it is also affected by other's consumption trends (Truong and McColl, 2011). The snob

effect is when consumers buy and show material goods in order to feel separated from other people; meaning that if a luxury product becomes a trend and too many people have it, snob consumers would not want to buy it (Turunen, 2018). The bandwagon effect is when consumers gain status benefits by copying others who are buying the same goods. Consumers desire to own luxury brands serves as a symbolic indicator of group membership; consumers try to imitate stereotypes of affluence to fit-in with them and to be distinguished from the non-prestige reference group. The bandwagon effect is based on belonging, and the snob effect is based on being differentiated from the group. Lastly, the Veblen effect is when the demand increases when the price is higher (Sirgy 1982; Belk 1988; Parilti and Tunç, 2018; Dubois, 2020; Gordillo-Rodriguez and Sanz-Marcos, 2020).

Two key motivators in consuming luxury goods are identified in the literature. The first one is the need to symbolise the user's affluence and power through utilising the conspicuousness tool in luxury brands (Dubois and Duquesne, 1993; Kim and Lee, 2015; Vigneron and Johnson, 2017). This supports the notion of 'buying to impress others' or simply 'flashy display of wealth' as noted in previous work (Rodrigues, Brandão, and Rodrigues, 2018; Gordillo-Rodriguez and Sanz-Marcos, 2020) this also links to Vigneron and Johnson's (2017) non-personal oriented perceptions. The second motivator is the hedonic experience gained by the usage of luxury brands for self-directed pleasure (Kim and Lee, 2015); this motivator is linked to the second orientation of perceptions, the 'personal' perceptions (Vigneron and Johnson, 2017). Luxury brand consumption occurs for social and personal reasons, including expressing the user's personal values; luxury goods are consumed for what they symbolise (Dubois, 2020). Four principal factors of luxury consumption beliefs were proposed, (1) importance of showing status through the

consuming luxury goods, (2) knowledge about luxury goods and brands, (3) experiential part of a luxury retailer, and (4) luxury goods purchase and consumption experiences (Kim *et al.*, 2011).

Affluent consumers use the conspicuousness of luxury to make statements about who they are and to create identities that offer belongingness. This means that the social status associated with a certain luxury brand can highly affect the adoption of it amongst affluent consumers seeking status and position (Vigneron and Johnson, 2017). Changes in consumer behaviour have created a new form of luxury, one that is expensive and exclusive, but not so much that it is unreachable (Ishihara and Zhang, 2017; Kauppinen-Räsänen *et al.*, 2018). Consumers trading up in order to meet their aspirations is called ‘luxurification of society’ according to Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie (2006). This creates the need to ‘belong’ amongst affluent consumers (Turunen, 2018). However, it is argued that the consumption of luxury amongst affluent consumers is shifting from the non-personal perceptions, to a more holistic view of the overall experience on a personal perception level by celebrating creativity, self-expressiveness, intellect, flexibility, and most importantly, meanings (Panigyrakis and Koronaki, 2011). Consumption, therefore, plays a role in the creation, maintenance and reproduction of desires and hedonism (Williams and Atwal, 2013). This makes the present affluent consumers more diverse and complex, and this complexity is seen in the ways they consume products and services where the old and controlled consumption has become commercial and conspicuous (Williams and Atwal, 2013; Hockey and James, 2017). Roper *et al.* (2013) found that affluent consumers and the underlying tensions between them and luxury brands are bundled together around a built “luxury brand market”, in which consumers liberate

themselves through anti-brand discourses (Holt, 2012). Consumers' luxury discourse applies different purposeful associations between ideal and problematic consumption. In the new luxury consumption, ideal self-themes are (1) subjective, (2) experience, (3) moral, and (4) art, merging into other core themes within the problematic other: (1) materiality, (2) ownership, (3) amoral, and (4) commerce, linked to the ideal-self themes consecutively. Changes in symbolism behind consumption are because of the shift in the set roles to individuals and their identities. The anxiety in individuals needing to show their individuality is solved by buying conspicuous goods to communicate their status in the new shift in social meanings (Jenkins, 2014; Arvidsson and Niessen, 2015). This is the core of myth making strategy to build iconic brands using cultural branding strategies (Holt, 2012).

In modern consumption, it is assumed that products are concepts with lives of their own, which are deduced indirectly by consumers. This means that consumption becomes an increasingly individualised experience (Atwal and Williams, 2017). This creates a challenge for luxury brands in building an experience that fulfils hedonic and expressive needs. Atwal and Williams (2009) also support the importance of experience and experiential marketing in the marketing of luxury brands. They suggest that the emphasis on luxury brand experience and lifestyle marketing gives physical, emotional, cognitive and social values to the affluent consumer. Also, this creates a cooperative collaboration of meanings, perceptions, brand usage and brand loyalty (Atwal and Williams, 2009). As marketing luxury is becoming more complex, luxury brands turn to selling lifestyles and experiences to consumers who turned into creatures that are defined by consumption and the experiences gained (Atwal and Williams, 2017).

### **2.4.3. Experiential Marketing**

Experiential marketing is emerging as a field around the world; it is seen in most sectors of the global economy; it is everywhere (Schmitt, 1999; Atwal and Williams, 2017). It was introduced as a concept of paying to spend time enjoying several memorable activities that a company creates to engage the consumer in an individual manner (Pine and Gilmore, 2011; Ali, Ryu, and Hussain, 2016). Therefore, it is about the essence of a product that turns it into a tangible, physical and interactive experience that reinforce the offer. Experiential aspects of consumption are identified as fantasies, feelings and fun (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Experiential marketing is, therefore, the initiatives that give consumers detailed, physical experiences to provide them with needed information to make a purchase decision (Petkus, 2010). Consumers are becoming more involved in the process value creation, and the co-created experience through the holistic brand value becomes the foundation of marketing (Tynan, McKechnie, and Chhuon, 2010; Cambra-Fierro, Melero-Polo, and Sese, 2018).

Experiential marketing has become the basis of development in fields such as retail, tourism and event marketing (Atwal and Williams, 2017). According to Schmitt (1999), three phenomena directed the birth of a new marketing approach. First, 'The Presence of Information Technology' everywhere, as social media encourages connecting and sharing personal experiences. Second, 'The Power of the Brand', a clear shift from the function of a product to bold brand diversity, car brands are expanding to clothes (e.g. Ferrari and Porsche), fashion brands have expanded to furniture (Chanel), and from fashion to hotels (Armani). The actual product is not about the function anymore, but rather, it is a means to deliver and enrich overall customer experience. Third, the 'Presence of Communications



and Entertainment' everywhere, is when everything is being branded; everything is acting as a communication and entertainment vehicle. Companies are becoming more 'customer', and 'community-oriented' and the communication between companies and their customers has become more interactive.

Schmitt (1999) suggested that the essential part of experiential marketing is Strategic Experiential Modules (SEMs), and the Experience Providers (ExPros). In the first part, the SEMs include; (1) sense: sensory experience, (2) feel: emotional experience, (3) think: creative cognitive experiences, (4) action: physical experiences, and (5) relate: cultural and social experiences. The second essential part of experiential marketing is the fact that the experience providers define as the tools that deliver the SEMs. They consist of communications, seen and spoken identity and signs, product existence, co-branding, spatial locations, digital media, and lastly, people. In building an experience, there are three ways to manage ExPros: coherently, consistently and by focusing the eye on details.

Schmitt (1999) introduced a comparison between traditional marketing and experiential marketing. He suggested that in traditional marketing, the focus is on the 'features and benefits' of the product at hand; whereas, in experiential marketing, the focus is on the 'customer experience'. Methodologies in traditional marketing are analytical, quantitative and verbal, while in the experiential, they are diverse. Customers are considered to be rational decision-makers traditionally, but in experiential marketing, they are seen as rational and emotional beings (Schmitt, 1999). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) support this, when they state that customers are driven by their emotions, just as much as their minds, because consumption as an experience is usually directed by the quest for desires, emotions and joy. Consumption is considered a holistic experience, meaning that the

competition is on a bigger scale. Schmitt (1999) uses the example of eating; Burger King competes with Wendy's in the traditional marketing system, whereas in experiential marketing, the Socio-Culture Consumption Vector (SCCV) is competing on the meaning behind eating a hamburger, and what feelings consumers get when consuming a burger. This expands the competition for Burger King not just with burger chains, but also to pizza parlours and all fast-food chains. This takes the meaning of consuming a product to a broader level. In the end, the shift from traditional to experiential marketing is as follows: the change in viewing the consumers as rational decision-makers concerned with the functional features and benefits of products, to viewing them as emotional beings, concerned with pleasure. Finally, it is argued that experiential marketing requires a more diverse range of research methods in order to understand consumers (Atwal and Williams, 2017).

## **2.5.Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the literature of three main areas: destination branding, cultural branding, and hedonism and luxury. Brands are becoming more powerful as the product itself is becoming more and more irrelevant in the face of the experience gained by that product (Schmitt, 1999). In destination branding, the relationship between destination image building and branding is the brand identity, which becomes an essential part of the destination branding process (Cai, 2002). Konecnik and Go's (2008) destination brand identity framework recognises the importance of the producer, (which is the DMO in this context), in the branding process, and stresses the role of brand identity. Brand image is what makes the perceptual difference when destinations are similar (Palumbo and Herbig, 2000).

Destination brands aim to attract tourists and visitors, who are highly emotional and have a desire to express individuality and belong to social groups of their taste (Schmitt, 1999; Atwal and Williams, 2009). Here is where the link is seen between the branding of destinations and their targeted market(s), because Holt (2012) believes that cultural strategies help brands achieve an emotional bond with consumers when applying cultural emotional and attitude branding. The brand should find the necessary cultural conditions to target consumers by offering them solutions to their social anxieties. These myth markets will adopt brands that enhance their private and social selves (Holt, 2004). This approach was discussed in this chapter to link the brand image and value, with the meanings associated with it by consumers, which means, to try to understand the role of the consumer's cultural influence on the adoption, and advocacy, of the brand. It was important to understand that brands use storytelling in myth making to build cultural brands and eventually succeed as iconic brands (Holt, 2004). The connection between attitude branding and cultural branding is a field-subfield relationship. Attitude branding is mainly using feelings in the brand building, using associations and symbols that are culturally shared (Gupta, 2009).

It was important to understand the motivation of consumer travellers as destination branding indicates the activity of tourism. Veenhoven's (2003) suggests that tourism, pleasure and happiness are related to hedonism. He presented the mechanisms for the paradox of hedonism and the examples given to prove that pleasure-seekers end up in misery. The chapter presented debate that hedonism is believed to weaken the health (e.g. drinking alcoholic, smoking, eating junk food and extensive sex); another paradox is that hedonism is healthy because it acts as a cushion to the person's stress. Hedonistic

consumption is how consumers react to stimuli (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982), and therefore, to destination marketing efforts using hedonic stimuli. Maslow (1943) suggested that a need that arises in an individual and creates a motive to satisfy that need. In the context of hedonism and hedonic needs, enjoyment and pleasure are emotions that act as strong motivators, and, according to Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), hedonic consumption occurs when the experience is sensual and emotional. Tinsley and Eldredge (1995) suggest a needs-based classification of several leisure activities, such as innovation, physical pleasure, intellectual stimulus, self-expression, originality, relaxation, belongingness and service. Weissinger and Bandalos (1995) argue that often, leisure needs precisely reveal an individual's simple motivational force, which is the basic need for optimal arousal controlled by a core motivation.

Hedonism is linked to experiencing, and consuming, pleasure and luxury, and is a much personalised perception (Vigneron and Johnson, 2017), it was crucial to the discussion of the scenery of luxury and luxury consumption. Though many definitions have been suggested for luxury, they all mostly agree on the brand identity, product reliability, brand name, premium price, exclusiveness, heritage and experience (Phau, and Prendergast, 2001; Fionda and Moore, 2009; Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2012). Luxury consumption patterns have changed over the last two decades into a commercialised and conspicuous consumption for the purpose of individuality. This happened as a result of the enhanced emphasis of self-expression as a societal role, which created a myth market opportunity for brands to apply cultural branding, which is based on meanings, emotions, and attitudes created in cultures and associated with products. Therefore, from the literature, hedonic consumption of luxury goods should be focused on the intangible multisensory experience

that affects consumers. Experiential marketing is based on the augmented product, which is consumed hedonically.

This research was inspired by Dubai emirate, United Arab Emirates. The connection between the topics in this literature review and the emirate itself is seen in the fact that Dubai is considered an 'Instant City' (Bagaen, 2007). With a success that positioned it in the top touristic destinations (TripAdvisor, 2016), regardless of the real estate boom, that has impacted the cost of living in the Emirate and in neighbouring emirates over the last few years. Dubai as a destination brand is cultural and consumer-oriented, and is believed to have excelled in applying a 'consumer-oriented' planning and strategy (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990). Davis (2005) in '*Does the Road to the Future End at Dubai?*' examines Dubai's boom, which has become the world's largest building site, and an emerging dream world of consumption and what locals call 'ultimate lifestyles'. It is a luxurious destination, possibly one of the most luxurious and lavish tourism destinations in the world, attracting visitors from the globe (Heyes and Nadkarni, 2019). In their paper, Nadkarni and Heyes (2016) found that statistics showed a long-term sustainability of Dubai's exclusive and thus luxury appeal. Dubai has succeeded in positioning itself as a luxury getaway, in which indulgence is the norm. Dubai is not a destination exclusive to the wealthy; Dubai luxury is for the masses and is affordable for the middle classes of the world, whether as a stopover point, or for a short holiday (Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2006; Zaidan, 2016). Dubai sells luxury vacations to the globe (Muonemeh *et al.*, 2018). Shopping has been acknowledged as an attraction for tourists in multiple destinations such as Dubai, Las Vegas, Hong Kong, and Singapore (Kattiyapornpong and Miller, 2012). Luxury shopping is something Dubai markets all year round as it effectively offers a wide range of luxurious

significant retail services for tourists. In 2004, Dubai ranked at the time, second only to London in terms of having the largest number of retailers represented (Zaidan, 2015). The Dubai Mall was recognised as a fashion capital in the world (Peter and Anandkumar, 2011). Dubai creatively combined shopping and entertainment opportunities aiming to attract consumers to a cosmopolitan-based shopping experience. For example, the Emirate might be the only destination in the world where visitors can shop the world's top retail brands, and a few meters away can enjoy swimming with sharks or ski down a snowy mountain (DTCM, 2013).

## **Chapter THREE: Methodology**

### **3. Introduction**

This chapter will present the research philosophy, approach and methodology for the research which has been carried out for this thesis. It will present an overview of the case study approach, the sampling, the data collection techniques, and finally ethical considerations. To achieve the purpose of research, the researcher must select the most appropriate paradigm, approach and method to answer its research questions. As this research explores the behaviour, experience and perceptions of affluent tourists to Dubai as an exemplary case study of a luxury and hedonic destination brand, this research requires the collection of rich data in order to obtain a profound and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The needed amount of data has been collected through a qualitative approach, which was judged to be the most appropriate approach for this research. Methodology is a comprehensive plan for carrying out a research study; it explains all steps that should be considered by the researcher to achieve the main goals of a research (Collis and Hussey, 2003). Research design is an important part of a study. This chapter will explain the research philosophy and paradigm that will be used and will present a rationale for implementing an interpretive approach.

#### **3.1. Research Philosophy**

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) define research philosophy as a primary term concerning the development of information and the nature of these facts in relation to research. This means that it is highly affected by the researcher and the way he/she thinks and interprets the data used to develop their research. In the following section, an elaboration on the research paradigm which will be applied throughout the research is explained.



### **3.2. Research Paradigm**

The research paradigm is defined by researchers and academics as a set of beliefs. These beliefs impact on how the research is done, what needs to be examined, and how findings must be interpreted (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Therefore, a paradigm is a structure that directs how research must be conducted based on individuals' viewpoints their beliefs about the world and the nature of knowledge (Collis and Hussey, 2009). In another definition by Neuman (2006) the research paradigm is a general structure for theory and research that includes basic conclusions, main topics, models of quality research, and methods of seeking answers. According to Saunders *et al.* (2009) there are four paradigms: (1) positivism, (2) realism, (3) interpretivism, and (4) pragmatism. The main two paradigms in social science studies are positivism and interpretivism (Collis and Hussey, 2013).

In the positivism paradigm social reality is seen as objective, meaning there is only one reality, in the interpretivist paradigm social reality is seen as subjective, meaning each individual has their own interpretation of the world and there are multiple realities (Collis and Hussey, 2013). This means that the interpretivism approach assumes the subjectivity of the researcher which cannot to be separated from the study (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Many scholars believe that positivism and interpretivism are the two traditional paradigms (Collis and Hussey, 2013). The Positivism approach is usually used to recognise the causes of a social phenomenon and therefore generating hypotheses to be tested is a key step in the process (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Positivists say that the social world exists and therefore can be measured by observation (Creswell, 2009). This means that if the researcher is seeking facts about a social phenomenon and thinks that, the researcher and the research

topic must be separated, then the positivist approach is what best suits their research (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2015).

The main principles of the positivist approach are objectivity and observation (Rahi, 2017). A positivist approach involves collecting data from large samples because this approach examines hypotheses extracted from existing theories (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). In addition, the researcher's interpretations must not affect the collected data, as they must be separated to maintain a sense of objectivity.

Interpretivism according to Bryman and Bell (2011) requires the social researcher to hold a subjective meaning of social action. Collis and Hussey (2009) also support this by suggesting that social reality is in our minds, and is influenced by us. They also add that this approach focuses on the 'meaning' as opposed to the 'measurement' of a social phenomenon, which is gathered from research participants. The interpretivist approach differentiates between people and things in the natural sciences, it entails that the researcher gathers knowledge of the subjective meaning of social actions (Bryman and Bell, 2007). In this sense, if a researcher uses this approach, they must be subjective and cannot be separated from the research, as they are a part of what is being researched (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Of course, bias is present in this approach, as it is a result of the required subjectivism. According to Saunders *et al.* (2009), interpretivism is related to a qualitative approach and therefore uses small samples as the data will be collected in depth.

From a comparison of the two research paradigms, it is clear that the positivist views reality as a solid structure. In contrast, the interpretivist views it as a projection of an individual's mind (Collis and Hussey, 2013). Also, positivism does not distinguish between objects in

natural sciences and individuals in terms of their meaning or reality, in contrast, the interpretivism acknowledges the differences between them (Bryman and Bell, 2015). After discussing these different paradigms and how they can be applied, and keeping in mind the aim and objectives of this research, the researcher has selected the interpretivist paradigm because as the research is concerned with a social phenomenon, an interpretivist approach is more appropriate for achieving a better understanding and producing more profound and nuanced insights and overall results. The interpretive paradigm is concerned with understanding the world from the subjective experiences of individuals. This approach is suitable for researchers who use meaning (versus measurement) oriented methodologies, such as interviewing, focus groups and documentation, that depend on a subjective relationship between the researcher and subjects (Thomas, 2010).

An inductive approach is a systematic procedure for analysing qualitative data where the analysis is guided by specific objectives (Thomas, 2003). Inductive reasoning is used in this research because it moves from specific observations about individual occurrences to broader generalisations and theories in qualitative research (Soiferman, 2010). Uses of an inductive approach are associated with qualitative methods of data collection and data analysis, while the deductive approach is thought to be related to quantitative methods. Induction, subjectivity and meanings are types of reasoning in qualitative research, and will be applied in this research. This is done with open-ended questions that are process oriented. Data with this approach is analysed through narrative description and constant comparison (Dudovskiy, 2016). Conclusions change and evolve continuously throughout the data collection phase in qualitative research, with the purpose of building a theory or a model. Interpretive or inductive methods are intended for theory building (Bhattacharjee,

2012). However, building a theory requires a succession of multiple studies, and in a single inductive study, theory is generated from empirical data to help reach “closeness of fit” between data and theory (Gehman *et al.*, 2018).

This research aims to examine the experiences and perceptions of affluent visitors to Dubai. This required an inductive approach because participants gave in-depth insights, which needed to be constantly compared and analysed. This approach was applied to this research because of its flexibility (Thomas, 2010), and because it helped the researcher answer her research questions and achieve the aim of the research by continuously evaluating data and changing conclusions to construct the final framework. The inductive approach helped reduce raw data into a brief, summary format, which led to a development of the derived themes that constructed the framework. This approach enabled the researcher to establish clear associations between the research objectives and the summary findings resulting from the raw data. It also facilitated the development of the framework of the underlying structure of experiences or processes that were derived from participants in this research. In general, an inductive approach offered a simple and systematic set of techniques for analysing the collected qualitative data. It helped to add extra depth and dimensions to the findings, which might otherwise have been constrained by the main concern of reliability and validity in qualitative research (Javadi and Zarea, 2016). An inductive approach provided a simple and straightforward way for deriving findings, and was less complex than applying other approaches to qualitative data analysis (Thomas, 2006). This paradigm will be applied through using a case study methodology, which will be explained in the following section.

### **3.3. Research Strategy**

A research strategy is a broad design by the researcher which presents the way that the research questions will be answered (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015). Saunders *et al.* (2009) suggest that since the theories are being developed at the end of the research, after the data has been collected and analysed, then the methodology of the qualitative research is assumed to be inductive. This research is adopting the case study methodology. Yin (1984) defines the case study research method as an experimental investigation that explores a current phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not obvious, and which uses multiple sources of evidence. This definition has been reworked to, “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context” (Yin, 2013: p. 16). Case study expands our in-depth understanding, and gives us clear insight into life directory. The case study approach is one of three major research strategies, along with surveys and experiments (Gibbs, 2012). It is therefore a method of examining and analysing a social unit in a focused and detailed way. This methodology is an inductive study that has collected focused qualitative data that will help in gaining a complete description of a social unit within a process-oriented approach. This is suitable for the aim of this research where the case is Dubai as a destination brand, with the visitors to Dubai as the unit of analysis.

The case study was chosen because it promotes in-depth analysis which will help in the construct of the framework. This research strategy is also suitable for the research in hand because it facilitates the uncovering of comprehensive, in depth and sensitive information which will help the researcher in gaining a holistic and detailed view of the experience a

Dubai visitor goes through (Kothari, 2014), how this experience is interpreted, and what meanings are derived from this. This strategy functions as an in-depth investigation of any person or group, or indeed the focus of any research (Seawright, 2016). Therefore, using the case study methodology is a suitable method in relation to the research focus, aim and objectives of this paper. Case study methodology is particularly efficient in addressing research questions which require in depth and focused data. This approach has many benefits, for example, it allows details to be collected from a large sample and the data is richer and more in depth than the experimental design method. A case study approach has also been conducted because of its flexibility. Research was conducted at various stages of the project. This strategy helps in truly capturing reality, and allows more than retaining just the ‘noise’ of real life (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2001). This research focused on individuals, with a certain lifestyle, who have experience of luxury destination brands.

Dubai was selected because it positions itself as a luxurious destination full of hedonic experiences. Dubai has also showed success over the past twenty-five years (Almansoori, Milne and Bull, 2020), with an increasing number of visitors. This destination and the type of visitors fit the aim of this research, and investigating their experiences serves the research questions and the scope of the study. Dubai also represents a luxury destination which has recently emerged in the market. The findings of this case study have some universal applicability. It was important to choose a case that is relevant to today’s trends, and luxury tourism is becoming an increasing trend in emerging destinations (Zembowicz 2009; Zaidan, 2016). Luxury tourism plays a significant role in developing a destination. It has, however, lacked attention from scholars compared to other domains in the tourism field. There is currently no one-specific template for becoming a luxurious hedonic

destination that can be adopted by emerging destinations (Thirumaran and Raghav, 2017). Therefore, the researcher needed a research strategy that would help gain insights from visitors in an in-depth manner.

The steps the case study will go through are; (1) the preparation stage, where research questions are presented. Then, (2) collecting data stage, which will be via focus groups, interview, and photo documentation. After that, (3) the collected data is analysed, and themes and patterns are identified. Gibbs' (2012) case study thematic coding will be applied in constructing the framework. This is to ensure that the data is grouped in categories that make sense.

### **3.4. Data Collection Method**

Since this research has adopted an interpretivist paradigm, the researcher has selected an inductive approach using a case study methodology for the research. Hence, this research requires qualitative data to be gathered. The data for this research will be collected via in-depth interviews and multiple small focus groups, in addition to some photo documentation by the researcher to demonstrate some communicational efforts. This will help the researcher obtain broad reaching and profound insights. The main purpose of this research is to understand how a destination brand can achieve icon status from the consumer perspective, on an emotional and symbolic level. As the benefits are hedonic, interviews and focus groups will help the researcher to interact with participants in order to obtain rich data and to understand their interpretations and the meanings they have invested in and derived from their consumer experience (Saunders and Lewis, 2012). An interview is a communication between the person giving the interview and the interviewee in which both

co-create and build narrative versions of the social world (Silverman, 2019). This is discussed further in the following section.

### **3.4.1. Focus Groups**

A focus group is a methodology used to obtain rich, in-depth qualitative data from participants. Focus groups allow the research participants to communicate for the purpose of data generation, making the group interaction a part of the methodology (Tritter and Landstad, 2020). This method according to Kitzinger (1995) is useful when the researcher is studying people's knowledge and experiences, it helps understand what people think and the reasons for why they think the way they do. The main idea of focus groups is to encourage the group to discover and clarify their views in easier ways than in an individual interview (Barbour and Barbour, 2018). This method is appropriate for this research, focus groups are not simply group interviews, they are group discussions that are useful when having a series of open-ended questions, which will allow the participants to explore the matters of importance to them, using their own words (Prior, 2018). Also, this data collecting tool is used in this research because it facilitates gathering the largest amount of data under time constraints of the PhD programme, this is due to the unit of this study being consumers, as opposed to organisations where using in-depth interviews would be more suitable. In addition, due to the fact that the research topic is under theorised, it was crucial to collect a vast amount of primary data, and focus groups help the researcher achieve that far more efficiently and comprehensively than individual interviews.

The researcher conducted twelve focus groups for this research. Each group consisted of five participants on average. This was due to the sensitivity of the discussed topics. The



used techniques were; word association, third-person story construction and projective techniques, which entailed describing Dubai city as a person, roleplaying and discussions. This was to derive in-depth answers that will help the researcher reach a clear understanding of the reality behind the participants' actions and emotions. The questions and topics were selected to reflect the research aim and objectives, and to answer the research questions. Guided by the literature review, the areas of the focus group questions focused on the visitor's motivation, experience and perceptions. Also, traveling motivations and re-visit intentions were discussed. The questions were tested in a pilot study, and were refined and expanded after the test. The focus group questions were semi-structured and the researcher kept the same main areas of discussion in all focus groups, however, some questions were different amongst groups depending on their willingness to answer and how much they elaborated. Overall, the participants were very open and talkative, due to the small size of the group, which ranged between four to five participants per group. The session lasted for an average of one hour including a five-minute wrap up and thanks. Focus groups were conducted until the Data Saturation stage was reached. Business visitors were not included in focus groups due to their busy schedules and work sensitivity, rather, they were interviewed individually as per their availability. Therefore, the focus groups only included travellers with leisure purposes travelling with family, and with friends or significant others.

### **3.4.2. In-Depth Interviews**

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research tool that involves performing a thorough investigate using a series of open-ended questions with a number of respondents individually, for the purpose of exploring their views on a certain idea (Boyce and Neale,

2006). In-depth interviews are the most common method used in qualitative research (Bell, Bryman, and Harley, 2018; Ghauri, Grønhaug, and Strange, 2020). Using the interpretivist paradigm offers the researcher the opportunity to ask the interviewees for elaboration and deeper explanations through probing their answers (Saunders *et al.*, 2009; Gray *et al.*, 2014). To briefly explain what ‘probing’ is, it is to ask “can you elaborate?” or “Tell me more”, which is very useful in gaining more meaningful answers (Malhotra, 2015). Interviews help the researcher ask difficult questions freely as the interviewee has the chance to ask for explanation and give the chance for the interviewer to ask for further elaboration if needed (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005). In an in-depth interview, the interviewer usually starts with general questions, then goes into more specific questions. An interview might be done in multiple formats, it can be in person, on the phone, or online (Aaker, Kumar, and Day, 2001; Szolnoki and Hoffman, 2013). A face-to-face in-depth interview has the lowest chance of misinterpretation of questions, as the interviewer is able to clarify any ambiguity the participant has regarding the instructions or questions (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012). In this research, in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face. For privacy reasons, interviewees participating in this research wished to remain anonymous and only consented the use of their domain and their initials. The interviews were with business travellers who went to Dubai mainly for work. These participants had high demanding positions that made interviewing them easier than conducting focus groups. They all worked in Saudi Arabia in organisations that have branches, headquarters or clients in Dubai. One of the interviewees was seconded by his media agency in Riyadh to work in Dubai with the DTCM on media and advertising planning.

The number of in-depth interviews in qualitative research, in which representativeness and quantification are not goals, depends on the size of the case study. Where the studies are small to medium, six to twelve interviews are recommended (Kumar, 2020). It is argued that five interviews are needed for each new occurrence of common themes (Morse, 2000; Guest *et al.*, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Mason, 2010; Townsend, 2013). The researcher conducted five in-depth interviews, each of them lasted for an average of one hour. This number of interviews was affected by the busy schedules of potential participants and confidentiality concerns. The questions that guided the semi-structured interviews were based on the research questions and objectives. The interview questions were also guided by the literature review and attempted to cover all aspects of the participant's experience.

### **3.5. Sampling**

A sample is a subcategory group taken from a larger population that represents the target group who will be participating in the study (Malhotra and Birks, 2007). This research will follow a traditional sampling technique without replacement as the respondents will not be contacted twice to obtain the same information over time, but only for different insights (Aaker *et al.*, 2001). Conducting sampling without replacement is more convenient and gives more precise results (Statcan, 2017). As far as sampling techniques go, they are divided into two kinds: probability and non-probability sampling (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005). For the purpose of this research, exploring a phenomenon related to lifestyle decisions, the non-probability techniques will be used. Malhotra and Birks (2007), categorise the types of non-probability sampling techniques into: (1) convenience, (2) judgmental, (3) quota, and (4) snow-balling. This research adopted the snowballing sampling technique because it is recommended when the study examines behaviour or

perceptions (Dragan and Isaic-Maniu, 2013) and is primarily explorative, qualitative, and descriptive (Hendricks, Blanken, and Adriaans, 1992; Drăgan and Isaic-Maniu, 2012), which is in line with the purpose of this study. Participants were mainly Saudis because the Saudi nationality had the highest number of Dubai visitors according to the latest Tourism Annual Report of the DTCM at the time of conducting this research (2016). All participants had to meet very important criteria: they had to be regular Dubai visitors, regardless of their reason for their visits, they also had to be satisfied visitors. The researcher started with identifying a few acquaintances who travelled frequently to Dubai. As a second step, the researcher requested those participants to recruit or recommend other people. This was done to all participants who agreed to participate. Participants were made aware that they did not have to provide any other names if they did not feel comfortable doing so. The referred prospective participants were contacted directly in person or via telephone. They were briefed about the nature and purpose of the study. If they agreed to participate, the researcher gave them a few dates to choose from in advance to meet them personally. In addition, they were assured very firmly that their participation would be kept strictly anonymous and that their privacy would not be compromised. And lastly, they were informed of their right to leave at any point of the focus group, and freedom to refuse to answer any question.

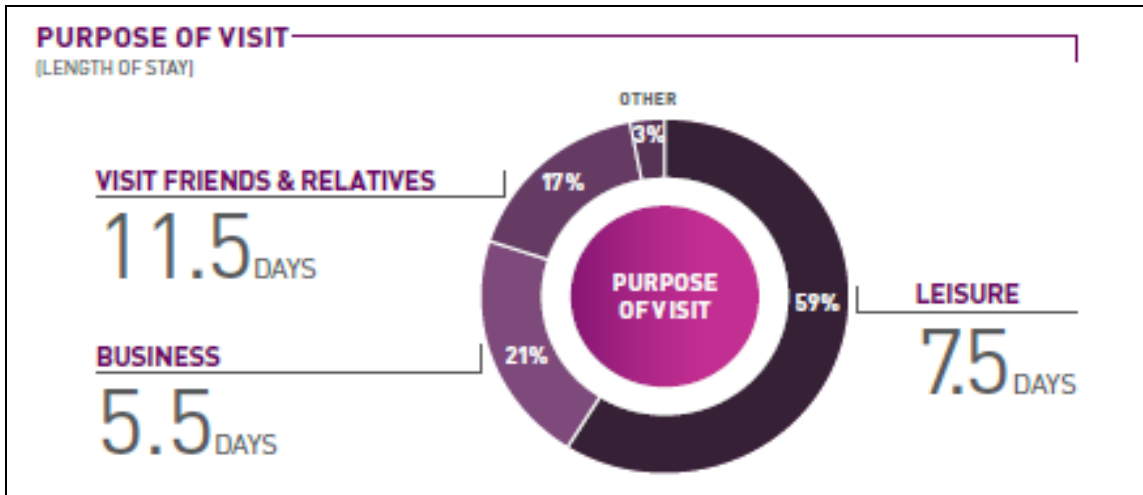
### **3.5.1. Overview of Research Participants**

This research focused on lifestyle and psychographics. Therefore, demographic sampling was only used as a guide to shape a better understanding of the candidate participant of this study. As this research is focused on the city of Dubai, the sampling was based on the highest percentage of tourists and visitors to Dubai. According to the Department of

Tourism and Commerce Marketing in Dubai, UAE, the top ten hotel guest source markets in 2014 (when this research began) were from the following countries; Saudi Arabia came first, followed by India, United Kingdom, United States of America, Iran, Oman, China, Kuwait, Russia and Germany (Emirates247, 2015). As Saudi Arabia kept the same rank, the rest have all moved up, and this is because of the UAE's federal decision, in March 2014, that citizens of thirteen European countries, in addition to the previous fifteen, do not require a pre-entry visa. According to Helal Almarri, Director General of the DTCM, figures from the year 2014 show a healthy increase in hotel guest numbers from Asia, Africa and Western Europe. He also explains that figures in 2014 show an increase in Chinese visitors especially during the April of 2014 seeing the largest delegate group from China with the NuSkin conference. Dubai also hosted the largest tourism industry FAM trip from India in December 2014. These events were essential to further strengthen ties with key markets and position the destination of choice for both new travellers and repeat visitors (Emirates247, 2015).

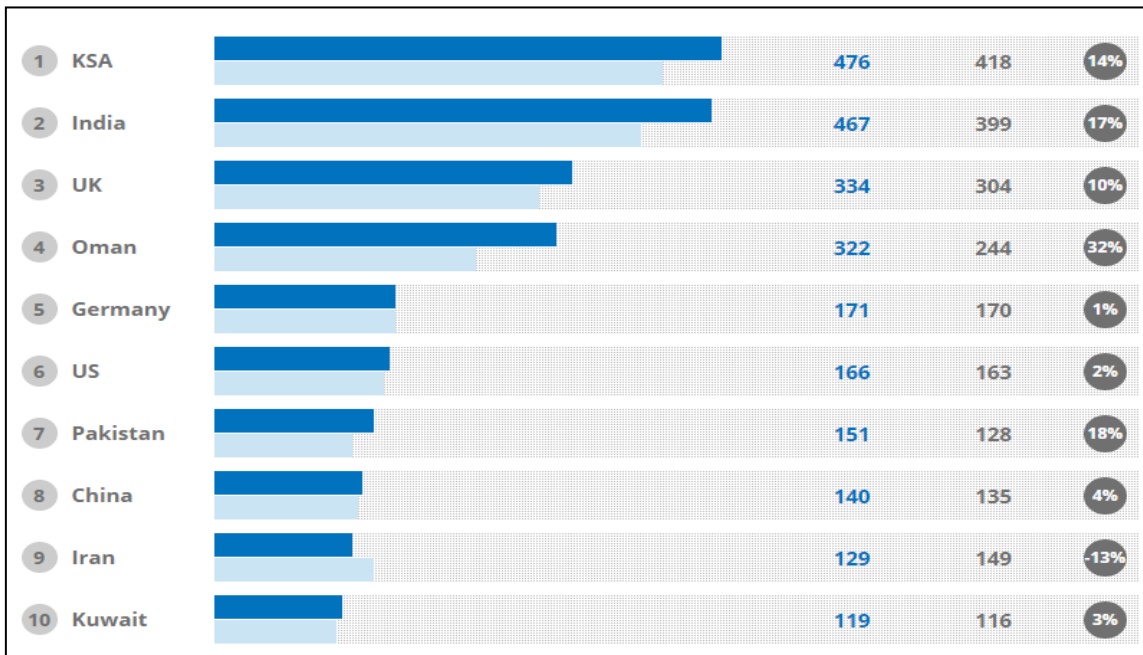
The DTCM conducted research on 24,000 visitors by face-to-face interviews and questionnaires and the findings were published in The Annual Visitor Report 2014 of Dubai. Statistics showed the traveller demographic as follows: females at 42 per cent and males at 58 per cent. The total is made up of 47 per cent families, 30 per cent individuals, 18 per cent friends and 5 per cent colleagues. Choice of accommodation was 75 per cent hotels and apartments, 22 per cent staying with friends and relatives, and 3 per cent other (DTCM, 2014). Lastly, the purpose and length of the visit are indicated in the following figures 3.1 and figure 3.2.:

Figure 3.1. Travellers Purpose and Length of Visit.



Source: Dubai Tourism and Commerce Marketing: The Annual Visitor Report (2014)

Figure 3.2. Travellers' Nationality. (First column: 2016, second column: 2015, third column: change in %)



Source: Dubai Tourism and Commerce Marketing: (2016 Jan-Mar Report)

It is important to note that all data used here was from the 2014 annual report of the DTCM, this is the year the data collection started, and sampling was done based on the highest number of visitors who came from Saudi Arabia. This was updated in 2017, and Saudi Arabia was still the top nationality. From the above statistics, this research adopted a

sampling criterion based on the top nationality of tourists, focusing on families and individuals in Saudi Arabia. However, because of the nature of the research problem, the sample candidates were categorised according to lifestyle and visit purpose to have a more consistent group. The screening process of participants was by a brief questionnaire that included their personal information and demographics, the number of times they visit Dubai per year (to establish that they were loyal to the destination), and who they travelled with during their vacation in Dubai (i.e. family or friends). Lastly, they were asked about their visit purpose in order to ensure that the focus groups were homogeneous. Two very distinct categories became clear and they were: (1) participants who went to Dubai with their friends, they are in the night-life and lavish spending category, (2) participants who went to Dubai with their families, (whether a mature family or a young one), and they are the “our children need activities and internet” category. The research was mostly limited to Saudi nationals, following the statistics presented by the DTCM in the above figure (3.2.). They have high-paying jobs, they are highly educated and they come from big families. They are either single, unmarried but in a relationship, newlyweds, or married with children. As for the interviewees, they were professionals who went to Dubai for work related reasons and mixed it with pleasure.

As for their traveling patterns to Dubai, they travel for quick getaways, holidays, and work purposes. Their trips are almost eight to twelve weeks apart, on average. As stated above, the twelve focus groups had an average of four to five participants, and the sessions lasted for an hour on average. They were given alphabetical codes to ensure anonymity. The following table (3.1.) shows brief information about each participant. Some participants were revisited to elaborate further on their communication behaviour in social media. The

researcher only contacted the seven participants who gave consent for their photos to be used in this research.

Table 3.1. Codes of Focus Groups Participants.

#	Code	Age	Gender	Social Status	Field of Work	Type of Trip
1	A	32	Female	Single	Telecom	Friends/ couples
2	B	35	Female	Married, no children	Marketing	Friends/ couples
3	C	35	Female	Single	Public sector	Friends/ couples
4	D	33	Male	Single	Work in a university	Friends/ couples
5	E	33	Male	In a relationship	Work in a university	Friends/ couples
6	F	35	Male	Prefer not to say, no children	Prefer not to say	Friends/ couples
7	G	28	Male	Prefer not to say, no children	Banker	Friends/ couples
8	H	28	Male	Prefer not to say, no children	Work in an international company	Friends/ couples
9	I	30	Male	Prefer not to say, no children	Entrepreneur	Friends/ couples
10	J	27	Male	Prefer not to say, no children	Entrepreneur	Friends/ couples
11	K	26	Female	Single	Insurance	Friends/ couples
12	L	30	Female	Single	Semi-government sector	Friends/ couples
13	M	32	Male	Married, no children	Public Relations	Friends/ couples
14	N	38	Female	Single	Lecturer	Friends/ couples
15	O	28	Female	Married, no children	Semi-government sector	Friends/ couples
16	P	32	Male	Single	Semi-government sector	Friends/ couples
17	Q	27	Female	Single	Lawyer	Friends/ couples
18	R	37	Female	Single	Banker	Friends/ couples
19	S	36	Male	Single	Entrepreneur	Friends/ couples
20	T	32	Female	Single	Banker	Friends/ couples
21	U	34	Female	In a relationship	Banker	Friends/ couples
22	V	26	Female	Single	Admin	Friends/ couples
23	W	39	Male	Single	Surgeon	Friends/ couples



24	X	36	Male	Single	Defence sector	Friends/ couples
25	Y	38	Female	Married, no children	Banker	Friends/ couples
26	Z	32	Female	Single	Banker	Friends/ couples
27	AA	33	Male	Prefer not to say, no children	Banker	Friends/ couples
28	AB	32	Female	In a relationship	Consultancy	Friends/ couples
29	AC	34	Female	Single	Telecom	Friends/ couples
30	AD	33	Female	Prefer not to say, no children	Entrepreneur	Friends/ couples
31	AE	45	Male	Married with children	Medical Doctor	Family
32	AF	47	Female	Married with children	Housewife	Family
33	AG	39	Male	Married with children	Admin	Family
34	AH	37	Female	Married with children	Housewife	Family
35	AI	35	Female	Married with children	Admin	Family
36	AJ	40	Male	Married with children	Banker	Family
37	AK	37	Male	Married with children	Consultancy	Family
38	AL	38	Female	Married with children	Restaurant owner	Family
39	AM	35	Female	Married with children	Admin	Family
40	AN	40	Female	Married with children	Admin	Family
41	AO	35	Female	Married with children	Housewife	Family
42	AP	37	Female	Married with children	Banker	Family
43	AQ	34	Female	Married with children	Entrepreneur	Family
44	AR	38	Male	Married with children	Engineer	Family
45	AS	29	Female	Married with children	Housewife	Family
46	AT	40	Female	Married with children	Lecturer	Family
47	AU	40	Male	Married with children	Telecom	Family
48	AV	38	Female	Married with children	Dentist	Family
49	AW	39	Male	Married with children	Banker	Family
50	AX	35	Female	Married with children	Shop owner	Family

51	AY	38	Male	Married with children	Insurance	Family
52	AZ	29	Female	Married with children	Admin	Family
53	BA	32	Male	Married with children	Admin	Family
54	BB	30	Female	Married with children	Banker	Family
55	BC	30	Female	Married with children	Housewife	Family

Source: Author (2016)

As for the in-depth interviews, interviewees ranged from banker, investment banker, media agency executive, lawyer and manager working with Dubai government. The total number of interviews was five. Some of them were contacted later for further information. The interviewees had their initials assigned to them as codes to ensure anonymity (table 3.2.):

Table 3.2. Codes of Interviewees

#	Code	Gender	Occupation
1	E.Z.	Male	Media Agency
2	N.M.	Female	Sales Associate, International Investment Bank
3	M.O.	Female	Human Resource, International Investment Bank
4	T.J.	Female	Lawyer, Local Law Firm
5	M.A.	Male	Works with Dubai Government

Source: Author (2016)

### **3.6. Data Collection Procedure**

The required data for this research was collected from 55 individuals who are both male and female. They participated in twelve focus groups which took place in different locations: homes, cafes and hotel lobbies. Seven participants were contacted again to discuss their photos and posts-sharing behaviours on social media. As for the interviews,

they were conducted in the interviewees' places of work. The questions were designed to begin with the overall experience of visiting Dubai, and became narrow to specific questions about thoughts and feelings. The questions were semi-structure and guided by relevant theories that make up the research area. The researcher prepared a rough guide of questions that was flexible to fit each focus group and interview discussion. The researcher acted as both interviewer and moderator, and used probing techniques such as 'tell me more, what do you mean, and why is that (Malhotra, 2015). This section will present details about the actual design of the data collection.

### **3.6.1. Language Used in Focus Groups and Interviews**

The focus groups and interviews took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. They were conducted in English as not all participants were Arabs. In order to minimise the chance of non-response due to language difficulties, participants were asked to use different synonyms to describe what they meant when/ if they found difficulty (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Minor differences were spotted and settled. Afterwards, the focus group guide was piloted.

### **3.6.2. Data Analysis**

The collected data was ordered and analysed using the latest version (at the time) of NVivo 11. NVivo allowed the researcher to gather, enter, manage and examine data whilst keeping the richness and immediacy, which is essential for the qualitative research (Bazeley and Richards, 2000). All data was entered and saved in NVivo format allowing data coding, drawing patterns, connecting data, entering observations, recovering data and finding thematic codes. Since the data analysis took an inductive approach, the process included comparisons of one unit of data with other units to look for similarities and patterns against

each other. The found patterns were given names (thematic codes) for classification purposes (Gibbs, 2007). Coding is a useful and common method to reduce data (Jonsen and Jehn, 2009), it also helps in building concepts and categories in order to give meaning to the data (Ghauri, 2004). Coding the generated data into inductively unique themes helped in relating the findings to the existing theoretical models. Constant comparison was used through line-by-line coding to develop thematic codes and relate concepts (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998).

The process then included the axial coding stage (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Axial coding is when codes are polished, and conceptual categories are merged according to similarity in order to reach core categories that connect all categories in the theory to make a story (Gibbs, 2007). After that, the process includes establishing and clarifying relationships amongst thematic codes, and lastly, pattern matching (Ghauri, 2004).

### **3.6.3. Ensuring generalisability, reliability and validity issues in the research**

Reliability and generalisability of findings are linked to the positivist methodology to case studies (Lindgreen and Beverland, 2009), which is not valid to this research since it is a qualitative research based on an interpretive approach. The aim of qualitative research is to mainly interpret what is happening, rather than generalising the findings (Merriam, 1988). Repeating a social phenomenon is challenging because it is not possible to duplicate the actual situations in which data was collected, or to control the variables that could potentially impact on findings (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). As every interpretation is distinctive, reproduction is impossible (Easton, 2010). And because of this, researchers conducting qualitative research do not give high priority to external validity, rather

consider it as irrelevant (Schofield, 1993). For any qualitative research, internal validity and authenticity are the main issue (Ghauri, 2004). The approach aims to present an authentic understanding of people’s experiences (Ghauri, 2004). Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain that qualitative research is to hear what others say, see what others do, and present them as correctly as possible. Interpretations can be developed by confirmability, credibility, transferability and consistency (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) (table 3.3.). Merriam (2002) defines reliability in qualitative research as dependability and consistency, and the outcomes have meaning when they are consistent and dependable.

Table 3.3.: Criteria of Improving Interpretation in Qualitative Study.

<b>Confirmability</b>	The extent to which interpretations are the result of the informants and the phenomenon as opposed to researcher bias
<b>Credibility</b>	The extent to which the findings appear to be acceptable representations of the data
<b>Transferability</b>	The extent to which findings from one case study or setting in one context will apply to case studies or settings in other contexts
<b>Dependability</b>	The extent to which a case study’s or qualitative study findings are unique to time and place; the stability or consistency of the explanations

Source: Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Lindgreen and Beverland, (2009)

For this research, the four criteria have been addressed as follows:

1. Confirmability was completed by two means: first, by creating a level of trust between participants and researcher (Lindgreen and Beverland, 2009) and second, by collecting multiple points of view of the same phenomenon. All participants were given a general outline of the research along with the consent form issued by the ethics committee at Brunel University, Uxbridge, UK. This was to ensure the confidentiality of their identities and any data obtained, and make them aware of their right to withdraw from the

focus group or interview. Before each focus group or interview, the researcher would introduce herself and her academic background and interest. Also, to gain multiple viewpoints of the same phenomenon, interviews and focus group participants were from different backgrounds such as, employed and unemployed, married and unmarried, parents and non-parents, and so on.

2. Credibility was achieved in this research by the triangulation of data and collection methods. There are multiple sources of data as the research consisted of interviews, focus groups and photo analysis. Interviews were with professionals working with the Dubai government, media executives, bankers and lawyers. This was to achieve ‘multi-actor viewpoints’ (Raworth and Kidder, 2009, p. 167) using semi-structured and in-depth interviews and focus groups with people who visit Dubai to cover the consumer market viewpoints as broadly as possible.

3. Transferability was achieved by choosing participants based on psychographic segmentation, from different backgrounds, ages, genders, and occupations.

4. Dependability was achieved by requesting participants to reflect on current and past experiences. Also, NVivo provides comparable and consistent methods of data management, contributing to improve consistency and reliability (Lindsay, 2004).

### **3.7.Limitations**

In order for a researcher to achieve the most valid and reliable results, limitations must be considered. The limitation of the chosen research strategy is considered to be the deep involvement of the researcher in the study which might affect the results (Yin, 2013). Since the method is mainly qualitative rather than quantitative, there may be question of

subjectivity in the findings because they rely considerably on the researcher (Jonker and Pennink, 2010; Bryman and Bell, 2011). This was resolved by repeating the focus groups and interviews until the data saturation stage in order to collect different views. This enabled in-depth research and facilitated the collection of rich, qualitative data. However, when choosing a small number of cases to achieve depth, it becomes very difficult to generalise the findings based on incomparable collected data that cannot be replicated (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Yin, 2013; Gog *et al.*, 2015). This was not a concern in this research as the main aim is interpreting experiences and exploring perceptions and motivations in-depth, with an inductive approach.

The research applied a cross-sectional study on regular visitors to Dubai. Although this type of study allows findings and results to be analysed to construct new theories and models or in-depth research, it has its limitations. It cannot be used to analyse behaviour over a period to time, instead, it looks at the phenomenon as a snapshot, and therefore, it is not representative. Cross-sectional study does not help determine cause and effect, because the experience and outcome are simultaneously evaluated, there is generally no evidence of a temporal relationship between exposure and outcome (Solem *et al.*, 2003). The researcher used a cross-sectional study because it serves the aim of this research by looking at data from a sample at one specific point in time to answer the research main question. It is also considered a quick way to gather data, considering time restraints of the PhD study duration. This type of research can be used to describe characteristics that exist in a community, and is often used to make conclusions about possible relationships or to gather initial data to support further research and experimentation (Cherry, 2019).

The researcher used a thematic analysis of the data. This means that the data is coded, then

the codes are categorised into meaningful themes (Gibbs, 2007) –this is explained later in this chapter. Thematic analysis has its limitations, reliability for example is a main concern because of the vast variety of interpretations from different researchers. Thematic analysis might overlook variations in data. Also, it is easy to mix themes and codes when deriving them from raw data (Javadi and Zarea, 2016). This was not of major concern in qualitative research, it was, however, addressed by repeated reviewing of data, codes and themes. Also, the NVIVO software helped in managing this issue.

In this research, there were some limitations faced during data collection such as; (1) privacy issues, where participants were not comfortable to share their “nightlife” experiences with the researcher in front of other participants, this impacted the number of participants in each focus group in order for it to become a more stress-free environment. Participants also refused recording of sessions, which left the researcher with writing transcripts of the discussions. (2) Timing constraints: the timing of high season in Dubai limited the availability of all group members at the same time, this caused the researcher to use a cross-sectional study. And finally, (3) restrictions of stakeholders and their confidentiality policies made it difficult to reach people of interest and decision makers. Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing of Dubai (DTCM) employees have not cooperated despite multiple attempts, and sending them the information sheet and consent forms of Brunel University, that stated clearly their freedom to decline answering any question they were not comfortable answering. To solve this, the researcher opted instead to analyse advertisements and marketing efforts conducted by the DTCM and service providers, along with a few photos taken by the researcher to help demonstrate the communicational efforts of the Emirate. Furthermore, only one interviewee who worked



with the government of Dubai tourism sector agreed to participate, but kept answers limited.

### **3.8. Ethical Considerations:**

This research was approved prior to implementation by the Ethics Committee of Brunel Business School. This approval, along with the forms of consent and information supplied clarified to the participants what was expected of them and ensured their anonymity and freedom to leave at any point. As this research examines consumer behaviours in hedonic settings, participants names and nationalities are not used in anywhere in this research.

All researchers must be ethical; and most research contains ethical issues. Research ethics is defined as the suitability of the researcher's conduct with regards to the rights of those who are subject of the research project, or who might be affected by it (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). It is essential for a researcher to get formal ethical approval from the research ethics committee of their university before beginning any study. Such approval will help reduce the amount of harm that could be caused by the study or the researcher (Fisher, 2007). The research process went through four main stages to consider several ethical issues that may arise during each stage. The four stages are: (1) design and gaining access, (2) data collection, (3) data processing and storage, and (4) analysis and reporting (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Each will be discussed further.

#### **- Design and Gaining Access:**

The researcher obtained formal consent from participants who took part in the study (Fisher, 2007). No pressure was exerted on participants or potential participants to grant

the researcher access (Sekaran, 2003). For that reason, the researcher distributed a consent form prior to the focus groups and interviews, which was an agreement that is written and signed by both parties, stating that the individual agreed to participate in the research and gave their approval for data to be used in the specified ways (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). It is crucial that participants were informed about the research that they took part in, the researcher treated them ethically by asking them to sign a consent form given by the university, and ensured that they were made aware of the research objectives and were under no obligation to take part in the study. Lastly, they were assured that their identity and any information they gave was kept confidential and anonymous.

- **Data Collection**

During data collection, the researcher obtained various personal information about participants. The researcher did not reveal or share this information and respected the privacy of the participants.

- **Data Processing and Storage**

The collected data was accessible to the researcher only and no one else gained access to it without official permission. Any personal information collected during this research was managed legally and objectively.

- **Analysis and Reporting**

It is crucial that the collected data was not misinterpreted by the researcher during the analysis and write up stage (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Researchers must not be selective when reporting data (Zikmund, 2003). In an attempt by the researcher to avoid ethical issues that might occur when conducting the research, the following steps were applied:

1. The researcher introduced a formal letter from Brunel University stating that the researcher is a Ph.D. student and that the required information was collected for study purposes only.
2. The names of participants were kept anonymous, and the respondents who participated in this study were given alphabetical initials.
3. No secret information about the participants or organisations was recorded, collected or mentioned in the data analysis.
4. All the collected data was kept confidential and was used by the researcher for the research purposes only.
5. The researcher obtained formal consent from participants in this study.
6. The researcher preferred to record the interview; however, the respondents had the right to refuse for this to take place. Participants did not consent to recording the sessions, and therefore, the researcher took notes in writing instead.

### **3.9.Data Coding**

In the conducted focus groups, the transcript was analysed according to the use of similar words and phrases by finding synonyms to clarify a route for the analysis of the collected data, and to categorise these codes into a thematic coding process following the methods of Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Gibbs (2007). After twelve focus groups, data saturation stage was reached, and the emerging thematic codes are illustrated in the following table (3.4.):

Table 3.4. Thematic Codes from Collected Data

Thematic Code no.	Thematic Code Name	Thematic Code Definition
1	Myth Market no.1: Respectful Renegades	Visitors to Dubai who seek adrenaline, nightlife, and extravagance
2	Myth Market no.2: Raising Generation Z	Visitors to Dubai who seek family quality time, fun and safety
3	Myth Market no.3: Bleisure Travellers	Visitors to Dubai for work reasons mixed with pleasure
4	Luxury	Fancy and expensive surroundings in the destination
5	Belonging	The feeling of belonging to the aspired group.
6	Success	Perceived success of the individual on a private and social level
7	Joy	Feelings of happiness and satisfaction
8	Hedonism	Happiness and pleasure of the senses
9	Lifestyle	Luxurious lifestyles communicate through symbolic meanings of places and products
10	Experience	The simulation of the story and the lived fantasy

Source: Author (2018)

The above thematic codes will be used throughout the following research chapters and the discussion chapter to describe and analyse the collected data. A theme is defined as a

structural meaningful unit of data which is needed when providing qualitative findings (Speziale, Streubert, and Carpenter, 2011). Thematic analysis offers organised and rich descriptions of the database, it is not only a question of counting phrases or words in transcripts (Shinde *et al.*, 2011). The researcher used coding to develop themes in the raw data. This enabled the researcher to recognise key moments in the data before interpretation. The explanation of the found codes included comparing of theme frequencies, relationships within different themes and deriving theme co-occurrence (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Analysis was based on both theoretical assumptions from the literature review and the research questions. Thematic analysis was used because it is well suited to vast data bases, it allows researchers to grow the range of study past individual experiences, and it permits categories to evolve from data. The process of thematic analysis involved the following steps adopted from Clarke and Braun's (2006, 2013) as a systematic guideline for conducting thematic analysis:

1. Becoming familiar with the data: the researcher transcribed the verbal data, read it repeatedly and built initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes: this started with primary coding for data. Systematic coding was applied as the researcher coded as many potential themes and codes as possible. Then, the researcher explored similar codes and combined them together.
3. Looking for themes: categorising different codes into meaningful themes. Themes are made up of different codes, they help downsize the amount of codes to make up a story.

4. Reviewing the themes: this was done over two stages; the coded data and the thematic codes. In this step, the researcher revisited the codes and their themes to look for the relationship between the themes.
5. Names and definition of themes: themes were given catchy and meaningful names. Themes were defined according to what is represented in the data. This was done to help construct a model that maps the themes.
6. Reporting and discussing: The named themes were discussed over three findings chapters. This was done to lead to the discussion chapter where the themes are presented in a concise framework and the relationship between them is explained.

### **3.10. Conclusion**

Methodology is a comprehensive plan for conducting research, to present and explain the steps that the researcher will apply to reach the main goals of the study (Collis and Hussey, 2003). In this chapter, the research design and steps were explained. Also, the research philosophy and paradigm that will be used were discussed and justified. As this research has applied the case study method, qualitative tools such as focus groups, in-depth interviews, and photos have been applied to obtain a deep understanding of the experiences, motives and perceptions of affluent tourists to Dubai.

This research is amongst the first to explore the consumer side in an inductive and in-depth approach. This research will have implications in the literature of destination branding, hedonic experiences, luxury consumption and myth making in a tourism context. It will also have implications benefitting DMOs of hedonic destination brands and will help them understand and satisfy the needs of their targeted customers. It will also be of value in the

positioning of Dubai as a premium destination brand and will enhance its identity and image. The findings of this research are interpreted and discussed in the following chapters: (1) Myth Markets of Luxurious Hedonic Destination Brands, (2) Hedonic consumption and enhancement of the self, and (3) Interactional Communication of Luxurious Destination Brands and Affluent Tourists. The constructed framework will be introduced and explained in the discussion chapter.

**Chapter FOUR: Myth Markets of Luxury Hedonic Destination Brands**



#### **4. Introduction**

This chapter examines the groups who visit Dubai. Through iterative, inductive research, these groups have been interpreted and constructed as myth markets. These myth markets are socio-psychographic segments that have become defined in relation to their characteristics, lifestyles, and cultural needs which are satiated in Dubai, and which have created a symbiotic relationship with the destination. This chapter examines the socio-cultural characteristics of these segments, their relationship with Dubai, the benefits they accrue from the brand, and their loyalty to it. In this chapter, we become acquainted with these groups in terms of their backgrounds, their consumption, their anxieties, and their choice of activities at the destination.

Interpretivist research from the focus groups and interviews developed thematic codes that constructed three myth markets, (1) Respectful Renegades, defined as visitors to Dubai who seek adrenaline, nightlife, and extravagance, (2) Raising Generation Z, categorised as visitors to Dubai who seek family quality time, fun and safety, and finally (3) Bleisure Travellers which encapsulates a category of visitors who come to Dubai for both work and pleasure. Throughout the research, these three groups are referred to as myth markets. Guided by Holt's (2004) myth making concept, myth markets are defined as markets that have emerged as a result of cultural shifts that have created tensions due to the emergence of new ideologies. These three groups were considered as myth markets in this research because the researcher came across socially defined niches in the consumer market which these aspirational travellers hoped to fulfil in choosing Dubai as a destination. There was a clear cultural element that motivated these affluent travellers in their frequent visits to the

Emirate. This chapter begins with a discussion of myth making, luxury consumption and hedonic consumption. This is then followed with a description and analysis of the three myth markets.

Culture and society play an essential role in the creation of brand meanings as Holt (2004; 2006; 2012) explains in his principles of cultural branding theory. Holt's conception of "Myth Markets" was the basis of his theory of iconic brands. Before elaborating on Myth Markets as a marketing strategy, it is important to define what a "myth" is. In the mid-nineteenth century, the word originated to define an imaginary and fictitious person or thing, according to the Oxford Dictionary. Heller (2016) explains that the term "myth" either means an untruth that is shared amongst a society, or the anthropological meaning of a myth, which is a story that contains values and practices of a given society. Holt (2004) defined "myths" in the social world as ideal situations created by the media. Imagery used in the advertisements of iconic brands show ideal social situations, which assuage insecurities and anxieties within targeted customers. Cultural brands communicate a promise to consumers that if they buy selected products, this will resolve existential anxieties and gaps in their lives.

Dubai is a luxurious and hedonic destination. Its visitors are affluent consumers who are motivated by luxury experiences. The three myth markets identified in this chapter are influenced by their surrounding culture and are determined to belong to ideologies which they find aspirational. The luxurious meanings that these three myth markets invest in Dubai highly impacts on their consumption of the brand (Vigneron and Johnson, 2017). This is guided by Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption (1899), which argues that

individuals consume luxury to show off their wealth. The associations and meanings attached to luxury brands and consumption are hedonic in nature. The consumption of the experiential aspects of brands was the main focus of Hirschman and Holbrook's (1982) work on hedonic consumption. They define this as the multi-sensory, imaginative, and emotional aspects of the individual's experience with products (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982).

Dubai's myth markets, who they are, and their choices of activities are introduced in this chapter. The chapter aims to provide a clear picture of the experiences they have, and what this means to them. The three myth markets find solutions to their anxieties in the cased destination brand Dubai. The following section will present a theoretical overview of myth markets and culture, luxury consumption, and hedonic consumption. After this, each myth market will be discussed in a separate section that explores their motivations and activities. In the final part of this chapter, the three groups are compared to give a clear view of what differentiates them and what commonalities they share.

#### **4.1. Myth Markets, Luxury Consumption and Hedonic Consumption Overview**

Cultural brands supply new myths that may only be fulfilled through communication and consumption (Holt, 2012). Holt (2004) explains that social change can create anxiety and insecurity in individuals. This difference between social ideology and actual reality is where cultural brands come in. These brands offer a solution to these individuals by making them belong to a larger ideology, and if the brand does this consistently over time, it becomes iconic (Holt, 2004). Holt called this group of individuals a "Myth Market". Examples of creating myths are seen on TV shows such as "Sex and the City," where the

new ideology of the independent woman is communicated, a social entity who is fashionable, strong, and feminine at the same time. The main character, along with fans of the show, was obsessed with shoes. Another example is the portrayal of the ideal family in advertisements, which usually consists of the handsome father, beautiful wife, two adoring children, and an ideal home.

In the context of destination brands, Las Vegas, for example, presents the image of the wild party animal hidden inside each individual potential consumer. It is a place to celebrate a marriage, or recover from a relationship break up. This is strongly communicated in many Hollywood movies and TV shows. The movies “The Hangover” and “Bridesmaids” have had an impact on the tourist market to Las Vegas, according to “Las Vegas Sun”, (2010), as Hollywood continues to sell the city as the solution to celebrating the single life. Myth markets, according to Holt (2004; 2012), are seen by brands as opportunities to gain market share. Through advertising, brands become culturally involved by communicating a clear consistent message that indicates that consuming the brand’s product will help the consumer more rapidly achieve the ideal as embodied in a desired social ideology, and thereby these culturally-involved brands become identity enhancers. An example of this is Dettol cleaner and soap. The message to the target market is “if you are a mother who cares about protection against germs then you are the perfect mother, and to become that, you need to buy these Dettol products”.

Affluent consumers experiencing the tensions associated with conspicuous consumption, and the luxury brands which they seek out, are grouped together around a “luxury brand market” (Holt, 2012; Roper *et al.*, 2013). Veblen (1899) defined luxury as something that

is different from the usual in terms of daily living needs. In his theory of ‘Conspicuous Consumption’, he argued that individuals use the conspicuousness of luxury goods to convey their wealth, power, and status. Affluent consumers want to make statements about who they are and to create identities that promise a sense of belongingness. The social status associated with a certain luxury brand, therefore, is highly influential in its adoption amongst affluent consumers seeking status and position (Vigneron and Johnson, 2017). Trends in luxury consumption have shifted from the aristocratic to mainstream and commercial consumption (Williams and Atwal, 2013; Hockey and James, 2017). This was as a result of changes in consumer behaviour –the new trend of luxury consumption is expensive and exclusive, but not so much so that it is inaccessible (Ishihara and Zhang, 2017; Kauppinen-Räsänen *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, new groups of aspiring consumers emerge, they are consumers who trade up in order to meet their aspirations. This is referred to as the ‘luxurification of society’ (Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2006). This creates the need to ‘belong’ amongst affluent consumers (Turunen, 2018).

It is important to note that a change in the socio-cultural environment in the neighbouring countries of the United Arab Emirates has been caused by many factors such as political conflicts, and most recently, by social media. This chapter will explain the different social groups and generational characteristics in an attempt to understand the reasons behind the way they behave and how they perceive and consume Dubai.

After discussing myth markets and their luxury consumption trends in the literature, it is important to discuss hedonic consumption because hedonism is intrinsically linked to the nature of luxury consumption (Widjaja and Purwanegara, 2018; Amatulli, De Angelis, and

Donato, 2020). Therefore, it is important to discuss hedonism and hedonic consumption briefly before presenting the myth markets found in this research.

According to Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) pure hedonic consumption lacks clear defining features. However, they define hedonic consumption as, “aspects of consumer behaviour that trigger the multi-sensory, imaginative, and emotional aspects of the individual’s experience with products.” (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982, P.92) A typical utilitarian product can incorporate hedonic features, for example, when a soap bar is advertised by its scent, as opposed to how well it cleans (Chaker, 2011). On the other hand, a typically hedonic product can have utilitarian benefits as well, for example, when red wine is consumed to alleviate Alzheimer’s, or when a product that is used for euphoria is also used to treat vertigo (Linden, 2011). Consumer activities face the same mixture of benefits, whether hedonic in nature, or utilitarian. Travelling, for example, can be seen as a relaxing activity, but it can also be hard work. It depends on what the traveller’s main goal is.

A traveller can seek both utilitarian or hedonic objectives (Batra and Ahtola, 1991). Imagine a consumer traveller who visited Dubai and had a joyful time, and another traveller who went for a three-hour meeting and left on the next flight. Both individuals travelled, an act of hedonism in its nature. However, they had different motives and therefore the same consumer experience - a visit to Dubai – had difference results. Joy and pleasure in their nature can be experienced in a variety of ways, whether through exciting and active feelings or through peace and indulgent relaxation (Mogilner, Aaker, and Kamvar, 2011). An example of this is consuming alcohol which can be to be to unwind after a busy day at work, or to have a wild party.

In addition, it is important to clarify the nature of consumption, particularly in relation to the consumer desire for experiential versus material consumption. A survey of the overall happiness of senior citizens in the United States showed that the only kind of consumption activity to have long-term value in their lives was leisure consumption (DeLeire and Kalil, 2010). Consumption is believed to involve a balanced stream of fantasies, emotions and joy, comprised by what Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) call the "experiential aspect." This experiential view considers consumption as an initially subjective state of consciousness with a variety of symbolic meanings, hedonic responses and appealing criteria. Consumption is therefore dependent on these aspects when the information processing and experiential views are compared.

A hedonic consumption approach, according to Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), looks at subcultural groups and identifies cultural sources of real and fantasy images that direct the product adoption and experience. Subcultural groups differ in their view of which products are suitable for hedonic consumption. Consumers of many hedonically-experienced products are described differently in social class profiles, for example, opera-goers are stereotypically older, more affluent and higher in social status than theatregoers. This indicates to consumers what is appropriate for their social class (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). Subcultural groups also dictate what is trendy in luxury brands, for example, pop-culture and street wear has redefined luxury. This relates to the previously discussed developments of luxury consumption and modern affluent groups. Luxury consumption is a hedonic mode of consumption, it is shaped by cultures and new cultural shifts. People become groups of subcultures who aspire to be unique and yet to belong at the same time (Li, Li, and Kambele, 2012). This means that meanings of fantasy and emotions are created

by cultures, and in luxury consumption, affluent groups aspire to show-off their wealth by consuming pleasurable and hedonic experiences as vehicles chosen by culture.

## **4.2. Myth Market “Respectful Renegades”**

### **4.2.1. Overview**

This segment’s travellers are those who visit Dubai for pleasure, luxury, and nightlife. They are ‘renegades’ because they want to break out of social customs and norms in their home country. At the same time they are respectful because they practice this in another country where what they want to practice is acceptable and legal, away from the constraints of their society. This group showed the same beliefs and values with different levels of intensity. As a result of the focus groups, insights about these participants started to become clear after several sessions. Individuals of this segment are aged between twenty five and thirty seven. They are either single or in a relationship. They are predominantly Saudis. Visitors from Saudi Arabia were the highest percentage amongst all nationalities coming to Dubai according to the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing of Dubai (DTCM) annual report (VisitDubai, 2014; 2016). They fully understand and respect their society and its traditions, even though they may not agree with most of the social and legal restrictions, hence the name ‘Respectful Renegades.’

Their average stay in Dubai is a long weekend (approximately three days). A brief description of the culture is necessary in order to understand the behaviour of these visitors. Values in Saudi Arabia contain a mixture of religious and traditional beliefs. At the time of conducting the focus groups, Saudi Arabia did not allow women to remove their veil (hijab), and it was against the law for women to drive. Men were not able to enter many



shopping malls unless accompanied by family. It was, and still is against the law to sell and consume alcohol. Unmarried couples were not allowed to go out in public, as there were random religious police checks in public places. Lastly, nightclubs were, and still are, illegal. These strict laws, (some at the time of the research, and some continuing to this day), seem to push wealthy individuals into practicing these activities elsewhere, namely Dubai. Even though things are changing in the Kingdom, and many of these laws are reversing, there is the socio-cultural factor which means that many still frown upon these activities. There have been changes – some accepted - for example, in 2018 women were allowed to drive cars and this was accepted by society. Cultural mores are, however, hard to change. Unmarried couples were no longer subject to legal penalties if seen out together following the implementation of the Crown Prince's countrywide '2030 Vision' in 2017<sup>1</sup>. Despite this, those same unmarried couples continued to avoid being seen by their social circles. Therefore, time in Dubai is perceived as when these individuals can get to “be who they want to be”, even if this is only for a brief while. Over time Saudi Arabia has developed an image of being “the place of work”. And these participants agree to work with little to no joy, for the sake of affording a Dubai holiday. During their discussions, participants of this segment shared the following thoughts on how they feel in the Emirate as illustrated by the quotations from the focus groups, “*I do not feel judged when I am out in Dubai.*” Participant V, “*I feel I can do what I want at anytime and anywhere.*” Participant O. and “*I love going out with my friends without worrying about what will people say.*” Participant AA.

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<sup>1</sup> “Programs-Saudi Vision 2030”, [vision2030.gov.sa](http://vision2030.gov.sa), Retrieved 4 July 2019.

#### 4.2.2. Change in Their Holiday Destinations

Although they previously went to neighbouring countries, such as Egypt, Lebanon and Bahrain, for most of their quick getaways, this is no longer the case. This is due to political situations in those countries that have recently been very unstable. But why instead Dubai? The ticket price from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia to Dubai, UAE can approximately match the ticket price of Riyadh to London, UK. A simple answer to this question emerged during the focus groups, it is the proximity. However, after a discussion on the fact that Doha in Qatar is mimicking Dubai's success in the design of its streets, architecture and restaurants, participants were asked if they would consider switching their getaway destination from Dubai to Doha if the prices were less expensive in Doha. Some of their answers were, *"I would not! Because in Doha, there are many locals."* Participant AB. *"Qataris are almost as conservative as the Saudis, if not more!"* Participant AD. And *"There are GCC nationality specific laws, such as taking a copy of the national ID at bars and pubs for documentation, which defies the purpose of privacy we are looking for in our getaway."* Participant C.

In Dubai they see no locals, it is a cosmopolitan city that mimics the pleasure they feel when in western countries. They can wear whatever they choose, meet whomever they like, drink whatever they want and simply go for a night out without being pestered or judged. Many of the participants articulated ideas and responses which can be best characterised by the following statement, which sums up the general attitude to the ambience in Dubai, *"The vibe in Dubai is very similar to the west, except for the fact that [Dubai] feels more extravagant."* Participant G.

### 4.2.3. An In-Depth Look

These participants are proud individuals, as is most of their society, meaning they truly believe that they are better than all Arabs. When they are in a western country, they can only brag so much before they feel like a minority, as opposed to the sense of ownership and entitlement they feel when in Dubai and other Arab countries in general, where they are treated as princes and sheikhs. This makes all the difference to them. After all, according to the Hofstede's (2001) Culture's Consequences, Arab countries have a culture which is more than usually defined by masculine attributes which are competitive and materialistic. Furthermore, according to Hall's (1990) Cultural Dimensions, Arabs fall into the "High Context" category. High context cultures, as described by Hall, value their traditions, have long-lasting relationships, and depend on non-verbal communication, such as giving a certain look, hand gestures, and head-nodding.

They usually avoid confrontation, they are collectivists who value agreeing with others and they have strong restrictions in order to conform to a clearly defined and cohesive group identity. They are resistant to change, and finally, they have low territoriality. Consequently, as they are more about "belonging" than "being," they are always part of a group. Therefore, these affluent visitors coming from Saudi Arabia to Dubai feel as though they are in fact locals sharing the city as Emiratis. They feel safe and have trust in all the service providers. One participant said "*My parents will not allow me to travel alone with my friends unless it is in Dubai*" (Participant A) and this attitude typifies the general feeling of trust which has been generated in this target market, towards Dubai as a chosen destination which reconciles the seemingly impossible tensions between greater liberty and adventure, and cultural familiarity and safety.

Dubai represents a cosmopolitan city that people in the region have long awaited. They can go as families, friends and professionals to Dubai, which makes them familiar with the city. It is always a winning choice when planning a quick getaway or a holiday, as Dubai offers something for everyone. One participant said *“I have gone with my family, it was fine! They all had things to do, I felt that I was there with my friends. We would only have a meal each day together then disperse”* (Participant AG). This exemplifies the sense of familiarity, comfort and safety which this particular destination offers Respectful Renegades in their quests to fulfil their developing sense of self and expand their identity in a location that still feels as familiar as their own neighbourhood, whilst offering far more freedom.

#### **4.2.4. How They Spend Their Stay**

A Respectful Renegade’s average stay in Dubai is a long weekend, where their time is spent between beaches, spas, shopping, dining, nightclubs and lounges. This would most likely be followed by an after party. These visitors feel that Dubai is their playground. This is similar to Las Vegas in the West, where individuals celebrate with aggressive partying under complete anonymity. Sayings such as, “what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas,” encourage visitors to do things they would not usually do during their routine daily lives, such as trying new things and overspending. This is the case for Respectful Renegades when visiting Dubai. They may think they are being themselves, but in reality, they are behaving utterly out of their normal and routine character. This is linked to Cross and Walton’s (2005) definition of Playful Crowds which they defined as the ‘Industrial Saturnalia’. These crowds have a need for a break from the rules of their social circles. Their usual character is dictated by the norms of their society, which is illustrated by one

participant of the focus group, articulating the need for a greater degree of freedom, as he explained *“I go to nightclubs, lounges, drink, and meet people. I would not be able to do that back home” (Participant I).*

This sort of behaviour was seen in Saturnalia Festivals. Originally, Saturnalia was an ancient Roman festival honouring Saturn (a mythic Greek God). This celebration was before Christmas on the seventeenth of December and was later extended until twenty third December. During this holiday, slaves became masters. It was a festival of role swapping, gift giving and continuous partying. It had a carnival theme, and it changed Roman social norms –gambling was allowed and masters served their slaves. In the twenty first century, this behaviour is seen on special occasions such as quick getaways, where splurging on a fine meal is acceptable because it is temporary (John, 2010). After their getaway, these travellers go back to their busy lives. They leave extreme relaxation at the spa and go back to long hours at work. They have to go back to waking up early rather than staying up all night partying and finally they have to go back to monitoring their spending as opposed to ‘buying that five-thousand-dollar designer bag.’ They do, however, take with them the satisfaction and pleasure which their indulgent break afforded them.

Regarding the changes in the socio-cultural environment, many parents of the participants now ‘allow’ their daughters to travel without them for non-work related trips. According to the findings, this evolved from being prohibited, to being frowned-upon, to being accepted by most. On the other hand, these Respectful Renegades have a very open mind and modern/westernised lifestyle. They pushed for this change to take place, because they wanted to be ‘people who went for quick trips of stress release’. It is now acceptable to find a group of friends, after an intensive week of work, going to Dubai for a bachelor

party, bridal shower weekend, shopping, for wedding preparations and even for graduation trips (when a class goes away together as an end of school farewell). This is now trending in GCC countries amongst natives and also residents. All their needs are met and exceeded in Dubai. This, once a hot desert and humid land, is now perceived as a breath of fresh air. This was influenced by word of mouth, social media influencers, and social media reviews. When a respectful renegade decides to go away for a weekend, Dubai is their first choice. Proximity plays a key role for the first few times, but after a while, loyalty is built and the relationship between the respectful renegade and Dubai is developed to the extent that they might actually move there, in fact some, (friends of some of the participants), have already done so. Since not a lot of Emaratis reside in central Dubai, and tourists would rarely see and interact with them, they feel as if they have become a part of a nomadic culture and territory –if it belongs to no one, it belongs to everyone. This relationship is affected by many factors, but mainly, it is familiarity. The hashtag “My Dubai My City” or just “My Dubai” is an example of this. Respectful Renegades are not there to explore the city or to visit an archaeological site, they are there for consumption and experience.

### **4.3. Myth Market “Raising Generation Z”**

#### **4.3.1. Who They Are**

These travellers are parents with ages ranging from twenty nine to forty seven years old. They are parents who are raising children from Generation Z. Characteristics of Generation Z, will be discussed to better understand what they are dealing with as parents. Their children were born from the 1996 onwards. They are global, social (online), and visual and techno savvy individuals. They are always connected online, educated and one of the most

polished generation yet. They think and act older than they really are. They have the lowest attention span however, in comparison to other generations. They are the early adopters, they impact the brand and are the leaders of social media. This generation was born during the crisis period of terrorism, the global recession and climate change. It is expected to spend its youth in a time of economic and social rebirth. These individuals live in a time of changing household structures, and are an ethnically diverse generation (Parker and Igielnik, 2020). Generation Z is interested in luxury experiences, and activities, and connectivity. They spend an average of 15.4 hours per week on their smart phones (Kleinschmit, 2019). They need to be online to share all their posts, photos, videos and messages instantly and continuously.

Generation Z's parents find themselves obtaining value for money in Dubai. Their basic motivation is for their children to have fun. Some of the participants complain that they feel as though they have wasted money on "exploring" vacations. Instead, a place like Dubai offers the latest, largest and most satisfying activities in a luxurious experience. One family shared their surprise when they discovered that their children were not interested in any city they went to, rather, they were counting the days to go to Dubai, *"My wife and I could not believe it when our son said, 'when are we going to Dubai?' when we were in New York! Note that we were only going to Dubai for a one-day transit!"* His wife continued, *"that was the last year we went to anywhere other than Dubai with our kids! Anywhere else just feels like a waste of money and time."* Participants AG and AH.

#### **4.3.2. An In-Depth Look into Who These Parents are Dealing With**

These parents are from generations X and Y, their children are generation Z. These children would enjoy the new Zip Line across downtown Dubai more than a walk through the

cultural sights in Athens, for example. They prefer a wild water park in Dubai over the Mediterranean beaches. They prefer buying the latest fashion, make-up and gadgets from the biggest malls of Dubai, rather than from the authentic and traditional markets of Morocco. They are interested in “doing what everyone else is doing” instead of being unique or rather “alienated” from their community. One participant said *“My son has to have what his friends have, it has to be bigger and better, even if he does not really need it... He is thirteen!”* (Participant AM). Though the parents of this generation may not have had such a heavy pressure to ‘conform’ when at the tender age of thirteen, (or perhaps not in the matter of holiday destination), still, like all parents, they are anxious to fulfil their child’s needs with regard to fitting in, and Generation Z demonstrate a strong need to conform.

They need to dress alike, eat at the same places, watch the same movies and attend the same events. Their parents confess that Dubai is the only destination where they can rest assured that their children are safe and having fun, whilst still being able to have fun themselves as well. This attitude is summed up by the participant who empathised with their own child’s needs to ‘fit in’ with their peer group, though in a contemporary society this is expressed in a very different way, *“When we were kids, we used to brag about having been to destinations that our friends have never been to, my kids worry that none of their friends are going to be in the destination we chose for our vacation.”* (Participant AI).

These parents, (participants), were asked to imagine that Doha, Qatar had succeeded in copying Dubai, and that a holiday in Doha would cost them less than a holiday in Dubai. They were then asked if they would switch their plans to Doha instead of Dubai. Amazingly, some of the responses were as follows.



*“No! Dubai to Doha is like Disney World to Euro Disney. It is nice to see the latter, but the first one is a must”.*

-Participant AQ.

*“Not until all our friends switch to Doha, otherwise, we are happy with Dubai.”*

-Participant AS.

*“We might go just to check it out, but the kids would most likely still want to go to Dubai as they are used to it and feel like they belong there.”*

-Participant AE.

These parents, as much as they would like to, cannot say that they miss natural sights, real lakes and beaches. Instead, they enjoy the man-made beach in The Palm in Dubai, and the air-conditioned souk in Jumeirah Beach –which was built in 2003 and themed to look like the old souks (Jumeirah, 2020). They enjoy themed parks like the Butterfly Park, malls and the Marina (board walk), and are not interested in exploring the heritage and history of the Emirate. This general lack of interest in historical or cultural tourism activities is widely reflected in the comments which arose from discussion in the research groups. Parents articulated a generally similar sense of total satisfaction with the leisure activities offered in Dubai, and a disinterest in more historical or cultural locations, *“I have been to Dubai many times, I have never been to any museums to be honest!”* Participant AR., *“I would not even think of suggesting to the kids to go and see archaeological or historic sights.”* Participant AK. And *“When we are there with the kids, everyone enjoys their time. There is something for kids alone, families as a whole and for us as a couple.”* Participant BB.

### 4.3.3. How They Spend Their Stay

The average stay for a family with Generation Z children is between seven to twelve days. They stay in hotels or serviced apartments. They usually need two cars if their children are teenagers, otherwise, one car would be enough. A normal day would start with having breakfast or brunch at the hotel, then spending most of the daytime swimming. Just before lunchtime, they get ready to go out to a shopping mall. Shopping malls in Dubai are not like other shopping malls, they are much bigger with a vast selection of shops, restaurants, cinemas, and activities like skiing for example. One of the participants in the research group articulates this feeling of having everything that one could wish for under one roof when saying *“We went into Dubai Mall one day with the intention of just having lunch, we ended up spending the entire day there without realising the time.” (Participant AT).*

In these malls, children meet up with their friends and have lunch and/or dinner. They watch movies in the cinema and play in arcades in the malls. Throughout this schedule, numerous “selfies” and “snaps” are taken and posted on the spot. Immediate interaction is very important to these children. As for the parents, when their children are with their friends in a shopping mall, they mostly spend their time shopping and having coffee, either together or meeting with their own friends separately. These activities are reflected in the way the participants responded in the research groups, *“My kids are teenagers. When they meet their friends, I like to stay in the same mall, just to make sure that everything is alright.”* Her husband added, *“My wife mostly goes shopping but I wait for her in a café either reading to watching something. To me this is relaxing.”* Participants AV and AW., *“My kids are seven and younger. We spend longer hours swimming. Then during naptime after an exhausting morning, we rest too. We either take turns on a massage treatment or*

*just lounge in the room terrace.” Participant AX and AY. And “When it is late at night, and the kids are asleep, we go to the hotel’s restaurant or lounge. We enjoy ourselves as adults!” Participant AZ and BA.*

Participants of this segment have found the solution for all members of the family to enjoy the family trip and equally have fun. They insist on having a good time at the same time as their children. As opposed to what older parents had to go through during a family trip when it was all about the children, parents of generation Z like to spoil themselves and care very much about how they, and their children, appear in front of their friends.

#### **4.4. Myth Market “Bleisure Travellers”**

##### **4.4.1. Who They Are**

This segment represents travellers who go to Dubai mainly for business, but who also enjoy some leisure activities at the same time. They reside in Saudi Arabia and visit Dubai several times a year for meetings, training and conferences. These participants have different nationalities, social statuses and ages. Interviewees of this group are men and women who have high paying jobs and have visited multiple countries. They strongly believe in the image of Dubai in the business market. Dubai to them is perceived as a business hub in the Middle East and North African countries (MENA). E.Z, of Mindshare Media Agency, said during the interview that, *“Even though the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a much larger market than the United Arab Emirates, Mindshare Media Agency chose Dubai to be the home of their MENA headquarters.”* (Participant EZ, MD, Media Agency).

He further explained that this is due to several reasons, relating to the Kingdom and Saudi Arabia and factors relating to Dubai<sup>2</sup>. The first included the difficulty for executives and managers from Europe and the Americas to gain a work visa, not to mention a tourist visa, as the Kingdom has not yet opened its doors to its tourists. Another reason was that many female employees from abroad found it difficult to come to the kingdom for a work visit, training or a conference on their own because of how the kingdom was portrayed in the western media, stereotypically strict and full of terrorists. Consequently, the second reason included factors such as the ease of obtaining a work and tourist visas for Dubai. In addition, inviting the “board members” or the “symposium delegates” to Dubai gave them something to look forward to after work is over for the day, such as enjoying a drink. They can bring their families with them knowing that they will have a good time, and finally, the service was superlative in Dubai. One could also rest assured that events would go smoothly and professionally. Most of the interviewees in this segment echoed what E.Z. said, *“I look forward for some shopping and a night out when I have work in Dubai.”* N.M., Corporate Sales Associate, Investment Bank. And *“When a training is in Dubai, I am sure that I will have a good time regardless how long the hours are.”* M.O., Human Resource Manager, Investment Bank.

Business and pleasure are no longer two separate reasons to visit Dubai for these individuals. Executives and business visitors lavished in their trips to Dubai. Luxury hotels and fine dining with business associates made the business trip worth the discomfort of travelling. One of the participants in the group reflected this sense of being able to mix business with pleasure in such a unique way, saying *“When I have work in Dubai, I feel*

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<sup>2</sup> This was at the time of conducting the interview in 2016.

*like I get to have a mini holiday along the side, I always try to gather some friends to go along, we go out and enjoy ourselves after my training or meeting.”(Participant M.O.).*

#### **4.4.2. An In-Depth Look**

These visitors come back to the destination for a holiday after “sampling” the city. According to ‘Sabre’, a leading technology solutions provider, many business travellers are becoming “bleisure” travellers. A term used to define professionals who mix leisure with their business trips, according to a CNN article by Veselinovic (2016). These travellers usually extend their work trip by one or two days, or even stay the weekend if the time is right. E.Z., an interviewee in this research felt that life in Dubai, even though it is loud, was easier for him and his family for reasons linked to the freedom of his wife not having to wear the traditional abaya<sup>3</sup>. Dubai according to him does not feel like a difficult place to adapt to, as there are no hard-core traditions, unlike the other GCC countries.

Interviewees in this segment have a well-embedded image of Dubai that represents success, innovation and the future. They are loyal to what Dubai stands for when it comes to achieving a professional goal. A seminar in Dubai has the same psychological impact as a seminar in New York or any business hub in the world. Businesses operating in neighbouring countries prefer to host their board meetings in Dubai for members to come from around the globe instead of hosting them locally, as M.A, a participant who worked with the Dubai government stated. He believed that the political situation in the Emirates generally, along with positive media and publicity, played a crucial role in winning over

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<sup>3</sup>Abaya: loose over-garment, essentially a robe-like dress, worn by some women in parts of the Muslim world.

global attention and business investment. The rest of the participants agreed with this, mentioning that the service was outstanding when it came to organising events in Dubai.

#### **4.4.3. How They Spend Their Stay**

Their average stay is two to three days. During this time, their working hours are very long. During their interviews, participants shared the same concern as one individual who worried that, *“We tend to cramp everything into the few days we are staying because we are needed back home urgently.” (M.O. HR Manager.)* After they finish work, they usually go out for drinks with their colleagues to discuss work related issues. An interviewee said *“I enjoy a fine meal in a lavish restaurant after a long day of work in Dubai.” (E.Z.)* and this, on its own is a change of pace for them and a unique sense that their hard work deserves the ‘reward’ in the form of the luxury hospitality which Dubai has to offer. They either go out for dinner or to a lounge afterwards. This could happen with a friend who tagged along on the trip, or with a friend who lives there. Participants of this group try to find the time to buy something or to go to a new restaurant that everyone back home was talking about. These individuals get their recommendations either from their colleagues who live in Dubai, or from their friends. They sleep very little when in Dubai to make time for pleasure after work.

#### **4.5. Discussion**

Participants in all three segments showed a personal relationship with the city of Dubai. The loyalty bond between them and the city was very strong. From the findings, Saudis feel a proprietorial sense of ownership when they are staying in Dubai. This makes them feel at ease and in control, whilst expatriates residing in neighbouring countries feel it is

the perfect getaway where they can behave the same way they do back home without worrying about laws they may be breaking. As for Westerners, when visiting Dubai, they enjoy the Arabian sense of the city in hotels, spas and malls which are built to look like luxurious Arabian themed fairy tales. Even though it is not authentic, having been built to mimic Arabian heritage, they do not seem to mind as it feels like an extravagant experience.

Thematic codes helped in understanding the different motives and choices of activity of the affluent visitors on their getaways to the luxurious and hedonic destination brand. The benefits sought differentiated the three myth markets. All looked to bridge the gap between their anxieties and what they feel compelled to identify with, whether this was being a modern and free individual, a successful parent or a successful professional (this will be discussed in full in the following chapter). The destination brand of Dubai is perceived according to these three myth markets as, (1) an adult playground (immersing in hedonic activities), (2) the new Disney world for today's children, and (3) the Manhattan of the Middle East. Visitors seem to enjoy the luxury and modern vibe of the Emirate. They feel like royalty and this is due to the treatment they receive in hotels, shops and restaurants. "Visit Dubai" campaigns communicate certain cues that keep these groups interested. As described in focus group discussions, seen in the data, travellers perceive Dubai city to be a combination of Las Vegas, Disney World and the Manhattan of the Middle East. These 'fantasy' images of Dubai are reflected within each Myth market, as exemplified by the responses in the research groups. A 'Respectful Renegade' chose to 'borrow' the infamous idiom of Vegas, and transpose it to his chosen destination - "*What happens in Dubai stays in Dubai, just like Las Vegas*" (Participant P). While a Generation Z parent projected happy memories of their idyllic childhood holiday, onto their kids' experiences of Dubai "*Kids*

*today enjoy Dubai as we did Disney back in our day.”(Participant AS) Finally, a ‘Bleisure’ participant identified Dubai with Manhattan, saying “Dubai has most headquarters of companies operating in MENA<sup>4</sup>, it has a Manhattan-like feel with all these buildings.” (N.M.)*

To further understand these three segments, the myth market themes were contrasted to find commonalities and discords amongst them. These groups have the following in common. Firstly, they are self-indulgent, they care about themselves and how much fun they have. Secondly, they define leisure as an exaggerated form of pleasure rather than enjoying the simple things in life, like being in a natural place for example. Thirdly, Dubai’s proximity plays an important factor in the choice of the quick getaway destination. Fourthly they all feel as though Dubai is their city. Since there are few to no locals (Emiratis), all visitors feel that it is their land. Fifthly all of these groups enjoy the vast array of places and activities on offer, and do not mind that it is all man-made and artificial. Lastly, these affluent consumers appreciate and seek the luxury of Dubai and its conspicuousness.

These affluent groups, however, are different in their emotional approach to the benefits they seek. The way they interpret the soul and feel of the city is different in specific ways, such as when Respectful Renegades define Dubai as a playground. To them the city offers a free space and a chance to unwind. During their stay, they seek shopping boutiques and outlets, lavish restaurants and nightlife spots and finally, what resonates with a respectful renegade after a visit to Dubai, is the sense of identity satisfaction. They get to unleash

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<sup>4</sup>MENA: Middle East North Africa



their independence, indulgence and wildness. As for the second group, Raising Generation Z, Dubai to them is a destination that promises joy and happiness for all family members. When they are in Dubai, they seek activities for their children, shopping malls and outlets and spa resorts for relaxation. What resonates with this group's members after a trip to Dubai is how satisfied their children are and how many stories they have to tell their friends when they go back home. The last group, the Bleisure Travellers, tend to perceive Dubai's image as a sophisticated working environment, with some pleasure alongside. This means that when they are there, they gain a sense of success just by working from the Dubai office. They feel that they have earned a drink and a fancy dinner. After a work trip to Dubai, Bleisure Travellers feel a sense of accomplishment and that a long intensive day of work in Dubai will always be rewarded.

Emotional benefits encourage hedonic consumption, which is described by Hirschman and Holbrook (1982, P. 92) as "multi-sensory triggers, fantasy and emotional stimulation in consuming products." Dubai has succeeded in appealing to all groups of visitors and their senses. It has been argued that hedonism is addictive and hedonic consumers will always be asking for more Dubai Tourism and the Commerce Marketing Department understands this very well. They offer something new every few months. Although this is costly for the government, the numbers of visitors make up for it. Since hedonists look for pleasure, they seek the next "hot" product (whether an experience or a material object) to keep feeling joy. When this is repeated, and all places and activities are the same, they get bored, lose interest and start looking for the next "hot" destination. This result also occurs when the elite social class, or rather individuals who identify with elite status, start seeing that lesser social classes are beginning to invade their space by visiting Dubai and becoming loyal

visitors as well. The feeling of exclusivity soon starts to fade and negative feelings arise. In return they start looking for different places to visit. This relates to the ‘Snob Effect’, which is when consumers buy and show material goods in order to feel separated from other people (Vigneron and Johnson, 2017), and if it becomes a trend and too many people begin to consume it, snob consumers do not want to buy it anymore (Turunen, 2018). What these segments do, especially the Respectful Renegades, is that they try to limit their visits to offseason in Dubai as much as possible to avoid bumping into the crowd of visitors from all social classes who visit during the big holidays.

These segments separately agree that a trip to Dubai is a breath of fresh air, and indeed it is! In each segment, individuals are strangers who have the same interest, the same behaviour pattern and the same ideology. They have found themselves in a place that belongs to no one and treats them all as owners as opposed to guests. They can be themselves, or rather, who they want to be, even if it is just for a little while. They can feel a sense of belonging to the social groups they perceive they are a part of, after coming back from Dubai and telling all those stories about the seven-star treatment they received at the seven-star resort they spent their stay in. Their children can share photos with their friends and show them all the things they bought from the largest shopping malls.

Dubai meets the needs and expectations of the three groups in functioning as a solution to their anxieties. To the Respectful Renegades Dubai gives them the sense of being part of the modern, open minded and westernised group. As for the Raising Generation Z group, Dubai to them is the stepping-stone to becoming the model parent with model children. Lastly, the Bleisure group members close any anxiety gap by using “work in Dubai” as a tick-box in order to become sophisticated businessmen and women. The Dubai destination

brand has achieved, as Holt (2004) would deem it, the myth markets' solution status, by completely satisfying those social and psychological needs either directly, from a customer's own experience with the product, or indirectly, by targeted marketing or word of mouth. The Dubai destination brand has created a space for these individuals to consume all that is needed to embody the ideologies to which they aspire. This is translated heavily via word of mouth amongst visitors of these three groups.

They talk about their trips and intentions of going to Dubai and they encourage each other to go to specific places there, and as soon as they do, they feel the sense of belonging. *"...before I go to Dubai, I have to check with my friends to find out what are the latest trends in restaurants to visit and places to go... and I cannot wait to tell them all about it when I get back."*(Participant F).

They sense that the gap between themselves and the ideology in their society is closing gradually. The myth of a Respectful Renegade deems that in order for them to belong to the category of a modern, open minded, westernised individual, they have to go through the steps of firstly travelling with a group of friends, secondly partying at night, and thirdly shopping and relaxing during the daytime. A participant explores this sense of freedom and individuality, saying *"To be honest, I never thought of it before, but I do get a sense to pride and satisfaction when I say that I went with my friends, to people around me. It feels like I am on another level of lifestyle which is modern and independent."*(Participant J.)

Dubai offers the space for these Respectful Renegades to exercise these activities without being judged by their societies back at home and without being frowned upon. On the other hand, in the myth of a parent who is Raising Generation Z, they feel as though they are better parents when they give their children a chance to do what all their friends are doing,

wear what they are wearing and buy what they are buying. They are acutely aware of this, one of them saying *"We try to raise our kids in a certain way, but the peer pressure is too high really."*(Participant AE.)

These parents find that Dubai offers them the chance to belong to the group of “good parents” by offering a wide variety of the latest products and trends, alongside the safety they find in Dubai that allows them to let their children go out with their friends unsupervised.

*"Dubai is where my kids and I meet halfway when it comes to their freedom! It is the only place I allow them to separate from me to meet their friends and I feel at ease completely because I know they are safe."*

-Participant AO.

*"I am happy when my kids are happy, they are happy in Dubai!"*

-Participant AM.

Lastly, the myth of the Bleisure Traveller is that of an individual who has a career that demands travelling. These individuals seek success and status. To them, Dubai represents the Manhattan of the Middle East, therefore, it carries the symbolism of success amongst professional bankers, lawyers and corporate executives. Dubai gives them the opportunity to work as hard as a successful person works and rewards them with an appropriate pleasurable experience afterwards. The Dubai destination brand has successfully communicated three different solutions to three different myth markets through media communication. The Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing of Dubai

communication might have created anxieties amongst societies, but it has also offered the solution.

*"Sometimes my workplace sends me to Bahrain for work, it really has a different effect than a trip to Dubai. A trip to Dubai is like an upgrade."*

-T.J., Lawyer.

These visitor groups trust the Dubai brand and will buy what it sells. A Respectful Renegade believes that anything bought from Dubai is trustworthy and reliable. They trust Dubai's hotels, shops and their goods, and restaurants and entertainment. This is due to the consistent message that is continuously communicated at every touch point these visitors encounter. Raising Generation Z travellers trust that they will have a pleasurable experience as a family and as adults during their own time. They believe that a trip to Dubai is always a success. As for Bleisure Travellers, they expect nothing less than the sophistication of their day and the privacy of their night in Dubai. They know that they will have a successful conference and official dinner afterwards.

*"In Dubai, I feel that the standard is very high, this means that they will only recruit and hire the top and the best. Therefore, if I go to meet and work with these people, I feel successful by association."*

-M.A.

*"If my work was in another GCC country, I would think twice before going out to a nightclub. I only feel free in Dubai to go and come as I please without being found out nor judged."*

-M.A.

They believe that they will find anything they need or want, whether related to work or not. When it comes to Dubai as a destination brand, these groups believe that its standards are very high, to the extent that a parent Raising Generation Z does not question the safety of their children or the joy that they will find in a night out and the sense of luxury that they will experience in a hotel spa or restaurant.

Individuals from these groups have built a relationship with the destination's brand on a personal level. This is seen in how these visitors each describe Dubai with characteristics they find, or aspire to find, in themselves. The first group, the Respectful Renegades see the similarities between what they idolise in an individual, and what they idolise in Dubai. Characteristics such as 'free', 'open minded', 'non-judgmental', 'fun' and 'independent' are adjectives used to describe both the visitor of this segment and how they perceive Dubai. On the other hand, visitors from the Raising Generation Z group give Dubai descriptions of what they aspire to as parents, 'safe', 'fun', 'family-friendly', 'modern', 'luxurious' and 'homely'. As for the last visitor group, "Bleisure Travellers," they find Dubai to have the same characteristics as the group they want to belong to, 'sophisticated', 'luxurious', 'successful' and 'future-oriented'. These descriptions that personify the destination brand Dubai, result in a deep psychological connection between the consumer and the brand.

Myth markets occur due to cultural contradictions (Holt, 2004; 2012; 2018). Individuals who aspire to a new ideology and face problems fitting it in with their regular lives experience tension and anxiety. They, therefore, look for solutions in brands that symbolise cultural meanings to help relieve their tensions. Dubai as a brand, helps them become who they want to be, gaining its value from meanings attached to it by the new ideology. This

means that brands are influenced heavily by cultural dynamics (Heding *et al.*, 2020). In other words, there was a shift in norms and traditions from those in Saudi Arabia amongst these groups, and they found that Dubai offered them the opportunity to be who they aspired to be in relation to the tension generated by this cultural shift.

This is the case of the three groups. With the Dubai destination brand, regardless of how different they perceive its brand image, they unanimously agree that on the level of trustworthiness they will always be satisfied after their Dubai visit. This attachment to the brand eventually forms a community of “Dubai Goers.” A myth market that is strategically segmented into three groups. This community is formed by the people who are associated together with the characteristics to which they aspire. The strongest form of loyalty is when customers are actively engaging with the brand in forms other than buying it (Keller, 2001). Loyal visitors of Dubai act as salespeople of the destination –they recommend it to friends and in social media to people of their same group.

Used as self-expressive tools, cultural brands are filled with stories that consumers can relate to (Holt, 2012). Applying a cultural-branding and identity-myth strategy, makes it easier for consumers to adopt brands because those brands personify the ideals that they value, and thus become tools for self- expression. Self-expressive benefits give power to the brand and is inherent within mental associations that a consumer finds when moving up the stages from primary functional assets of the product to the symbolic values, cognitions, and feelings that consumers associate with it. After getting to know who these affluent consumers are, and what their activity choices are in Dubai, the next chapter will explore the symbolic experiences and benefits that these affluent groups experience in Dubai.

#### 4.6. Conclusion

This chapter presented the psychographic profiles of three affluent groups that visit Dubai. Focus groups were initially categorised according to types of travelling party to keep them homogeneous for discussion purposes. It became clear later on that they can serve as strategic segments for the destination. This could potentially be universal and not only specific to Dubai. This, however, needs further research. These groups were interviewed until data reached saturation. After the coding and analysis stage, it became clear that these groups serve as myth markets as defined in the literature. These groups were aspiring to resolve a gap between their reality and their desired lifestyles. These groups were, Respectful Renegades looking for raucous fun, Raising Generation Z seeking familial bliss through consumption, and Bleisure Travellers looking to combine business with luxury.

All group members have a personal bond with Dubai and feel that Dubai belongs to them. Dubai remarkably represents two opposites. Dubai represents the West in the Middle East to Middle Easterners, and the “Arabian night” dream to Westerners. Dubai has successfully appealed to all affluent groups visiting the Emirate. It feeds their hedonic urges with luxurious experiences that appeal to all their senses and emotions, which is the very definition of hedonic consumption in its essence according to Hirschman and Holbrook (1982). Hedonic consumers always ask for more, as arguably hedonism is an addiction (Veenhoven, 2003). This suggests that affluent visitors to Dubai will always expect something new of the Emirate. The Dubai Tourism and the Commerce Marketing Department understand this very well and works continuously to impress their loyal customers by constantly introducing new attractions, luxury and Saturnalian joy.



**Chapter FIVE: Hedonic consumption and enhancement of the self**

## 5. Introduction

In this chapter, the private and social identities of each of the myth markets examined in the previous chapter will be discussed and their experiences of Dubai will be compared. The findings in this chapter were guided by hedonic consumption theory (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982), and the work done by Veblen on conspicuous consumption, particularly in relation to luxury markets (1899). Holt's (2012) work on myth markets and cultural strategy forms the background of this chapter, as we deepen our analysis of the previously defined myth markets and explore their inward and outward selves, along with the hedonic benefits they seek for each level of their symbolic consumption (Holt, 1995). Other research and literature is also used to further understand the subject and consider the dynamic relationships between the thematic codes. This chapter aims to investigate the relationship between the three myth markets and Dubai, in terms of self-concepts and hedonic benefits.

Hedonism is intrinsically symbolic in the sense that hedonists consume products and experiences that carry meanings of relaxation, venting and happiness (Goossens, 2000; Ma, Gao, Scott, and Ding, 2013). However, it became clear to the researcher, during the discussions in the focus groups that these participants relied heavily on materialistic objects. Thus, the connection must be clarified between materialism and hedonic consumption. Material objects help these affluent individuals to communicate their social class and position, and express their individuality. This is primarily a hedonic benefit expressed through a material object. It is, in other words, the conspicuousness of luxury that Veblen (1899) related to individuals aspiring to move up social classes. Luxury products are bought by affluent consumers to display their wealth and position themselves

in society (Granot *et al.*, 2013). Symbolic consumption is the attempt to communicate status, social capital, or self-esteem by consuming certain products and services, and is based on the symbolic value these goods communicate, as defined by Heffetz (2009). Therefore, symbolic consumption means, in essence, that meanings are carried by market offerings whether goods, services, experiences or destinations. Holt (2004) adds that these meanings are ascribed to market offerings by the culture that surrounds the consumer. In return, these objects and services help enhance the identity of the individual consuming them.

Dubai is positioned in the tourist market as a luxurious destination (Jones, 2018). The identity of the destination mirrors the identities of the affluent groups as identified and explored in the previous chapter. For example, the participants of the focus groups personified the destination brand of Dubai, endowing it with human characteristics when they were asked to describe it. It was mentioned that the destination is ‘fun’, ‘safe’, ‘sophisticated’, ‘serious’, and ‘fashionable’. All of these adjectives reflect the feelings of visitors in terms of their own identity, how they perceive their ideal personality, and how they wish others to perceive them. This relates to literature concerned with symbolic tourism destination brand dimensions, self-congruence, brand identification, and lifestyle-congruence, and their effect on destination brand loyalty (Malär *et al.*, 2011; Boksberger, Dolnicar, Laesser, and Randle, 2011; Hosany and Martin, 2012; Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk, and Preciado, 2013; Kumar, 2016; Huang, Zhang, and Hu, 2017). Knowing one’s self and realising the gap between the reality and ideal lifestyles is a sensitive area that had to be examined through various methods of qualitative, and indirect, data collection tools, in an attempt to liberate the participants from fear of judgment by others in the discussion.

Participants were consequently asked to engage in a variety of psychologically revealing, though seemingly impersonal, activities, such as describing a third person's experience, continuing a scenario, and imagining situations.

This chapter will present an overview of hedonic consumption and its relationship to tourism, with particular focus on the concept of enhancing self-esteem through luxury consumption. Considerations of Symbolic Identity and Myth Markets, both individual and social, form a crucial part of this presentation. Brief definitions for the three myth markets of the luxurious and hedonic destination brand found in this research are given for a better view of the findings in this chapter. The first group are the Respectful Renegades, the visitors who go to Dubai for self-indulgence through shopping, drinking, partying and spa treatments. The second group are Raising Generation Z visitors, the parents of children from the so-called iPad generation. The last group is the Bleisure Travellers, who are the visitors who come for the purpose of business and manage to reward themselves with a night out for drinks or a fancy dinner after a hard day's work. After an overview of hedonic consumption and the enhancement of self-esteem through luxury consumption, this chapter will be divided into two sections exploring the sought benefits of each myth market. This includes both the private and the more public benefits unique to each myth market, and also the broad themes of the overall sought benefits which are common amongst all the groups, despite the tendency for each group to interpret them differently.

### **5.1. Hedonic Consumption and Luxury Overview**

Tourism is an activity of leisure. It is fundamentally a hedonic activity (Veblen, 1994; Sirgy 2010). Veblen (1994) suggested that symbolic meanings exist in leisure activities as explored in the theory of the leisure class. The consumption of products and activities like

travelling, sports, and the arts, enhance the definition of the leisured class. In research by Wynne (1990), and earlier by Smith (1979), the American and English middle class were examined. Their research focused on why the middle class was keen on visiting prestigious destinations and engaging with leisure activities. Their findings showed that both groups tried to keep up appearances in their societies and that tourism was highly symbolic. It is important at this point to address the intrinsic link between symbolic and hedonic consumption. Hedonic experiences are filled with symbolism (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). Consuming a product for its symbolic value is an intangible experience that is considered to be hedonic. Therefore, brands with highly symbolic meanings and associations are consumed for hedonic reasons. This is seen in luxury brands consumption and leisure activities as suggested by the literature (Veblen, 1899; 1994; Millan and Wright, 2018). Since buying a luxury brand is a way to express social status, the dimension of social communication defines luxury (Bourdieu, 1984; Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2012).

The following section presents an overview of hedonic consumption and tourism, then an overview of how luxury consumption expresses and enhances the self. These areas emerged from the literature review and the collected data. The link between these topics is reflected in how this research examines affluent consumers' experiences and perceptions through the lens of hedonic consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982), and the consumption of Dubai as a genre of luxury tourism through Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption (1899). Because these affluent visitors were previously strategically segmented into three myth markets, it is important to keep the guidance of Holt's work on myth markets and culture in mind throughout the paper.

## 5.2. Hedonic Consumption and Tourism

Travellers tend to buy objects that will later convey the meaning of the visit even after they go home. These touristic objects can vary from a simple fridge magnet and photos, to shopping products that will allow them to say “I got it from Dubai!” This is a form of extending the experience by materialising it into objects. A concern in tourism is researching the effects of symbolic consumption on the traveller’s choice of destination, along with their post-purchase experience (Crouch, 1994). Sirgy and Su (2000) attempted to find the relationship between the self-congruence and behaviour of the tourist by developing a model that presents an interaction between the destination’s environment, perceived image, self-concept of the visitor, their self-congruence, functional similarity, and travel behaviour. Other research looked into self-congruity with a destination, in addition to self-concept, motivation and symbolic consumption (Usakli and Baloglu, 2011; Gazley and Watling, 2015), destination personality (Ekinci and Hosany, 2006), destination brand loyalty (Berrozpe, Campo and Yagüe, 2019), and self-congruency with brand attachment (Japutra, Molinillo-Jimenez and Ekinci, 2019). They all concluded that the greater the similarity between the tourist and destination brand personalities, the more likely the tourists would be to become attached and loyal to the destination brand.

Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk and Preciado (2013) studied the symbolic consumption of tourism destination brands. Their findings demonstrated that *self-congruence*, *brand identification*, and *lifestyle-congruence* played a major role in visitor’s relationship with destination brands. They also argue that travellers develop loyalty to a specific destination brand based on the destination’s ability to help define and alter their self-concepts, social identities, and the symbolic attributes of their outward lifestyles, as opposed to the functional attributes

such as the geographical location and weather. These findings help understand the influence of brand identification and lifestyle resemblance on a consumer's loyalty to a destination brand. In fact, it extends the theory of the symbolic consumption of self-congruence with material products like houses and outfits. They also found that travelling to a specific destination brand differentiates these travellers in their societies and also become associated with certain social groups. This is supported by this research as Dubai visitors are segmented into three affluent groups of "Dubai Goers" which are Respectful Renegades, Raising Generation Z and Bleisure Travellers.

### **5.3. Enhancing the Self Through Consumption**

Many researchers have linked materialism, consumer behaviour, and culture, whilst Can (2013) is interested in defining the relationship between materialism and the individual's personality. There are two different views of what materialism means, the first definition is of a more philosophical nature, which is, anything in existence is composed of matter, or depends on it". The second definition is more accessible and comprehensible to the layman, when a person is more concerned with material (matter) as opposed to intellect and spirit in thing (Fournier and Richins, 1991; Richins and Rudmin, 1994). From these definitions, Richins and Rudmin (1994) argue that a materialistic person depends on physical possessions to socially express their self-identity. When these individuals express themselves in the way they want to be seen, they feel happy, there is an inevitable dependence on material possessions to promote happiness, and this is what 'hedonic consumption' is based on. This supports the O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy's (2002) definition of the word *Hedone*, which is, "the only good life is the pleasure life". And from this definition, a pattern is drawn which can be encapsulated by the simple idea that life

means pleasure, and if you are not having pleasure, you are not really alive. This supports the first definition of materialism, things are either composed of matter or dependent on it. In the case of the conspicuous consumption of the more affluent consumer market of this research there is an ever-increasing dependence on material possessions. As for Belk's (1985) definition of materialism, is the meaning that an individual assigns to physical goods. It is very closely defined as "symbolic consumption".

The link between materialism, self-definition and enhancement, and hedonic consumption is a process which begins with firstly self-definition and the need to express it. Secondly, materialism helps enhance and display this personality. Thirdly, objects and places used during this self-expression carry symbolic meanings that have been attached to them by culture, and finally, hedonism is the final stage where consumption reaches an addictive pattern of seeking happiness and the need to constantly communicate this to the individual's society. At this stage, the happiness of the individual depends on keeping up with materialism and the latest trends, with no regards to the intellect or spirit.

One's tendency to be more focused on goals that are associated with material goods such as the will to own them, to consume them, and/or demonstrate them to others is materialism (Csikszentmihalyi, 2005). Therefore, an individual is considered materialistic if they dedicate their energy, whether mental or emotional, to acquiring materialistic goods, or their symbolic meanings. Situations like being wealthy, having a high status and being powerful are all measured by materialistic possessions in certain cultures, especially those with a high masculinity factor like Arabs (Hofstede, 2001). A materialistic person has a greater tendency to view life from an angle of materialistic experiences, meaning an object is more than just the thing in itself. It carries meanings and thus has more importance to



that person than it would do to someone with a more intellectual or spiritual emphasis to their life experience. To a more materialistic person the ownership of an object would transcend the mere functionality of the item. These objects facilitate a happy life, the only form of life recognised in Hedone.

Materialists usually position their possessions as their main goals and assess their status based on the type and number of objects they own. Materialists use all their resources to live the “good life”, this means that instead of spending time and money on experiences to find happiness, they buy material objects (Van Boven and Gilovich, 2003). This also supports suggestions of modern consumption of luxury and trends of materialistic luxury (Atwal and Williams, 2009). Luxury brands target individuals who aspire to appear wealthy and who are anxious to express their individuality in society.

From objects to their meanings, a form of symbolic identity is created and enhanced. Therefore, material objects that carry symbolic meanings are used to communicate identities. This is outlined within the three myth markets explored in the next section in relation to their self-perceptions, the private (or individual) self and the social self.

#### **5.4. Symbolic Identity and Myth Markets**

The functional or utilitarian benefit of a product is well known. However, the hedonic benefit is sometimes mismanaged by marketers and misinterpreted by consumers. As a symbolic meaning or association, it is not tangible. It is more correct to say that it is dynamic, where one product or market offering could mean multiple things to different consumer segments. These symbolic associations are set by the consumption culture of the brand and its users, and then transferred to the individual’s conscious and subconscious

mind, and subsequently their emotions. Therefore, these symbolic meanings are co-created by the individuals and social groups who buy into the brand. This in return impacts on the success of the brand and its offerings. The idea of value co-creation in a destination is about the consumer's efforts combined with the organisation's efforts to improve their overall experience (Anh and Thuy 2017). Increasingly the focus in tourism has shifted to emphasise all forms of involvement by tourists (Pera, 2017). Tourists are not only consumers of a destination, they actively engage with it to produce their own experiences (Miles, 2014). Tourists become a part of the 'making process' of the places they visit (Richards, 2011).

The symbolic meaning in consumption occurs in two ways; either inward or outward as Holt (1995) suggested. Meanings occur either on a personal, or on a socio-cultural level. Hedonic consumption is when people consume products, or activities, for their emotional benefits, along with functional benefits (Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy, and Pervan, 2015). It is when an individual engages with these activities for reasons of expressing, enhancing and differentiating the self. Belk (1988; 2018) describes how possessions shape the personality and the status of the individual.

In the following section, a discussion of individual (or private) hedonic benefits sought by each of the three myth markets, is followed by a section on the social symbolic benefits sought by each myth market. It is important to note that some hedonic benefits overlap between the two levels (individual and social). This is due to a need for reassurance that originates from their societies, and is internalised to affect individual's private identities. This means, if an individual is motivated to acquire wealth as a personal and private drive, they will also seek to appear socially rich for reassurance. This overlap between the

individually and socially sought benefits is also due to the fact that they are ‘myth markets’, and as such Holt (2004) relates their existence to a cultural change (at the societal level) that has created a gap between their reality and their aspired selves (at the individual level).

#### **5.4.1. Individual Symbolic Identity and Myth Markets**

When it comes to the personal context of symbolic consumption, possessions and choices of where to dine, travel and even work, add to the individual’s self-concept (Belk, 1988; Hung, Chen and Peng, 2019). Shipman (2004) suggests that the consumer believes that their personalities are shaped by what they eat, drink, experience and sense. In this research, participants of all three myth markets have expressed how the luxurious destination of Dubai has contributed something to their own self -perception. Each group is discussed in the following sections.

##### **5.4.1.1. Respectful Renegades – Private Identity**

Respectful Renegades are travellers who visit Dubai to indulge and unleash their wild side, relax and pamper themselves in luxurious spa resorts, and self-actualise through shopping and fine dining. A common theme amongst the participants of hard work, deserving the rewards of hard play is illustrated by a participant who commented *“I think on some level, I feel like going there is a gift to myself. It is a time to enjoy what I worked for all those months before” (Participant J).*

They perceive freedom in staying out late and partying wildly without being questioned or judged. This group’s interpretation of Dubai was unanimous, Dubai was a playground to them, free of judgment and free of consequence. “Consuming Dubai” was the ultimate

experience to them. They found a personal attachment to the Emirate as it represented a part of their ‘selves’, or rather, who they think they are. This is derived from the inward level of symbolic consumption. A respectful renegade has an extravagant and wild side that they cannot explore in their home, or rather they prefer not to, in order to avoid judgment. Their inward hedonic benefits are driven by their personal interest, this is also influenced by advertising and their interpretations (Mick and Buhl, 1992). Participants of this research expressed how they perceive themselves and how the destination enhances these individual benefits and this can best be illustrated by Participant Z, who commented, *“I believe that I am a strong independent woman, as long as I am with my family I do not feel it. When I am in Dubai, I can feel and act like a strong and sexy woman”*. She further elaborated about what experiences helped her feel that way, *“Deciding to stay out late without worrying who is waiting for me at home, what justifications I have to give, wearing what I want and drinking what I want make me feel that I decide who I am. I feel great there!”* (Participant Z).

From the data we learn that the Dubai destination brand offers this particular myth market hedonic benefits that are internal, benefits such as feeling like Arabian royalty which translates into feeling rich. It also makes them feel like they are the main character in a story or a movie, most participants named celebrities like George Clooney and Tom Cruise as characters they feel like playing in their own stories. This sense of being the ‘lead role’ in the movie of their own life is explored by several of the participants who shared the following quotes,

*“I like it when I dress up and put on a fine watch and cologne. I feel like I’m George Clooney.”*

-Participant K.

*“There is a weird sense of assurance. I never really thought about it until now. But I definitely feel that I am a rich and fancy person when I go there! As if I ticked something off of a kind of a list or something. I know it sounds shallow, but really do you blame me? Have you seen their services?”*

-Participant AB.

Dubai enhances these perceived individual hedonic benefits in the sense that it allows these visitors to express (whether through products or services) their perceived and desired identities. The perceived identity of a Respectful Renegade is free and wild, and rich. It eventually makes them feel successful as the person they aspire to be. This sense of an enhanced identity can be explored through the nature of the activities enjoyed in the location. One participant who emphasises that her appearance is an intrinsic part of her positive attitude to Dubai, commented, *“I am a regular at a hair salon in Dubai, I always get my hair colour done there. I sometimes go to Dubai for a weekend just to do that! ... This makes me feel unique.”* Participant C. While others are equally enthusiastic about the fact that they are able to fully explore their identities in this destination, *“I feel like Dubai gets me! In return I feel guilty if I stay away for too long.”* (Participant F). This particular response is also fascinating as it emphasises the personified relationship which many of the participants feel in response to their positive experiences of Dubai. There is a sense of gratitude here, as though the location itself is giving the consumer the freedom which they crave to fully explore their identity, a sentiment which is also explored by participant X, who said, *“Dubai is always a good choice because everyone can find themselves there.”*(Participant X).

In these quotes the participants demonstrate a need to be treated in an exclusive manner. This treatment makes them feel elite and rich, they feel that the destination offers them the benefit of finding themselves and therefore, they become very loyal and attached to it. This supports research concerned with self and goal congruency with the destination, and how it influences the loyalty of visitors (Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy and Su, 2000; Ekinci and Hosany, 2006; Usakli and Baloglu, 2011; Hosany, 2012; Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk, and Preciado, 2013; Japutra, Molinillo-Jimenez and Ekinci, 2019).

In the end, a respectful renegade seeks both the experience of being pampered and the intoxication of being free. This is done by visiting the destination and buying luxurious objects and services. They perceive themselves privately as open-minded and elite.

#### **5.4.1.2. Raising Generation Z – Private Identity**

The second segment of affluent visitors to Dubai is the Raising Generation Z segment. Their perception of Dubai has many similarities to the other segments, though with a unique focus. They sense safety for their children, guaranteed fun and a family friendly place. This is due to the numerous activities offered for children, along with their families, from with beaches and swimming pools to theme parks. Participants of this group agreed that every time they visit Dubai, there is something new and trending amongst their children's friends. For example, Indoor skiing slopes, indoor skydiving (iFly Dubai), Xline (a zip line across downtown Dubai) and the unlimited number of theme parks, which are Legoland, Bollywood Park, Motiongate park, etc. These places are for the children and their families. To them everyone is guaranteed a good time in Dubai. Symbolic consumption in this group is higher in the socio-cultural context than the private one,

although not exclusively. A participant shared this complex internal dialogue between public and private personas when she said, *“I do not know why when I am at the beach with my husband and kids, I feel like I achieved some sort of a goal. Seeing them having fun and me relaxing with a cocktail, I feel like those families in TV commercials. And I think to myself, this is perfect”* (Participant N). This particular sentiment is highly indicative of the market’s general sense of anxiety over the complicated identity issues which are invoked by the nature of parenting, and how Dubai is uniquely placed in the market to ease those anxieties and supply a renewed sense of positive identity.

These individuals believe they are good parents if they buy things for their children and take them to places that ‘all their friends are going to’. From the derived thematic codes, participants feel success in their relationship with their children, they also feel rich when buying the latest technology and gadgets for them. These individuals also care a great deal about themselves and their ‘me time’. They perceive luxury and feel elite when they treat themselves to a spa treatment or a fancy meal. For this group, this must be documented and instantly communicated amongst their friends and families. They post photos of their ‘perfect’ family to reassure themselves that they are doing the right thing, and that they have a happy family that is keeping up with the trends.

These individual hedonic benefits are enhanced by materialistic objects, the seven star hotels and the luxurious cars, and by the extravagant shopping malls and all the activities that can be experienced there (e.g. skiing indoors, skydiving experience indoors, etc.). These hedonic benefits are explicitly explored and enumerated by various participants of the research group,

*“Dubai is a place where everyone in the family is happy! There are always things to do”.*

-Participant AN.

*“Not everyone can afford to take their entire family to Dubai and keep up with a certain lifestyle, I am glad that we can”*

-Participant AL.

*“I really am happy and relieved, to be honest, when my daughter tells me that some of her friends are there with their families as well. I feel like they must be from our social circle, and I feel relaxed knowing that she will have a good time.”*

-Participant AE.

These quotes from the participants show a theme of materialism and hedonism. They demonstrate that there is a link between materialism and hedonism in the symbolism behind the meanings associated with consumed goods and experiences. The sought benefits in this group are mostly success and joy. Dubai reassures them that they are good parents and they are smart parents for taking the family to a place where they all can experience pleasure in their own way.

#### **5.4.1.3. Bleisure Travellers – Private Identity**

The last group is the Bleisure Travellers. These are visitors who mix some leisure with their business trips. These travellers privately perceive themselves to be valued and successful. This image is affected by the skyscrapers, the businesses from the West that are operating in Dubai, and diversity amongst locals. A traveller from this group finds



reassurance starting in the flight to Dubai, (which is usually by Emirates Airlines), where they run into executives and CEOs heading to Dubai for the same reason, which is business. They derive a secret thrill from saying causally, *“I am always between home and Dubai”* (M.O.) and in the studiedly casual nature of this exclamation we can perceive the power of the identity myth which is being fulfilled here. Here we see the indispensable and influential business person, moving constantly between the private and public persona, and equally essential and valued in both.

Another participant focused on the enhanced sense of self-importance which is affirmed when becoming established in the regular field of business commuter receiving first class recognition, *“I take advantage of the fact that I am going there anyway. I feel wonderful when I go to the same places and they know me. Places where I am considered a regular. ....getting that special treatment is such a pleasure!”* (Participant E.Z).

Individuals of this group experience more private than social hedonic benefits in comparison to the first two groups. These visitors feel their optimum success when they are on a work-related trip to Dubai. Dubai, with its technology and innovations, skyscrapers and diversity, represents to them being part of a very advanced world and that they are in the right place in their careers. They perceive themselves as successful and valued by their work providers. Dubai offers them the “Manhattan Feel”.

To a Bleisure Traveller, Dubai is strictly for those with powerful positions and only successful people will have work to do there. This is purely a perceived and symbolic benefit. When their place of work sends them to represent the company in a meeting or a conference, they feel valued. And since the trip is an all-expenses paid, these visitors feel appreciated by, and important to, their companies. The intensity of the schedule, which

might be regarded as too much under every day working conditions, is actually perceived as an integral element of the enhanced status of doing business on a trip to Dubai, as exemplified by participant T.J, who explains, *“I really feel energised when I am there for work, everything happens very quickly and you feel that since your time is precious, they must realise that you are very important”* (Participant T.J.). This sense of the ‘pressure’ of the Dubai working environment as a form of social and personal kudos is further explored by another participant, who relishes the high octane pace of working life in Dubai, explaining that *“When I go to meet some people socially after a full day of work meetings, I feel very proud and successful when I tell them that I had no time between work and getting ready to meet them”* (Participant M.O.)

Visitors of this market feel empowered and successful when chosen to represent their company in Dubai. Many global companies base their headquarters of the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) in Dubai, turning it into a business hub in the area. This, in turn, portrays a very professional and successful space which is exclusive to global and powerful corporations. This feeds into the employee’s sense of being successful. As for being valued, this is enhanced by business class tickets, five-star hotels for the employee, and the amount of money given for their daily allowance.

The Dubai destination brand acts as an enhancer to these visitors, and assuages any anxieties they might have about the value of their positions or careers. Doing work in Dubai is a goal to some during their career, and they appreciate the business trip to this destination because of the combination of enjoyment of luxury, with the successful feeling after closing a meeting or a deal during that trip.

#### 5.4.2. Social Symbolic Identity and Myth Markets

The socio-cultural context includes status, profiling and prestige. The emotional bond with a destination is developed and strengthened when there is reassurance in associated social circles. This helps form strong feelings towards the brand and, therefore, it becomes dynamic as Gunderson and Watson (2007) suggest. The destination image evolves with memories and social interactions, people become who they are because of the sum of interactions they collect over time (Smith, 2017). These interactions could be between individuals, a person and a product, a person and a place, or between a person and an experience they purchase. This is seen in how the hedonic destination brand of Dubai represents different things for different people. Dubai, therefore, forms a cluster of symbolic chains of meanings that have been defined by participants of focus groups of different backgrounds with one clear thing in common, which is their advocacy for Dubai. Social symbolic consumption is about positioning one's self in a particular social class or community. Participants consumed the luxurious hedonic destination to become a part of an aspired elite groups. They find that the Dubai destination brand helps them express themselves and imbricates them within their communities. Two of the participants indicated a sophisticated awareness of the enhanced social status which consuming the destination of Dubai as a brand identity could give them,

*“There are the Dubai lovers, the Beirut lovers and the Egypt lovers. We are clearly defined.”*

-Participant AE.

*“...of course, the Dubai people, only accept the top-notch treatment! We would not survive the streets of Cairo for example. Or rather streets in general! We are indoor and mall people.”*

-Participant AK.

Veblen (1899) found that individuals desiring to move up in social classes, utilised the conspicuousness of luxury. Properties and goods are used to reflect their owner's positions in their families and social circles (Baumeister and Bushman, 2020), which can also include joining brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Fournier (1998) applied this concept to brands. This suggests that brand users, or destination brand visitors, build and develop their sense of self and social identity through consuming the cultural brands which are trending in their societies. Then they communicate their newly formed 'self' to others through their brand choices, which are essentially chosen according to similarities between brand and user meanings and self-image associations (Escalas and Bettman 2003, 2005; Khalifa and Shukla, 2017). This is seen amongst the participants of the focus group for this research as they 'loudly consume Dubai' and its luxury, talking about it, recommending it, and posting about it.

In each myth market, social hedonic benefits impact their loyalty to the destination. Each myth market is discussed from this social perspective, in the following section.

#### **5.4.2.1. Respectful Renegades – Social Identity**

Respectful renegades generally share the same values and feelings. They either have a wild side and/or an extravagant one. Modernity for this group symbolises going to Dubai for the weekend to unwind and relax. The social benefit is in the freedom that this entails. During

the focus group sessions, the names of hair salons, restaurants, nightclubs, lounges, and even hotels were commonly cited by the participants. They all went to the same places at the same hours of the day and night. These places were popular amongst them and shared almost exclusively by word of mouth. They also were influenced by the media (i.e. social media influencers, celebrities, TV shows and movies). Buying into these activities and visiting these places helps these individuals express that they are modern and open-minded. They want to be the type of people who go to fancy lounges and expensive spas.

When in Dubai, they mostly travel with a group of friends. To them, getting ready for a night out is an activity of fun in its own right. This is combined with the chance of meeting “the one” which might be perceived as an individual benefit, however, the real sought benefit here is that they are able to tell a story later on, after the trip, that communicates how modern and open-minded they are. They share the adventures of their trip in their social media profiles. They become the character they have always wanted to be in the story they have always wanted to experience. One participant expresses this by saying, *“I always remember “Sex and the City” when my friends and I go out. Even guys approaching us are categorised as TV series’ guys, there are the Harvey’s [from Suits], the Mr. Big’s [from Sex and the City], and so on.” (Participant N)*

Another social hedonic benefit they seek is being from an indulgent social circle, or rather, the leisure class (Veblen, 1899). Being in Dubai is being a part of an elaborate experience of a life free of consequence and responsibility, it is all about relaxation and pleasure. They make sure everyone who follows them on their social media networks knows what they do there in an attempt to profile themselves and position themselves in certain social circles. Most of their shared photos show a designer bag, an expensive dress, a fancy car and the

resort's spa and beach area. They feel freedom, joy and a sense of belonging during their stay. One of the participants of the research actually used the language of escape in articulating this sense of freedom when talking about a 'getaway', "*In Dubai I feel I am the best version of myself, I always vote Dubai when my friends and I are planning a getaway*" (Participant H), while another indicated a sense of being a leader within their chosen social circle, as defined by the elite consumer possibilities which only Dubai can bring, "*I see myself as a fashion icon in my social circle. Dubai is a fashion capital, I can shop there and feel that I am in my place when I do that.*"(Participant O)

Coming back from a Dubai trip with their friends is by no means the end of their experience, as they continue to feel the excitement of their conscious self-definition through sharing with their social group. They gather the rest of their friends to tell them all about the trip, what they bought, where they ate, and who they met. This is a social hedonic benefit sought to be seen as an indulgent person, who spends money on pampering themselves in the most expensive spas and restaurants.

#### **5.4.2.2. Raising Generation Z – Social Identity**

This group perceives social hedonic benefits more than the other two. They have a particular need to be perceived by others as good parents and, therefore, heavily rely on communicating their trip on their social media profiles. It is important to them that they keep up with other parents, so that their children can feel equal to their peers, or rather, the peer group they want to belong to. They sense belongingness when their children come back home and tell all their friends that they did all those activities and bought all those

products. Most of them run into their friends in Dubai, which is reassuring to the parents that their children are part of the “cool kids” group.

Parents of generation Z, whether they are of generation X or Y (Millennials), feel their reassurance amongst other parents too. Most of these parents are working parents, and do not spend a lot of time with their children. A trip to Dubai keeps the children happy and thankful, which is symbolic of good parenting. Holt (1997) demonstrated this in his research on how displayed and owned brands show the household’s social class. Therefore, a trip to Dubai represents in its act of symbolic consumption the definition of their social reality, and demonstrates to them their societal roles. As Douglas and Isherwood (1996) put it, consumption of any kind acts as a part of the society's communicational systems. These parents live in materialistic societies, where their social class and reality are measured by objects such as cars, houses, gadgets, etc. In the context of Dubai, where they stayed, what car they rented, and where they shopped, helps position them in society. Being able to afford to have their family stay at five star hotels communicates to others that they are rich or well-off. This is mainly why they are very keen on communicating these things with their followers on social media networks. Participants were asked to imagine that they took their families to Dubai and were not allowed to share the smallest detail. The performative nature of their consumption of the Dubai brand is clearly communicated by their responses,

*“Honestly? If I go and come back and I am not allowed to tell anyone, and my kids are not allowed to tell their friends, I might go somewhere less expensive. Maybe Abu Dhabi?”*

-Participant AZ.

*“I would not change the destination, however, I might ease up on expenses.”*

-Participant A.

They must be able to show who they are, what they buy and what they consume. They feel the need to communicate clearly to society and their social circles that they went to Dubai and experienced everything they did.

#### **5.4.2.3. Bleisure Travellers – Social Identity**

Individuals of this group experience social hedonic benefits starting from the flight to Dubai. They put on their business suits and carry their laptops and tablets to prepare for their meetings. They make sure they have the ‘business look’ in case they run into any business associates. Flying business class puts them in the category of professionals that they feel they belong to. They get a sense of achievement and success. Dubai in the Middle East is similar to Manhattan to them. A social hedonic benefit they seek at any cost is being important and powerful. It is communicated with their social and professional circles, through the meetings they attend, and the places they go to. Networking with highly professional and successful individuals in their fields is a defining social benefit of their trips to Dubai. The ‘Manhattan of the Middle-East’ to these visitors means the busiest and most successful location. If they are associated with these characteristics, they feel rewarded. This image was highly affected by factors other than word of mouth or society. In fact, it was due to the much more significant factor of the political stability of Dubai, and the ease of obtaining an entry visa, along with the media portrayal of the environment (i.e. the news, movies and television shows references).



When these visitors are in Dubai, their impulse is that they need to maintain a certain image through their material possessions, ranging from the designer suit and the briefcase they carry, to the car they rent. This is to communicate another social benefit, which is that they are expensive employees and highly paid. This means that they are smart, successful and valuable to their work place. They believe that if their companies appreciate them, they pay them a lot and make sure they get the best accommodation, transport and stay when on a business trip. Some of their comments reflect particularly on the perceived status of their means of transport, one participant joked *“I have to rent an expensive car like a BMW or an AUDI. I have to keep up with everything else”* (Participant E. Z). Another highlighted the luxury nature of even the transport services on offer in Dubai, *“I do not drive there, I use Uber. But even though, I still request a luxurious car. I do not want to be seen leaving my seven-star hotel in a Toyota!”* (Participant TJ)

These visitors feel joy in mixing pleasure with their business. After a long day of work, they plan a night out with their friends or colleagues. They go to the finest restaurants and lounges because that is, at least in their eyes, what is expected of a highly paid professional. A participant reflecting on the essential nature of luxury for business people in Dubai said, *“Many quiet fancy lounges open around work hubs to be the first choice of relaxation when you leave the office and before you go back to the hotel. Many of my colleagues [who live there] meet in such places after work before starting off their weekends for example, just as a mini celebration of ending the week”*. (M.A.)

To sum up, travellers of all three groups have built a bond with the Emirate. They have ‘befriended’ Dubai and have feelings of loyalty and a sense of belonging. This, however, differs with each group. This is demonstrated in their description of Dubai where each

group perceived an image similar to what they were consuming in the destination. The various and differing myth market requirements of Dubai as a preferred destination are typified in the participants' responses cited below,

*"Dubai is safe and family friendly"*

-Participant AK. (Raising Generation Z)

*"The Emirate is clearly a piece from the future! Very sophisticated"*

-E.Z. (Bleisure Traveller)

*"Dubai? Loud and wild! What else could it be? Luxurious and fancy maybe?"*

-Participant C. (Respectful Renegade)

In the end, through the development of this bond, they are able to achieve the transformation of their persona to one which they have aspired to. These individuals feel like they must keep going to Dubai and be loyal to it, as if this was a membership of a club they always wanted to join. Therefore, Dubai is a steppingstone to the self and social identification and enhancement. The most important unifying factor in the research group's response to their Dubai experience is that they all felt they had to communicate and share their trip eventually. Communicability of materialism, or rather, conspicuousness of luxury, is key in the goal of belonging to a particular social group. Dubai showed high congruence with the goals of these affluent groups, and the identities they desired. This is reflected in their loyalty to the brand destination, and their compulsion to share their experience and their advocacy of the brand within their social groups.

## **5.5. Discussion**

The success of the hedonic destination brand is built solidly on the fact that it can help visitors both to enhance and then convey their aspired persona. In this way, in its essence,

this is an example of symbolic consumption. Dubai, as a destination for luxury, pleasure and happiness, helps visitors express their status, their wealth, and their lifestyles. However, there are multiple aspects to one's self which could include differing social roles defined by varied personal characteristics, and consequently a variety of possible selves. These also include the person's idea of who they might become, who they would prefer to be, and who they fear becoming (Markus, 1977; Linville, 1987; Grant and Hogg, 2012). When there is a gap between the real self and the ideal self, myth markets emerge. Some cross-cultural evidence proposes that a person's mental image of the self could be based on the social environment, like relationships with others and memberships in social groups (Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Holt, 2012; Hogg, Abrams, and Brewer, 2017).

Cultural brands are rich in cultural symbolism, they symbolise culturally significant values, needs, and desires. These brands are associated with various elements of cultural knowledge, values and other cultural icons and incidental exposure to them can bring to mind the associated cultural meanings (Torelli *et al.*, 2010). Initially, Holt (2004) defined cultural branding as the process that builds brands into cultural icons, he suggested that if a brand can transform into a cultural icon, it is capable of expressing collective identities, and therefore, expressing what consumers want to be (Holt, 2012). In cultural branding, the brand promotes a new ideology that clashes with the old norms (Holt, 2016). A key role is played by the media and word of mouth in promoting the brands, and destinations, which will fulfil the needs of the self (Holt, 2016).

Symbolic consumption helped visitors to Dubai reach a sense of satisfaction. Experiencing the destination and all it had to offer gave them the opportunity to belong to their aspired individuals and social circles. Responses by participants about materialism indicate either

a conscious, or subconscious self-identification of the respondents to the positive elements of materialism as experienced within the culture of Dubai tourism,

*“A materialistic person would come to Dubai for the shopping only. They would not buy products because they wanted them, but only because they are trendy and they want to fit in.”*

-Participant U.

*“I have to own a Cartier love bracelet, a Rolex, and designer bag. This is the standard there, at any cost”*

-Participant W.

*“Buying an expensive bag would probably make a materialistic person feel that they are part of the crème de la crème of either their community or of the world in general since they are global brands”*

-Participant P.

*“A materialistic mother would probably feel like she is rich if her kids had expensive electronic gadgets”*

-Participant AM.

*“Materialistic people are not in Dubai for the fun and enjoyment, they are there to show off. ... Show off their possessions to show us that they are rich and sexy”*

-Participant C.

Analysis of data from the focus group, following an iterative process of thematic coding, was conducted to produce a cluster of concepts and to find links between them. This axial coding approach concludes a higher-order recognition of emerging themes as they relate to the key phenomenon being studied (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Spiggle, 1994). The codes

helped in developing themes to better understand the hedonic consumption relationship of affluent visitors to the luxury destination. These themes represented the core perceived benefits of Dubai. From the data, the first emerging theme was 'Luxury', which is found in hotels, restaurants, cars, shopping malls, and theme parks. The second theme was 'Success', whether as a professional, a parent or as an individual. The third theme was 'Belonging' to the visitor's aspired social circle. The last theme was 'Joy', which is feelings of happiness and pleasure and hedonic feelings. These themes were shared by all three groups. All four linked the three myth markets to Dubai. Though for each of the identified myth markets Dubai undoubtedly has unique characteristics, and differentiated individual and social symbolic benefits. The four themes are coterminous amongst them. However, they are interpreted differently in each group. In the following section there is a brief description of the four core benefits, followed by the different interpretations of each myth market.

### **5.5.1. Luxury**

Luxury seems to be the consistent theme amongst all of Dubai's visitors. It is the single factor which is most efficacious in satisfying their deeper psychological needs as embodied in sought benefits, both private and public, previously outlined. *Skift* (research and travel trends magazine) suggests that since experiential travel has become highly popular, the luxury travel category has focused more and more on the personalised experiences to become memorable. Travel is no longer exclusive to the wealthy, and increasingly, it has transcended the simple experience of luxury to encompass the more complex transformational potential of the experience. Travellers now hope that the experience of luxury will possess the magical power to transform them into a more desirable and

socially influential individual. This means that the new concept of luxury, or rather luxury travel, is a personal fulfilment tool (Carty, 2018). The modern consumption of luxury focuses on materialistic and conspicuous luxury (Atwal and William, 2009). Examples of conspicuous luxury are consumed in order to symbolise the user's affluence and power, and for the hedonic experience fostered by the usage of luxury brands for self-directed pleasure (Kim and Lee, 2015). This means that luxury travel has become a deep enhancer of personal fulfilment and growth.

Therefore, luxury can be a transformational tool or experience offered by the hedonic destination brand. Visitors to Dubai believe that the destination offers them an experience that they enjoy and they keep wanting more of it. This is what designer brands have discovered at a very early stage. They sell experiences, rather than the product itself. The same applies to luxury travel, if we were to take it to a larger context. A luxury trip, like a trip to Dubai, will tap into the passions and values of the traveller. When *Skift* interviewed Melanie Brandman, CEO of the luxury travel communications agency The Brandman Agency (2017), she explained that transformative travel includes a large variety of experiences. This could include acquiring a new skill, or having a deep discussion with an artist in their studio. Or in the case of the Dubai destination brand, visitors are always going to the newest restaurant, the latest amusement park and/ or the department store that is selling an exclusive product. They are all enhancers of a deep understanding of a private and social self. They also satisfy the need for self-actualisation, self-fulfilment, and belonging.

Participants of this research agreed unanimously that Dubai, a hedonic destination brand, is all about luxury. This research focused on what luxury meant to them and how it made them feel. Visitors of all three groups felt the luxury in hotel interiors, the services available in the emirate, and the service culture and elite standards. One of the Participants explored the nature of responsibility in the relationship which visitors develop with Dubai culture, saying, *“When you are in Dubai, you are expected to behave in a certain way, you have to respect the rules and be very polite”* (Participant K). In contrast another focused more on the sense of absolute entitlement which the visitor to Dubai can expect, *“Dubai is very luxurious because of the standard of service there, they treat you like royalty, so you have to act like royalty”* (Participant Y)

Despite these differing responses, it is clear that all the visitors feel the luxury they are promised in advertisements through the fancy hotels and spas, shopping malls, restaurants and the overall ambience. Feeling the luxury experience to them is transformational in the sense that it helps them express and live a reality of the self they idolised, whether individually or socially. Luxury makes them feel that they are being pampered and appreciated. It, therefore, makes them feel that they are being treated as they should be treated, and this plays a role in making them feel that they are being placed in the class they think they belong to.

Though luxury is a generic theme amongst the myth markets of this research, it is, interpreted differently amongst them. For a Respectful Renegade, luxury feeds into the anxieties of being rich and indulgent. They make sure they pay top dollar for their services. They get spa treatments, buy designer items and go to the latest fancy lounges and clubs.

To them, luxury is an enhancer of how modern they are. Seeking luxury for individuals of this group could be in the smallest detail of the trip, for example the type of wine they order, or getting their hair done by renowned stylists, as expressed by participant L, *“I only get my hair colour done in Dubai, sometimes my trip to Dubai is because of my growing roots. They know how to provide amazing service” (Participant L)*

As for the second group, Raising Generation Z, luxury helps them feel that all activities for their children are safe. This means that a Zipline through downtown Dubai will be safe for their children because of the overall level of luxury in the Emirate, as opposed to a zipline on an island in a less affluent environment for example. The sense of safety is also supported by the overall social status of people in Dubai, which gives an impression of there being no problem about crime or accidents. These parents would allow their children to go to a mall with their friends, unsupervised, whilst being in the same mall without a worry. One parent said, *“I would tell my children that I am staying put in a café in the mall and they are free to roam around. They know where I am if they need me. And if I need them, they have their phones.” (Participant BC)*

The last group of visitors, the Bleisure Travellers, interpret luxury in a very different way. They find that luxury enhances their feelings of being highly-accomplished in their careers. As the overall trip is luxurious, it reassures them that they are at the right place in their careers. Everything works smoothly and professionally. Luxurious flights, hotels, transportation and offices, translate into a successful professional trip, leaving them feeling confident and important. The luxurious and pleasurable aspect of the trip enhances their feelings of being valuable in their field through networking with successful and established



people after working hours. One interviewee said, *“The dinners or drinks after work gives the opportunity to meet people of high positions, this of course makes me feel that we are alike, if we are sitting on the same table.”* (E.Z)

### **5.5.2. Belonging**

Keeping up with trends and fads could prove to be a challenge for Dubai visitors seeing how expensive the Emirate can be. This is especially the case for the “Raising Generation Z” group because they are paying more since they are a family unit. Participants were asked to find alternative, or rather less expensive, ways to enjoy a holiday or a quick getaway without spending a large amount of money. They still chose Dubai as a destination, however some suggested that the accommodation would be in Abu Dhabi (a neighbouring emirate), which is less expensive and less crowded. This is because it was the destination that had all of the boxes that had to be ticked to become part of the self that they aspired to. This is at the heart of hedonic consumption of the destination. Participants chose Dubai because of the meanings associated with it, rather than the weather, the natural landscape, and the historical building. Some researchers examined the symbolic meanings and tourism, or leisure in general (Veblen, 1994; Greffrath, Meyer, Strydom, and Ellis, 2012; Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk, and Preciado, 2013). These studies suggest that symbolic tourism is largely influenced by the individual’s community. This research also supports this notion as the Dubai visitors were keen on visiting the destination essentially because of the impression this communicates to their social circle. This links to the concept of myth markets in cultural branding, where a brand must identify a disruption in society in order to create a sense of community in consumers by bringing like-minded consumers together to fuel the overall brand experience, story, community, and infrastructure (Waits, 2011).

It is important to differentiate between each of the researched identified myth markets in relation to their social circles, because these groups contributed directly to the profile of the aspirational societal identity which their consumer experience attempted to realise. For a Respectful Renegade, the clique they aspired to is the socially indulgent group. They make sure to buy whatever is trendy at the time, and show it off. Designer bags, shoes, hair colour, and watches are objects that enhance their positions in society. As for places, they must visit certain cafes, and take photos of their coffee cups carrying the brand name. They also visit lounges and restaurants that are trending to keep up with the trendy and indulgent social groups. One of the quotes, which perfectly articulates this ideal was, *“I feel excited that I always know what places opened in Dubai, my friends come to me for reviews and advice”* (Participant Q)

As for the Raising Generation Z group, they aspire to belong to a group of a new generation of good parents who make the right, and smart, decisions for their children. They make sure they take their children to theme parks that they heard about from their friends. They stay in hotels that offer entertainment for their children such as Atlantis Hotel and Resort. They consider themselves smart because Dubai offers their children exactly what they want in order to have a good time, whether this is continuous connectivity to the internet, or activities to keep them busy and safe. A parent said, *“When I share our plans of going to Dubai, and one of my friends say that they are also going, I feel like we are from the same class”* (Participant AL)

Bleisure Travellers also aspires to ideals that are unique to them. They enhance their identities to belong to a well-paid and successful professional, group. They use objects like business suits, briefcases, pens, and laptops to be perceived as one of that group. Their

after-work activities are almost always where professionals gather, this is a way for them to fit in. They want to feel and be seen as successful in their career and to demonstrate this. An interviewee said, “*When someone I know who is successful says they have work in Dubai, it feels like I am also successful because I go to Dubai, where our headquarters is, a lot*” (Participant M.O.)

Participants try to keep up with all the appearances and necessary consumption that will help position them in the right place in other’s minds. They will alter their social reality to belong if they must. An example of this is the phenomenon previously explored of renting fancy cars when in Dubai to keep up with everything else. It is important to note that these participants do not have these cars back home. They drive Toyotas, Fords, and GMC’s like everyone else back home. However, it is important to them to show that they fit in with their surroundings at any cost.

Communication reinforces symbolic meanings that personify the brand, transforming the destination of Dubai into a kind of ‘friend’ who understands and helps the individual be who they want to be. This is seen when people describe destinations employing human adjectives such as conservative, friendly, and adventurous (Sirgy and Su, 2000; Ekinici and Hosany, 2006). This was the case with the focus groups of this research. When they were asked to describe Dubai, respondents included the adjectives such as, “*free and open minded*” (Participant M), “*trustworthy and fun*” (Participant A.U.) and “*smart and sophisticated*” (T.J.). The ease with which they were able to personify the brand of Dubai is indicative of how deeply the symbolic meaning has been communicated and assimilated into their sense of their own identity, both public and private, and consequently, this is a

key indicator of their growing brand loyalty and feeling of necessary relationship with the destination of Dubai for their psychic wellbeing.

Participants in this research have consistently opined that luxury objects and experiences help them feel that they belong to the social circles to which they aspire. Belonging to these ideals reassures individuals and make them feel that they have succeed on both a personal and social level. Being acknowledged by peers also adds to the feeling of success.

### **5.5.3. Success**

The success theme from the data can be defined as the success of becoming both the person they wish to be perceived as by others, and being the person that they want to become privately. Visitors to Dubai are rewarded with the feeling of belonging to their aspirational social group, when they are recognised as Dubai Goers. This, in return impacts on the success of the brand and all of its market offerings. This means that when the hedonic destination creates a safe space for individuals to experience a renewed and redefined sense of self, and subsequently a set of experiences which enable that individual to effectively communicate their re-invented identity, the brand has achieved the goal of decreasing or even potentially curing the anxieties felt within the myth markets. This is due to the feelings of success that the visitors experience when consuming the symbolism behind the hedonic destination brand offerings. One Participant had an enhanced sense of status in relation to who they were in Dubai, mentioning the common theme of ‘royalty’, *“I feel rich and classy when I am there, everyone treats you like you are royalty. I never settle for less”* (Participant U), while another emphasised the enhanced sense of self-fulfilment *“The lifestyle in Dubai fits me perfectly, I find myself there”* (Participant W)

This success is different in each group. For instance, for Respectful Renegades, an individual thinks that they are wild, fun, open to life, rich and social. Finding the goods Dubai's hedonic environment that facilitate this re-positioning of identity results in feelings of satisfaction of succeeding in being an ideal self. The same applies for the second group, Raising Generation Z. These individuals believe that they are good parents and smart for being able to balance family, work and self-pampering. A hedonic destination offers just the right things to do and places to be able to achieve this success. Lastly, the Bleisure Travellers are focused on their careers and being important in their workplace. They also think that they are people who need a relaxing time after a long working day. Being able to show that they are professional with an elegant and classy side becomes possible in a destination that offers them a very sophisticated work environment. A luxurious end to the day, whether in a lounge or fancy restaurant, is the perfect combination of factors for them to be able to be perceived as their aspirational self. We can see these differing responses to the experience of Dubai in the research groups' emotional reactions. A Raising Generation Z participant encapsulates the sense of relief in being able to identify as a successful parent, when they exclaimed, *"My kids thanking me for the trip is so reassuring!"* (Participant AV). A Bleisure participant articulates their enhanced self-esteem at the prospect of a Dubai business trip when they explained, *"I feel that I am professional when I see DXB in my work calendar"* (T.J)

The theme of success, for each of the myth markets, however different, has something in common amongst all visitors of Dubai. They all want more. They want more of its goods and services to continuously reassure themselves that they are still part of their ideal class. They all want to be seen as rich and important. Being successful as a person gives them

joy. This post-visit satisfaction can be extended by goods which they have bought on their visit.

#### **5.5.4. Joy**

From the data, Joy emerges as a very real and quantifiable result of places visited or products bought from the destination. An experience is considered joyful, when it meets or exceeds expectations. Participants of the focus groups feel the joy in the luxury they experience, they feel joy when they experience the elements that help them reach their ideals. They often mentioned that shopping in Dubai gave them an extended sense of satisfaction and joy which they could take back home, and some could not wait to show their friends and colleagues what they had bought.

In taking on the qualities of the human beings associated with it over time and developing unique qualities, destinations can be said to have distinct personalities and characters. And just as a person finds joy in spending time with certain people in their lives, this also applies to places. In people we can call this factor of attractive energy and charisma. In destinations, and places in general, we can refer to this as ambience. These traits can become intrinsically linked with the visitor's personality which in turn creates a bond with the destination, functioning almost as a kind of 'friendship'. The destination then becomes experienced as a 'friend' who understands their mood and feelings, and gives them solutions to their perceived problems. Accordingly, this image that personifies the destination affects the traveller's motivation and intentions to return. This feeling of joy and success at achieving the desired social positioning inevitably gives rise to a sense of loyalty to the destination which facilitates this desired outcome. Litvin and Goh (2002) suggest that similarities between the visitor's self-concept and the destination brand's

personality, influences the choice of destination. This eventually helps Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) to better predict the destination choice of travellers. Research by Chon (1992) demonstrated that the satisfaction level of the visitor in experiencing a destination depended on the similarities between the visitor's self-image and the destination's-built image. These congruities expressed themselves in different ways. Therefore, as common as this theme of joy is amongst the three visitor groups, it is experienced differently in each group.

In the case of Respectful Renegades, "joy" is felt as the result of staying out late, partying, splurging money on spa treatments, and on fine dining, and feeling free of consequence and judgment. They want to wear outfits that express who they are without being judged, they also want to drink, and in some cases get drunk without fearing any law or social approbation. As for the feelings of being a socially indulgent individual, they find Dubai the perfect place to practice this by shopping for high-end products and treatments. They make sure they bring these experiences back home with them to extend the sense of joy, and to show-off in front of their social circles. One participant said, *"I only get my shopping done in Dubai. I enjoy the shopping, but I also like that some of the things are exclusive. And it really feels good to buy things and go through them when I am back home! As if it were a timeline of my visit."* (Participant T.)

The second visitor group, Raising Generation Z, experiences the joy of the visit through the time spent with their families. They enjoy shopping malls the most, because it gives them a chance to relax in a café whilst their children are off playing in safe and secured play areas. They are very appreciative of theme parks that offer rides for them as well, instead of having a mission of taking the children to a variety of different destinations and

amusements and subsequently feeling exhausted. This gives them reassurance that they are good parents who also find adult-time, or as some of them put it, “me time”. This makes them feel that they are smart parents who are successful in raising their children whilst taking care of their own needs. This sense of joy in Dubai comes with a high price tag, however, so they find their overall budget is best spent entirely in Dubai as opposed to any other destination. One of the parents participating in the group summed up the sense that Dubai is able to offer everything required in order to fulfil the imperative of good parenting in a changing world, *“Parenting now is different than before, we try to find places where we all have fun even if it is separately. For example, going to Europe might be fun for me and my husband, but the kids nowadays do not enjoy that experience. They want theme parks, arcades, swimming pools and cinema. Things are different and we have to keep up.”* (Participant AH)

The last visitor group, the Bleisure Travellers, find joy in the professional side of the Emirate. To them, joy is in the work environment, where each professional field has a dedicated city. An example of this is the Media City, where all media agencies and media suppliers are located. This organised place, with its restaurants and bars gives them the sense that they are in a highly professional environment. They find joy in networking and meeting people of the same background with all the promise of future successful connections, which this sense of a business community can bring. This reassures them that they are also professional and successful. Being able to mix this feeling with the private pleasure they seek later is the ultimate joy to a Bleisure Traveller. One commented in relation to this, *“It is a nice change of pace, I meet people who are interesting and successful.”* (T.J.) Another spoke about the down time after a long working day, *“I do not*



*get a chance to enjoy my evenings after work where I live because of my routine. When I am in Dubai, it is a nice reward to myself after closing a deal or finalising a meeting.”*

*(M.O.)*

## **5.6. Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the hedonic and symbolic consumption of visitors to Dubai. These groups have developed a deep bond with Dubai. It has influenced and enhanced their personal aspirations and concept of self. The deep symbolic meaning associated with Dubai lends itself to an experience that is hedonic and luxurious in nature. Visitors consume in order to feel many things including relaxation, venting, and happiness, and the core benefits of modernity, liberation, family bliss, and professionalism. Consuming hedonic benefits in a market offering is about enjoying the feeling that are associated with it. Therefore, when consuming these meanings, an individual looks for similarities between the brand and the self they aspire to be. For example, if an individual aspires to be an adventurous person, they will go to destinations where they can bungee jump or skydive. On the other hand, if they want to be elite, they will go to an expensive, luxurious and exclusive destination such as the Maldives, or Dubai.

Responses in focus groups showed that visitors do find self-fulfilment in their unique ways, through experiencing luxury, which makes them feel that they belong to the class they aspire to. This results in them feeling successful and therefore feeling joy during and after the experience of Dubai. This leaves them wanting more, and therefore there will be an inevitable revisit.

In the end, travel is now about seeking self-development as opposed to just seeing a new place or experiencing a change of pace. Luxury and luxury travel as a social need has been elevated from esteem to self-actualisation (Carty, 2018). Where hedonic consumption is deeply linked to hopes, aspirations and belonging, the need for material goods has become addictive (Titz, 2007). Dubai is a luxurious destination brand that offers hedonic experiences filled with symbolic meanings and benefits. It acts as a medium that communicates and feeds these symbolic goods to affluent visitors. This research, so far, has introduced three strategic segments of tourists that share the cultural aim of belonging to new ideology of affluent consumption and hedonism. The process of communicating these symbolic goods will be discussed in the following chapter.

**Chapter SIX: Interactional Communication of Luxurious Destination Brands**

## 6. Introduction

The experience of Dubai's affluent visitors is highly symbolic. The consumption of the luxury offered by Dubai has proved to be increasingly conspicuous and therefore, the need for communication has become an inherent part of the Dubai experience. Communication is not linear anymore. With the advent of social media, it has become a multi-platform process with complex and various manifestations, which is integrated and functions simultaneously (Fill and Turnbull, 2019). This process consists of people's responses to communication efforts received from other people and from technologies. These 'conversations' can be characterised as interactional and are a fundamental part of society (Fill and Turnbull, 2019). The three identified segments of Dubai's affluent visitors are the Respectful Renegades, Raising Generation Z and the Bleisure Travellers. They communicate their experiences to their communities, and these conversations emphasise the use of symbolic meanings and non-verbal cues. This is influenced by the hedonic consumption processes that is then communicated through the purchase of products and subsequent online posts and conversations.

Social and individual identities are built around meanings and interpretations, roles, and interactions (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1967; Schlenker, 1985; Hecht and Choi, 2012). The communication theory of identity (CTI) has many layers (Hecht *et al.*, 2005). This theory suggests that communication is a component of identity, as opposed to just a result (Hecht and Choi, 2012). This research explored the experiences of affluent visitors to Dubai and found that communication is indeed a part of the experience, rather than a result of it. Therefore, it is important to analyse the communication which these visitors generate and

consume in relation to their experiences of Dubai to give a holistic view of the interactional communication and the role it plays in their experience of the destination.

The chapter will first review relevant literature in order to gain a better understanding of how communication plays a role in the experience of affluent travellers in destinations. The main concepts that helped guide the findings is Veblen's (1899) conspicuous consumption theory, which was extended to 'Loud Consumption' to demonstrate the application of conspicuousness in the visitor's communication efforts. Loud consumption is used to explain that the affluent visitor not only display their consumption of luxury products in public but habitually and audibly post and talk about this to their social circles. The findings also draw on Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy and Pervan (2018) symbolic brands and personal meaning. This theory presents the brand as a person and as a friend, which was a key factor in this research in the participants' feedback when they were asked to describe the destination. Symbolic meaning of brands and personal meanings theory helped to better understand how a storytelling strategy can influence the meaning of the brand to individuals. Other theoretical work appears in the chapter to aid the linking of concepts and findings such as Fill and Turnbull (2019) on interactional communication, Schmitt (1999) and Atwal and William (2017) on experiential marketing, and Holt's (2004) myth making and cultural branding.

After the theoretical overview section, the communication context of the Dubai brand will be discussed by an examination of the communication of the various stakeholders of the destination, including its DMO, The Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM). Following this, the communication of affluent visitors to Dubai will be analysed via an examination of their posts, visuals and videos from social media platforms (i.e.

YouTube, Instagram, TripAdvisor and Snapchat). This will provide an understanding of the interactional communication that the visitors experienced. Photos from social media used in this chapter were taken from official accounts, which are open to the public, and from accounts of the participants of this research with their consent. In addition, other documentary photos of the city were taken by the researcher to illustrate the communication efforts of place making. The chapter will discuss the three phases of the tourist journey suggested by Hudson and Thal (2013). Existing literature on experiential marketing (Tynan *et al.*, 2009; Antéblian *et al.*, 2014) emphasise the temporality of consumer's experiences. The first phase is the 'virtual journey', where tourists are exposed to stories and communication before the actual experience. The second phase is the 'lived journey', which is the actual interaction with the destination. The third and last phase is the 'post-journey', which is the sharing of the successful experience (Hudson and Thal, 2013). For the purpose of clarity and to give a chronological structure to the visitors experiences, the sections in this chapter will be divided into communication by the service provider for the destination (which is usually prior to the visit), communication by the destination's marketing organisation (which is both prior and during the visit), and lastly, the communication by the visitors (which is both during the visit, and after). Following this, the key communication elements of the luxurious and hedonic destination brand of Dubai will be discussed through three thematic codes: hedonic cues, lifestyle marketing and experiential marketing. The thematic codes will be referred to as 'key elements of communication' in the affluent traveller's experience of Dubai.

## **6.1. Communicating Identity through Consumption**

Interactional communication is the sum of conversations that respond to a certain action (Fill and Turnbull, 2019). These conversations evolve to become a community that is a source of meanings and brand cultures (Percy, 2014). Social meaning becomes a major player in creating a social spectrum, relationships and personalities (Percy, 2014). Brand communities are defined as the non-geographic communities that are based on clear, structured relationships amongst fans of a certain brand (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Percy (2014) links brand communication with the social meaning it carries. However, in considering the influence of brands, Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy and Pervan (2018) extend the meaning to include persons as brands, such as politicians and celebrities, in addition to commercial brands.

Anderson's (1983) concept of 'imagined communities' illustrates how brand communication interacts with consumers and enables them to construct collective communities based on consumption and lifestyle (Cayla and Eckhardt, 2008). Anderson originally suggested that print material, such as books and newspapers, made people imagine that they lived in a common community. His ideas have been adopted by marketing and consumer researchers today, and applied to modern day systems of marketing communication. Brand managers use and apply multiple cultural references to build a brand and form a 'multicultural collage' and brand community (Cayla and Eckhardt, 2008). These communities are a strategy of cultural branding, where consumers are both drawn towards the myths which brands furnish, and away from their anxieties which the brand has been designed to resolve.

Online forums have become communities where the stream of communication is no longer restricted to a business-to-customer (B2C) line. In fact, it is possible to communicate amongst consumers (C2C) and give feedback and interact with businesses (C2B) (Buhalis, 2003; Fill and Turnbull, 2019). Collective interactions between service providers and consumers creates value (Vargo and Lusch 2008). This view suggests that frequent interactions, open communication, and constant exchange of communication are drivers of value co-creation (Prebensen and Xie 2017). Eventually, customers become co-creators of value through intangible experiences and their relationships both with the brands and with other customers (Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Vargo *et al.*, 2008). The co-creation of services for example, occurs when the tourist co-constructs the service or experience to better-fit his/her goals and needs (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

Consumers can co-create value within brand communities, as value is evident when it is portrayed and perceived by customers. This enhances consumer engagement and builds brand equity. Therefore, organisations can improve added value to their brand by effectively developing willing customers as resources (Schau *et al.*, 2009). Brand customers who share their experience with others become directly involved in the life of the product. The process creates meaning for the brand in co-creating its identity and symbolic value. Cova and Dalli, (2009) suggested that loyal brand customers could become “working customers”, who create cultural and meaningful value for brands. Brands, therefore, are social practices that consists of multiple stakeholders, and this creates a new focus on how brand value is co-produced with consumers (Brodie *et al.*, 2009; Hatch and Schultz, 2010; Frow and Payne, 2011; Iglesias, Ind, and Alfaro, 2017). Interactions between destinations (i.e. DMOs and service providers) and consumers co-create the



identity of the destination, and in order to achieve this, these consumers must be highly motivated (Black and Veloutsou, 2017). Throughout this chapter, co-creation will refer to the co-creation of the brand story and symbolic meanings.

In reality, Destination Marketing Organisations have very little control over activities performed by their destination's service suppliers and external intermediaries. Perhaps the only area that the destination marketer has control over by the DMO is the promotion of the destination (Buhalis and Amaranggana, 2013). This means that the DMO's communication activities have to be coordinated in collaboration with the resources available at the destination. For a destination aiming towards a leading position, it is important that a brand image is developed, and for this image to be unified throughout all the communicational efforts (Pike and Page, 2014). These communications must follow cultural meanings and values to connect to consumers' emotions, which are regarded as powerful motivators for consumption (Atwal and William, 2009).

Successful marketers use storytelling and myth making strategies in communication to frame a story in the words, images and interactions that reinforce the cultural preferences of the new ideologies (Holt, 2012). Storytelling is when brands use a narrative to form brand communities of shared experiences, desires and values, turning these communities into brand advocates (McCabe and Foster, 2006; Chronis, 2012; Hughes, Bondoni and Pehlivan, 2016). Storytelling shapes consumer behaviour in which both the brands and consumers tell stories. This applies to destination brands as well (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012). Storytelling creates an image that reflects a solution to the anxieties that people feel due to the shift in cultural change (Holt, 2004; Holt and Cameron, 2010; 2012). According to Holt (2012), cultural brands are built around the symbolic meaning shared in a culture,

which is then used by individuals to express their personalities. This is because brands can carry meanings, which are embedded in their cultural environments, such as success, independence, masculinity and femininity, and by communicating certain lifestyles and values (Holt 2004). Myths are defined in the cultural context as an ideal that is set by and shared in a culture. It could be a quest myth where there is a goal that must be achieved by a hero, or it could be a story that elaborates certain roles and values such as the ‘American Dream’ (Thompson, 2004; Heller, 2016). In support of this, Lichrou *et al.* (2008) suggest that destination brands should be marketed as stories, as opposed to products.

Storytelling not only helps in promoting the destination, but it also creates strong bonds between a destination and its visitors (Moin, Hosany and O’Brien, 2020). This relationship becomes a friendship bond that assumes anthropomorphic qualities for the brands. This means that the brand is perceived as a person or as having a brand personality. The bond between the brand and the consumer could also develop the idea of the brand as a friend, which is a relationship that is high on factors such as intimacy, commitment, and love. Consumers who ‘befriend’ brands become loyal, and more tolerant and forgiving of brand lapses (Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy and Pervan, 2018). This supports the concept of how some consumers move further than only assigning human-like personality characteristics to brands, and rather begin to develop meaningful human-like relationships (Fournier, 1998). Storytelling is central to marketing communications (Woodside, 2010). From the overview, storytelling, myth making, and communication have a symbiotic relationship where the co-existence is mutually beneficial.

Brand stories are communicated by consumers through consumption and communication efforts such as posts, reviews, recommendations, and word-of-mouth. Consumers who

have the need to symbolise their affluence and power, utilise the conspicuousness of luxury (Dubois and Duquesne, 1993; Kim and Lee, 2015; Vigneron and Johnson, 2017). ‘Buying to impress others’ or simply ‘flashy displays of wealth’ are all communication efforts (Rodrigues, Brandão, and Rodrigues, 2018; Gordillo-Rodriguez and Sanz-Marcos, 2020). Not only products, but lifestyle trends can also communicate social status and are a strong motivator of luxury consumption (Li, Li, and Kambele, 2012). However, they are no more than acts of Flânerie communication, whereby individuals stroll amongst each other and peer into each other’s consumption. Veblen’s conspicuous consumption is concerned with the public display of consumption to enhance status and power. In this research, this concept is expanded to its communicative counterpart. The term ‘Loud Consumption’ will be used to describe the above-mentioned efforts of communicating one’s status and largesse.

## **6.2. Dubai Communication Strategies**

The Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) is a governmental department that handles the planning, organisation and development, and therefore marketing of tourism in the Emirate of Dubai, UAE. This department manages the promotion of Dubai’s commerce division, the issuing of permits and general organisation of all the tourism facilities such as accommodation, tours, travel agencies, and all other touristic activities (Visitdubai, 2018). The following sections will present the context of communication by service providers in Dubai, the media and entertainment, and by the DTCM. This will represent the communication that affluent visitors are exposed to prior to their visit.

### 6.2.1. Communication by the DMO

The Department of Tourist and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) strategically locate their articles, brochures and promotion material in their target market's newspapers and tourism centres. An example of this strategy to target the market for maximum impact is when the DTCM located a promotional information booth in the Visa Application Centre in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (figure 6.1). This booth promotes reservations of hotels, airlines, theme parks, skydiving, etc. The booth offers multiple promotional offers and discounts for affordable luxury, making it even easier for visitors go to Dubai with a detailed plan of what to do there.

Figure 6.1. Visit Dubai Promotional Booth in the VFS Centre in Riyadh



Source: Photographed by the researcher, (2018)

The communication efforts by the DTCM are also very prominent online, whether on social media platforms or their YouTube channels, where they post videos and advertisements

that communicate where the Dubai brand is positioned in terms of luxury and unique experiences. In December 2016, a series of videos were shown of the Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan, who has fans all over India and the Middle East. The celebrity calls the destination ‘My Dubai’ whilst inviting his fans to visit with the hashtag #BeMyGuest (Visitdubai Youtube Channel, 2016). Several videos of the star showcase things to do in Dubai. A shot from the video (figure 6.2.), shows him surprising fans who are in an airplane ready to skydive in Dubai; he then jumps with one of them. This seems to be targeted at Respectful Renegades, the adrenaline seekers, an interpretation which is consistent with this research’s findings.

Figure 6.2. Shah Rukh Khan Surprising his Fans



Source: VisitDubai Youtube channel, Dec. (2016)

Another clip of the same campaign shows him walking through Dubai airport experiencing memorable moments with people visiting from around the world (London, Singapore, Mumbai, etc.). The video shows girls from Los Angeles on a trip and a group of men from Singapore (they later meet in the video) which communicates the possibility of meeting someone to fall in love with in the Emirate, thus targeting the Respectful Renegades. We interpret some parts of the video in relation to the Raising Generation Z parents, the clip

also shows a little boy with his team coming to Dubai to play at a football match as part of the unique experience of his first trip to the city, thus communicating the opportunities that the destination offers, and most importantly, what most of the Raising Generation Z focus group participants agree on, the safety of the emirate. The boy later in the video visits theme parks such as Lego Land. In another example we see a man with his wife at the airport picking up his parents who are there to visit (who later in the video go to the Opera House), this seems to be targeting Bleisure Travellers who are staying in Dubai for a period of time or even living there because of their job.

In each video, images of different segments are shown. In one video, a part shows the star surprising his fans in a restaurant by serving them their order. The restaurant is luxurious, and a glimpse of what goes on in the kitchen is shown to communicate that it is fine dining. The customers range from a family with children (Raising Generation Z), to a formal group sitting together (targeting Bleisure Travellers indirectly). In the same video, he then goes to a luxurious boutique and surprises his fans there who are buying designer shoes (Respectful Renegades). The campaign had the Bollywood star actively engaging with his fans in extreme sports, beach fun, fine dining and shopping, and finally, the emotional and memorable moments which characterise the visitors' experience of Dubai. He ends all the videos by saying 'this is my Dubai, come, be my guest.'

This campaign emphasised his loyalty and his personal invitation to viewers and readers to come to 'his Dubai' by displaying almost all the destination's attractions from theme parks, shopping boutiques, restaurants, opera house and finally extreme sports. The campaign was heavily launched online; it was integrated through social media on each platform with the appropriate format (video, text, hashtags, photos, etc.). This was also supported with a

jumbo billboard on the Sheikh Zaid road in Dubai which is the main road in the Emirate (see figure 6.3.), it is characterised by walls of skyscrapers on either side of the road. It is considered to be the centre of the business district and home to some of Dubai's most valuable properties (Propsearch AE, 2020). Even though it was mainly an online, campaign, the mass media followed and covered the news of this large campaign, either by newspaper articles or television news segments.

Figure 6.3. Jumbo Billboard in Sheikh Zaid Road in Dubai



Source: Source: VisitDubai Youtube channel, Dec. (2016)

As this campaign achieved remarkable success, the DTCM decided to relaunch it in 2018, showcasing new attractions in new videos. The campaign focused on loyalty to the destination that offers everything. Having this message conveyed by a highly influential celebrity like Shah Rukh Khan led to mass media coverage as a ripple effect of the online campaign (figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4. Mass Media Covering the News of the Campaign Re-Launch



Source: Arab News (Jan, 2018)

The Bollywood star has become the brand ambassador of the Dubai destination brand. In the three-minute video, the DTCM not only targeted Indians, they widely targeted all of Shah Rukh Khan fans, all adrenaline-junkies, luxury-seekers, and beach lovers, as described by the Think Marketing Magazine (2016). They showcase the country’s various attractions and how they are suitable for different segments. One of the participants said *“After watching the Shah Rukh Khan ‘Be My Guest’ YouTube video, I felt it was me talking not him, especially when he said ‘I know these sounds, I know these smells, and this energy... this is my Dubai’, I really related!”* Participant A.

Another Youtube video campaign used the hashtag #styledinDubai, which was created by Visit Dubai of the DTCM, where they had fashion designers from the Middle East speak about how Dubai has changed their designs. This included designers such as Maryam



Hassan who believes that Dubai will be the next Paris or New York of Fashion (Visitdubai Youtube channel, 2018).

The DTCM's VisitDubai YouTube channel communicates the same consistent message of luxury. A video of the 'Spirit of Dubai' in 2015, which has 27,415,668 views in 2020, states that *'Dubai is one of those cities that must be seen to be believed.'* Another video communicates the diversity of what the Dubai destination brand offers stating: *'There is something for everyone in DUBAI.'* The Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DCTCM), which is under the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing of the Dubai government, manages the branding, promotion and marketing of Dubai. The DCTCM works alongside the private and public sectors with the aim of positioning the Dubai destination brand as a leading global business and vacation destination. For them to achieve this, they promote the destination brand as a leading destination for leisure, amusement, and events, and also as a business destination. Their campaigns promote Dubai as a destination that offers all the needed facilities, infrastructure, trade shows and capability required to enable trade, attracting regional and international businesses to establish offices in Dubai. Operational partnerships with organisations in the public and private sectors of the tourism domain are focused on as this promotes trade associations with the aim to induce inbound travel and trade.

### **6.2.2. Communication by Service Providers**

The Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing in Dubai 'Visit Dubai', relies heavily on service providers in the Emirate to advertise their services through advertising for Dubai. Service providers like hotels, airlines, and telecommunication companies use

advertisements that not only communicate their products and brands, but are linked to the Dubai brand. This section represents the communication that the visitors may be exposed to prior to their visit. This will be analysed in this section. Images here were chosen randomly with no specific order or criteria through an online research of the keywords ‘Dubai Advertisements’ and creative agencies content. The selection of the following posts aims to cover all types of communication targeting the groups of this research.

Emirates Airlines (see figure 6.5.), and Taj Dubai Hotels Resort and Palaces (figure 6.6.), are examples of advertisements that were in local and international print (newspapers and magazines) for the duration of the campaign (Ads of the World, 2012). In these advertisements, the visuals communicate the lifestyle of a luxurious and modern destination. The background in the

Figure 6.5. Advertisement by Emirates Airlines about Dubai



Source: Ads of the World (2012)

Emirates Airlines visual shows modern buildings, telling a story of a promising and “re-imagined” world and saying hello to tomorrow. This advertisement when applied to the three found myth markets appears to be targeting the Respectful Renegades. The Taj Dubai visual on the other hand could appeal to Raising Generation Z, who in this research were defined as couples who have children. They value their ‘me time’, and hire help for their comfort. A visual of a butler waiting on their every need reflects the appeal of relaxation and luxury.

Figure 6.6. Advertisement of Taj Dubai Hotels Resorts and Palaces



Source: Luxury Branding Agency, (2015)

As for the Bleisure Travellers, the service providers in Dubai communicate professionalism and smartness. This is demonstrated in the Du Telecom advert (figure 6.7) communicating that Bleisure Travellers can have their entire office in their phone if they buy a Du SIM card.

Figure 6.7. The World is Now Your Office Advertisement by Du



Source: Du Dubai Best Ads by Carl Warner 20.

A campaign by Visa targeted all three groups in 2013 (figures 6.8), communicating the Dubai destination brand identity on behalf of the DTCM's Visit Dubai (Parisi, 2013). Visa targeted the affluent groups of Dubai with various visuals to attract them and to encourage their use of the card. The visuals show an understanding of the nature of the affluent visitors as they carefully chose different people of different races and genders, along with the iconic Burj Khalifah, which seems to be present in most of the visuals. Using different nationalities, ages and experiences shows that Dubai is a global destination brand targeting lifestyle segments, and it is a destination for excitement, modernity and luxury.

Figure 6.8. Fine Dining Visual, Fashion Visual, Adventure Visual and Lifestyle Visual



Source: Giuseppe Parisi, Visa Go Dubai Ad Campaign, (2013)

In their first visual (A), a blonde sophisticated lady is shown having a meal with a gentleman in a suit, leaving the interpretation of the meal to the viewer. It could be a business dinner, or lunch, targeting Bleisure Travellers, or a fancy dinner date targeting couples of Raising Generation Z having a quiet and romantic night. In the second visual (B), a woman showing off her dress is displayed with a background of multiple fashion items, giving the impression that Dubai is a fashion capital where a Respectful Renegade will always find something to buy, and show-off, during their Dubai visit. As for the third visual (C), Visa appeals to the adventurous Respectful Renegade who is eager to express the wild side of their personality. Lastly, the visual that sums it all up, is the Dubai lifestyle (D). This visual communicates to all visitor groups and addresses the ‘futuristic city’ that is an iconic symbol Dubai’s destination brand in this research.

### **6.2.3. Communication by the Media and Entertainment Industry**

Dubai is mentioned in several movies and music videos. This communication can occur at any time of the tourist journey (pre-visit, during the visit or post-visit). This section was necessary to demonstrate how the image of Dubai is communicated on a global scale by the entertainment industry. This section is about communication that surrounds the tourist at any stage and reinforces the same lifestyle that is communicated by the service providers in the Emirate. Brand placement and integration in media (movies, television shows and music), tell a story about the identity of Dubai. All celebrate Dubai as embracing and symbolising a lifestyle of extravagance and modern luxury. Images of money, luxurious cars, sexy girls and adventure are indulgently communicated to their audiences (figure 6.9).

In one video, the desert, an SUV and quad motorbikes surfing through the dunes are shown. The beach and the sun, the luxurious cars with Dubai licence plates, and large numbers of skyscrapers are seen in the background. This all relates to the materialism, masculinity and hedonism that fill the image of the Dubai destination brand.

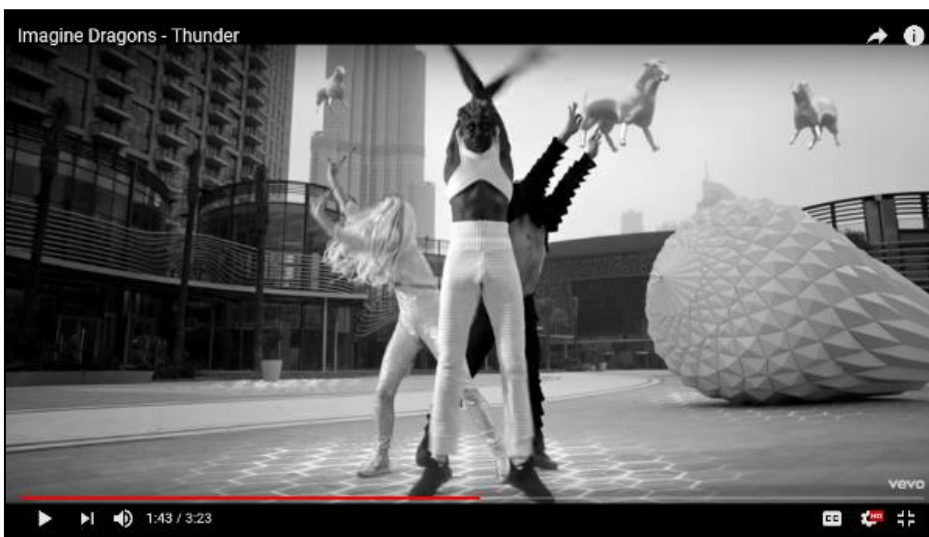
Figure 6.9. Official Video of Yungen – Bestie



Source: Youtube, YungenMusic, (2017)

Another association of the Dubai destination brand image is innovation, technology and the future. This is demonstrated in the music video of ‘Thunder’ by Imagine Dragons (figure 6.10). This clip shows modern performance art with the iconic Burj Khalifa in the background. The video was shot in the Dubai International Financial Centre.

Figure 6.10. Official Video of Imagine Dragons- Thunder



Source: Youtube, Imagine Dragons account, (2017)

Burj Khalifa was also featured in a ‘Mission Impossible, Ghost’ movie scene in 2011. Another movie which integrated the Dubai brand was ‘Star Trek Beyond’ in 2016 which was filmed in Downtown Dubai (Milek, 2017). As for Bollywood films, many were filmed in the city, featuring its desert, buildings, luxurious resorts and /or all of the above (Milek, 2017). In the television show ‘The Good Place,’ Dubai is mentioned as an elaborate Las Vegas. Ted Danson’s character states “...*Las Vegas, better yet, Dubai!*” implying that Dubai is the mecca of gambling and adventure (Season 2, Episode 4, 2018).

All of these destination brand placements, either implicitly or directly, indicate that the Dubai destination brand is well known for its luxury, diversity and modernity. The use of destinations to indicate luxury in the entertainment media has long been a practice before Dubai with destinations such as Miami, Las Vegas or New York being showcased (Firat, 2001). They, like Dubai now, build brand images across the globe that appeal to targeted audiences, and communicate their hedonistic associations through mass media such as movies, TV shows and music. All such media which communicate the Dubai destination brand in return benefit from its brand equity. This consequently leverages the Dubai destination brand.

### **6.3. Communication by Dubai Affluent Visitors**

The participants in this research were found to heavily communicate their visits to Dubai, predominantly through social media. They shared their photos of skiing, for example, with their friends and family on their private accounts on social networks. They posted photos of their Dubai adventures and exciting activities to communicate a story that they wanted to believe they were a part of. They later talked about their experience when they gathered



with their friends and family. Participants communicated their trips to Dubai, and communicated the luxury they consumed loudly and conspicuously. Meaning that their posts, photos and videos were all in aim to convey their social status. This was facilitated by the destination itself. Shopping malls, marinas and walks are all designed to facilitate the 'strolling' and 'displaying' of fashion, cars and luxury goods. The key word in the conspicuous consumption concept is to 'display', in other words, to let people see and make assumptions about the wealth of the person being seen. Veblen's theory is has evolved over time with consumers searching for new ways of creating and displaying wealth (Trigg, 2015).

In this research, the concept of "Loud Consumption" is introduced as an extension of the Veblenian theory of conspicuous consumption. The two concepts complement each other in the sense that they both have the same goals of gaining status and reputation in society. Loud consumption is, however, the amplifier of conspicuous consumption, it is its communicative counterpart. They are, however, different in terms of display, frequency of exposure, and audience. Whilst conspicuous consumption is about the display and public showing of goods that carry symbolic meanings in a particular society, loud consumption is when the consumer become an active agent in conveying their consumption through mass (and usually social) media. This is demonstrated by the practice of participants posting photos that show how wealthy they are, and by actively talking about the luxury they have experienced. What is particularly interesting about Loud Consumption is its shared and interactive character on social media. Following Hudson and Thal, (2013), this section examines communication by visitors before, during and after their visits.

### **6.3.1. Communication by Visitors: Pre-visit Stage**

After discussing the various players in the communication process that help position the destination, we will now shift the focus of the chapter to the visitors and participants in this research. This section will discuss how these individuals communicate with each other in relation to their visits to Dubai. Communication is an inherent part of the affluent visitor's experience that will be grouped into three distinct phases of pre-visit, visit, and post-visit. This section will also discuss how inter-communication amongst visitors creates discursive ways of experiencing and co-creating Dubai. It is important to mention that the participants of the focus groups are regular loyal visitors of Dubai and rarely rely on strangers' reviews unless they are researching into a new place such as a lounge, nightclub, and restaurant. Before they visit Dubai, participants ask other Dubai-friends about places they have been to, and they trust their feedback and reviews. These visitors encourage each other through shared photos and comments and hashtags associated with them. Participants explained that they seek their friends' recommendations before going to Dubai. In figure 6.11., one Respectful Renegade can be seen collecting names of places to go to in preparation for the coming trip. Many places shared and recommended amongst Respectful Renegades include bars, lounges, and exciting experiences.

Figure 6.11. Respectful Renegades Recommendations



Source: Research Participants

As these lists are sometimes created ‘after’ the trip, they are often the first step to others who are in the “information collection” stage. One participant said, *“Before I go to Dubai, I always ask whomever went recently from my friends to update my list of places to go to, like new restaurants, shops, lounges and sometimes hair salons.”* Participant AC. Visitors are continuously exposed to images that motivate them to plan a trip to Dubai. When asked about what photos of Dubai are mostly shared, one participant said, *“Burj Khalifah of course! Everyone I know has a photo standing in front of it, even if they are regular visitors of Dubai, and every time I see that photo, I miss Dubai.”*, Participant Y. Participant P. stated, *“Most of the resorts I go to in Dubai are a result of photos I have seen online- whether by friends or by other visitors from around the globe. [...] Because they cannot or will not Photoshop the space or the beach, they will share real photos of the place, and if I like it, I know I will find what I saw in the photo.”* This supports the interactional communication model by Fill and Turnbull (2019) that suggest that communication comes

from influencers, media, and the target markets themselves. They are all telling the same story.

Loyalty of these visitors often plays a role in relieving any perceived financial risk. They complain relentlessly about the high prices, however, they continue to visit Dubai willingly and frequently. One even commented, *“I know it is expensive, and with this amount I can be somewhere in Europe. But Dubai is a guaranteed good time for each one of us.”* Participant AN. Another one observed, *“Even though I always end up paying a leg and an arm for a visit to Dubai, I always get my money’s worth.”* Participant N.

These quotes show how perceived images and past experiences are similar. They still, however, reach out to friends who just came back from Dubai to get the latest updates on attractions. As demonstrated earlier in this section, Respectful Renegades ask about fun, exciting, and pampering experiences. Raising Generation Z members ask about family-oriented attractions from their friends who have children (figure 6.12.). Their interests are usually in theme parks, family beach, open places such as board walks, and shopping malls with children activities.

Figure 6.12. Raising Generation Z Recommendations



Source: Research Participant

The search is different for a Bleisure Traveller. They research the hotel they will be staying at, the location and distances between the hotel, their work location, and any attraction or event surrounding them. They rely more on published material and websites such as “Time-out Dubai” because it can inform them about any event related to their business and connections. They also usually depend on their colleagues who live in Dubai to show them a good time.

### 6.3.2. Communication by Visitors: Actual-visit Stage

Communication by visitors during their visit to Dubai was primarily symbolic and aspirational. Participants of this research were asked about the type of photos they shared with other travellers when they were in Dubai, and what kind of comments they received. Many of their answers were similar, the most shared photos were either with the iconic

Burj Khalifah (the tallest building in the world), on the beach relaxing, participating in an extreme sport or the infamous photo of the person sitting in a café taken (supposedly) ‘without their knowledge’! This is a classic example of a point where Dubai enables a simulation opportunity for the visitor to live the hyperreal ideal of themselves. The findings showed that the urge to communicate came from the need to belong to aspired groups. This is demonstrated by the ‘loud consumption’ that co-creates that story of the destination brand of Dubai. This also supports the notion that the mere act of strolling and displaying is no longer enough for these loud consumers, they need to take initiative in creating content that communicates their luxuriously lived experiences. Commenting on this inevitable fakery, a participant said *“I always laugh when I see a photo of my friend acting like she does not see the person taking the photo of her, yet I do it all the time! [...] Because it feels like you are a celebrity. Many social media influencers have the same pose in Dubai, and I know Fouz AlFahad<sup>5</sup> has tons of photos like that.”* Participant F.

In a photo shared by one of the participants (figure 6.13), it is evident how this visitor feels as though she is in a story of her own, treating herself to some quality ‘me time’. To many visitors like her, Dubai offers a situation where they can live the fantasy of a relaxing time through imagery that communicate the concept of proper ‘me time’ such as the big blue swimming pool, a cold drink on the side, the sunbeds with layers of towels, which are replaced constantly by fresh ones by pool butlers.

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<sup>5</sup> Kuwaiti social media influencer

Figure 6.13. Four Seasons Hotel Dubai



Source: Focus group participant (2017)

And like British Columbia's DMO (Newberry, 2019), the dissemination of this imagery is all encouraged by the destination itself (Visit Dubai account) to be posted and shared in their official social media accounts for customers to see and to be seen, this establishes a platform of communication between visitors. The Visit Dubai Instagram account of the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) captions the photos with hashtags of trigger words such as 'happy', 'family' and 'holiday'. In considering this Instagram post, (see figure 6.14), in the light of the myth markets explored in this research, it seems designed to appeal to the Raising Generation Z group. An example of this would be the perfect young couple with a cute baby going out for a desert adventure.

Figure 6.14. Visit Dubai Instagram post-Family



Source: Visit Dubai Instagram account (2017)

Photos by Dubai visitors in the Instagram account reflect the three myth markets of this research (figure 6.12.). From the research findings, there is a consistency in the communication amongst the Emirate's DMO, stakeholders, and visitors. They are all communicating an attractive destination to multiple segments of affluent travellers. Photos are generated by the affluent visitors of Dubai. The Instagram account shows multiple photos taken by affluent tourists in similar experiences and locations. Numerous photos are of an extravagant feast, near an iconic landscape such as Burj AlArab and Burj Khalifa. There are also images of extreme sports and exciting experiences. Each post in the following figure (6.15.) describes a core benefit sought and attained.



Figure 6.15. Instagram Post Targeting: ‘Respectful Renegades’ (Top Left), ‘Raising Generation Z’ (Bottom Left), and ‘Bleisure Travellers’ (Right)

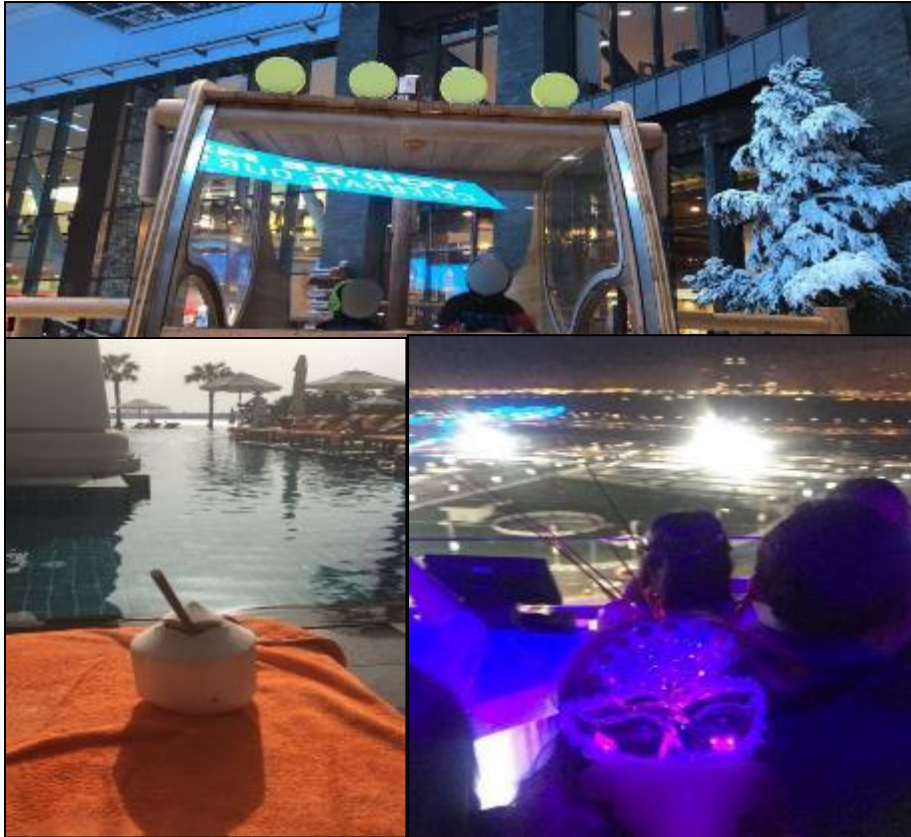


Source: Visit Dubai Instagram Account, (2019)

On examination of this platform, it became clear that Dubai relies heavily on hedonic experiences which encourages consumers to share. It is filled with symbolic benefits and is essentially a self-expressive tool. Dubai to these visitors is where anything is possible, a modern destination, an Arabian Nights fantasy and luxury resort, and finally a business and operations hub. The same story is told by the DMO, the service providers, celebrities and influencers and now, by visitors. This synchronised interactional communication cycle encourages visitors to ‘loudly consume’ the destination by creating content.

Some of the participants' photos showed cues of a certain lifestyle of luxury and relaxation, happiness and celebration, and adventures and activities. Examples of the three myth markets communication during their visit can be seen in the following figure (figure 6.16).

Figure 6.16. Raising Generation Z (Top), Respectful Renegade (Bottom Left) and Bleisure Traveller (Bottom Right)



Source: Focus groups participants (2017, 2018)

This encourages positive word-of-mouth communication about the Dubai destination brand and simulates a fantasy of either a carefree luxurious, a fun and exciting, or a professional and successful lifestyle. As a result, travellers who identify with the lifestyle that Dubai offers start finding similarities with each other and with the city. They eventually develop a feeling of belonging towards the brand, and this acts as a motivational tool that encourages others to visit the places posted by their friends, as demonstrated by

the participants in the previous section. When some visitors post photos of their pleasurable time in Dubai, others are taking note of those experiences for the next time they visit the destination.

### 6.3.3. Communication by Visitors: Post-visit Stage

Post-visit communication differed amongst the three myth markets. The ‘Respectful Renegades’ stated that *“Dubai is a fashion capital now, I can find all brands there!”* Participant AD, and *“I feel like I am in the future when I am in Dubai, I always wonder why all hotels in other cities don’t pay attention to details like hotels in Dubai.”* Participant F. Photos from this group are mostly about the products they bought when they were in Dubai (figure 6.17.). These photos loudly communicate consumption. They predominantly consist of expensive designer brands that communicate one’s wealth and status.

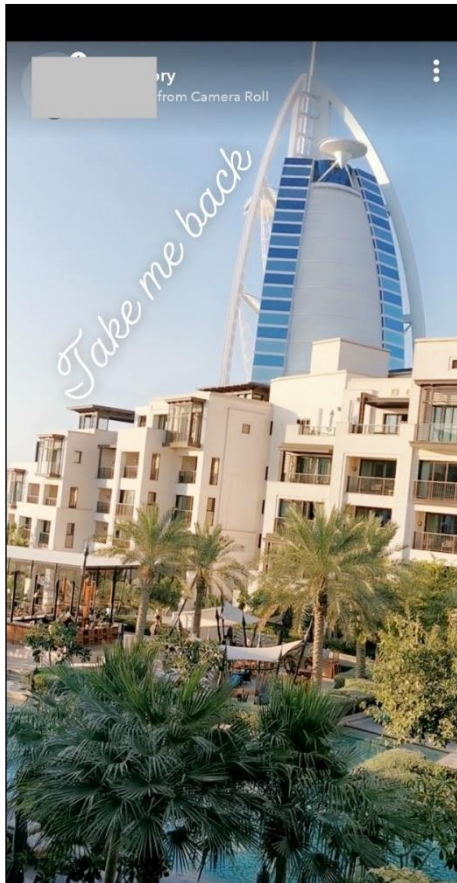
Figure 6.17. Respectful Renegades Photos Post-visit to Dubai.



Source: Research Participants.

On the other hand, visitors from the Raising Generation Z group said *“Dubai was built for our generation and our kids’ [generation], it is really not for people who are into nature or history. Most of the places are not there by nature, they are fantasies that are built.”* Participant AE, and *“I am a little old fashioned, I only visit Dubai because of my kids. I secretly feel like a caveman there! Everything is so advanced I feel like it is on another timeline to be honest.”* Participant AH. These travellers miss the sense of relaxation and quality family time after their trip to Dubai. The following photo, for example, nostalgically remembers the luxurious family resort that is missed by the participant (figure 6.18.). This photo was taken in Jumeirah Al Naseem Resort in Dubai.

Figure 6.18. Raising Generation Z Photo Post-visit to Dubai.



Source: Research Participant (2019).

Bleisure Travellers also agree with the idea that Dubai is a destination where a traveller can feel as though they are in the future, and in a place where fantasies are lived out. Some of the visitors from this group said, *“You will always use top notch technologies and services during a work visit to Dubai.”* Participant M.O. and *“At this day and age, trips are not exclusively business or pleasure, they can be both- they mostly are! Dubai is the kind of place where you have pleasure after work or make business contacts during a night out partying.”* Participant E.Z. Posts by this group show a sense of accomplishment and success. The photo shared by a Bleisure Traveller (figure 6.19), communicates the futuristic feel they enjoyed when they were in Dubai, or simply the exclusive product they purchased for their office from Dubai markets. In this image, the participant shared a photo of the “Bukhoor Burner” they bought from Dubai for the Riyadh office.

Figure 6.19. Bleisure Traveller Photo Post-visit to Dubai.



Source: Research Participant

From the findings, working adults fantasise about relaxation and an average teenager dreams of being a ‘fashionista’ or a technology expert. These needs seem to have been met by a visit to Dubai. Situations of lived dreams are not exclusively of dreamt places that exist in the real world, they are also places that bring fantasies and myths to life. Visitors to Dubai experience these ‘lived moments of fantasies’ when in the destination, which leaves them with a resonating sense of joy that stays with them when they are back home. In their focus groups, they explained how their time in the Emirate has left them feeling like they were in a story from a movie. They felt that Dubai offered them the platform to write their own story, even though briefly. Some of their quotes demonstrate how the hedonistic destination brand resonates through its physical environment and surroundings. Participant B ecstatically observed that, *“In Dubai I am a princess! The way I am treated and waited on is just a dream.”*, and Participant AA eulogised, *“Dubai buildings and streets make me feel like I am in the future.”*

Such aroused feelings of emotion and accomplishment encouraged participants to start recommending the destination. Visitors wrote reviews and posted recommendations about the destination on social networks such as Twitter’s hashtags and the Instagram accounts of the DTCM and travel accounts. They share information face-to-face in gatherings and at any chance they can. Some even create a ‘must-go-to list’ and start sharing it with their friends on their Snapchat account and in their WhatsApp groups, (a step that is considered a final step of the experience to some, and becomes the first step to others.) This all fuels the concept of “Loud Consumption”. Visitors need to talk about their experiences to each other, in addition to the sharing photos. Some of the participants mentioned recommending hairdressers in Dubai to their friends in Saudi by showing them the result of that experience.

They commented, “My friends know I only get my hair colour done in Dubai, they always ask for the salon’s number before they go”, participant C. And “I always show my hair colour as evidence that they do have the best hair stylists in Dubai”, participant L.

Although these participants may not exactly be creating discussion forums and communities of visitors, they still, however, have a bond that ties them together. They talk about the destination and its newly opened spots and reminisce about their trips. In figure 6.20., the Twitter post says that the person misses Dubai (on the left), another individual replies with a photo of a man in a cardboard box saying “take me with you” under it (on the right).

Figure. 6.20. Loyalty to Dubai on Social Media.



Source: Twitter, (2016)

Participants observed that there is a sense of belonging to each other, and to the destination after they leave and go back home. One participant commented *“This has happened many times, when someone and I have a friend in common, as we meet for the first time, if she says something about Dubai, I light up! She immediately asks: are you a Dubai addict too? We always have a good laugh and reminisce about Dubai past trips.”* Participant Q. This adds pride and reassurance to loyal visitors. It also encourages new Dubai visitors to build and enhance a positive image and identity of the Dubai destination brand. Eventually, potential visitors are expected to identify themselves with the groups of visitors who have already travelled to the Dubai destination brand and therefore create additional positive word-of-mouth communication amongst other societies and communities. One of the participants said, *“Dubai’s service level has ruined us for other tourism destinations, it is very difficult for us to accept the level of service elsewhere because it will surely be [of] lower [standard] than Dubai’s, and whenever I say this to anyone who has been to Dubai, they instantly agree.”* Participant AF.

After a visit to Dubai, visitors agreed with each other about certain images of the destination such as, the getaway, the fashion capital and the advanced city. This is due to how these images effected the visitor’s mood when in Dubai for a holiday. This goes hand in hand with their shopping behaviour. Collecting items during shopping makes visitors feel as though they are collecting parts of the destination (Kong and Chang, 2016). Objects, clothes, bags, and souvenirs carry memories of their time spent there (Hubbell, 2011). When participants of the focus group were asked why they associated Dubai’s identity with shopping, some of their answers were, *“Dubai has a very big shopping festival, it has been going on every year for years now.”* Participant K., *“Most designer brands opened their*



*first boutiques in the Middle East, in Dubai.*” Participant P. and *“Shopping malls are where most families go so that adults can sit in the very nice cafes and restaurants while our kids can go to the cinema or hang out with their friends.”* Participant AO.

Visitors feel that they found what they expected, if not more. When these loyal visitors were asked to describe Dubai, their descriptions revolved around, (1) a city from the future, (2) an escape destination with high standard services, (3) shopping and luxury, (4) nightlife, and finally (5) a business capital. Visitors perceive the advancements of technology and the futuristic theme of the destination in its buildings and smart streets and places. Some of the participants said, *“I do not think there is anything manual anymore in Dubai, it makes other cities seem stuck in the past really.”* Participant S. They also add that the identity of Dubai is linked to it being an ‘escape destination’ as if it were an island like the Maldives. The cycle of communication is carried on after the visitors return home. They watch videos and photos by their peers, influencers and celebrities who all post about Dubai. The quotes demonstrate the power of ‘Loud Consumption’ acting as a motivator for visitors, and thus, completing a cycle. One participant said, *“I follow several celebrities on social media, whenever one of them is in Dubai, their photos are of the beach and sand, the hotel spa or the beach party. This is the same if they went to the Maldives.”* Participant U. Another said, *“I watch ‘Made in Chelsea’, they go to Dubai more often than you would expect! I want to go again every time I see their posts.”* Participant O. Participant D noted *“I follow ‘The Real Fouz’ (Kuwaiti Fashionista), she is always going to Dubai to promote restaurants or watches, etc.... This shows that Dubai is a luxurious destination in my opinion.”* Themes of luxury, hedonism and celebrity pervaded this communicative discourse of largesse, flânerie and display.

## **6.4. Discussions- Communication Themes**

In this final section, the thematic codes which emerged from an analysis of Dubai's communication, which has been presented in this chapter, following Gibbs (2007) method, will be discussed. The emerging key communication themes are, (1) hedonism (happiness and pleasure of the senses), (2) lifestyle (luxurious lifestyles communicate through symbolic meanings of places and products), and (3) experience (the simulation of the story and the lived fantasy). These themes were evident in both the communication which emanated from Dubai and its stakeholders, discussed in the first part of this chapter, and from its visitors and participants in this research, discussed in the latter half of the chapter.

### **6.4.1. Hedonism**

Hedonism is the belief that 'the only good life is the pleasant life.' (Feldman, 2004). A hedonic experience is consuming products and places that satisfy the emotional arousals and fantasies of the consumer (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). The hedonic experience plays an important role in the visitor's choice of destinations (MacInnis and Price, 1987; Goossens, 2000; Atwal and William, 2017). Consequently, how the hedonic brand promise is communicated will influence destination brand image and conversations between target markets. Hedonic benefits sought by Dubai's affluent tourists are luxury, belonging, success and joy as was discussed in the previous chapter. The findings show that affluent consumers respond to hedonic stimuli. Images, such as the ones used by the DTCM, viz. clear beaches, luxurious hotels and resorts, spas, fine dining, beautiful people, servants, lounges and alcoholic drinks, speak to sought pleasures by myth markets.

The DTCM communicates these images as is demonstrated in the Visit Dubai social media account. Dubai's communication focuses on the fantasy of a relaxation and indulgence. Hedonism, for instance, is implied in images of luxurious settings and pleasurable moments in palatial blue swimming pools, with accompanying cold drinks, and sunbeds with layers of towels. This demonstrates the impact of cognitive images on associations of the destination brand as suggested by Lim and Weaver (2014). The Shah Rukh Khan campaign by the DMO focused on pleasuring the senses, and was premised on hedonism. The communication by the Bollywood star specifically was a luxurious melange of spices, scents, colours, and the spirit and felt energy of the Emirate. The campaign targeted adrenaline-junkies, luxury-seekers, and beach lovers (Arab News, 2018). Another campaign by the DTCM focused on communicating hedonic shopping of designer brands in the destination by having fashion influencers speak about the Emirate and its importance to the fashion industry. All communication efforts focus on conveying that the destination is about pleasures of the senses and joy. This is also applied by service providers in the Emirate as demonstrated in this chapter. The Visa 'Go Dubai' campaign used visuals of multiple hedonic settings that appeal to the targeted markets. The media and entertainment industry use locations to promote their productions, with Dubai becoming a filming location for movies and music videos that aim to communicate luxury, wealth, adventure and fantasy. Images of sexy models of both genders, expensive cars, extravagant hotels and desert dunes are all hedonic cues that trigger symbolic meanings and conversations.

Participants in this research linked the identity of Dubai to the image of a 'getaway destination'. This is a destination where they can experience pleasures that cater to all the senses. Fine dining, luxurious lounges, souks, spas, shopping malls, and safaris are some

of the many examples of the hedonic experiences that affluent visitors consume and communicate when in the destination. All these encounters make up the overall experience of the destination as suggested by Buhalis and Amaranggana's (2015). Participants sense the luxury in the hotels' interiors, restaurants and lounges, shopping boutiques and overall services and facilities, and therefore, focus of capturing these settings in their photos. The photos they share with their friends and families are filled with hedonic elements of pleasure, luxury, and extravagance. Visitors sense these hedonic elements and enjoy them, and communicate them. In all interactional communications analysed in this chapter, the Dubai destination brand is linked with luxury and exclusivity. Hedonism in communication could be considered a foundation of an overall lifestyle. For example, the hedonic cue of "shopping" translates into a person who is fashionable and rich, a hedonic cue of "nightlife" translates into a wild person, and hedonic cue of "spa treatments" translates into a person who is fancy and relaxed. These lifestyles derived from hedonism are lifestyles which the three myth markets aspire to and loudly consume. This is discussed in the following section.

#### **6.4.2. Lifestyle**

The interactional model of communication assumes that communication is not linear, it involves multiple players and sources communicating in the form of conversations (Fill and Turnbull, 2019). Storytelling on the other hand is when brands use a narrative to form brand communities of shared experiences, desires and values (McCabe and Foster, 2006; Chronis, 2012; Hughes, Bandoni and Pehlivan, 2016). This makes the Dubai brand a 'relatable' one whereby the strategy of storytelling makes it easier for the consumer to identify with the brand. This clearly relates to Holt's (2012) observation that relatable

brands become cultural and iconic brands. The Dubai destination brand communicates a story of a certain lifestyle built around luxury and modernity as demonstrated in the chapter. Images of desired lifestyles in the Dubai communication context reflect different fantasies across the three myth markets of Dubai visitors. Using lifestyle images strategically in the brand communication is what Brassington and Pettitt (2000) call Lifestyle Marketing. They define it as the individual's patterns of the activities that they take part in, the interests that they have, and the thoughts that they develop (Brassington and Pettitt, 2000). Therefore, the lifestyle and goal congruence occur between the destination brand and the visitor when the level of similarities between the destination brand experience and the visitor's desired lifestyle are optimised. Communicating a successful message could encourage travellers to visit or even revisit the destination. This is due to the impact that the message has on the personal attachment to the destination (Onkvisit and Shaw, 1987; Yang *et al.*, 2020).

The promise of a luxury lifestyle is a story that is told by many service providers at the destination, in the media, and by the destination itself. The story told by the Emirates Airlines, is the same story communicated by the Taj Dubai Hotel and Resort, and it is the same brand image that is being perceived by visitors of the destination. This became clear in the focus group discussions, as participants agreed on the Dubai brand image by describing it as a luxurious, high-tech and futuristic. The lifestyle of Dubai visitors is communicated clearly and well understood amongst participants. This consequently makes it easier for visitors to create a bond with the destination brand and therefore to become loyal.

The identity of the Dubai destination brand translates into different meanings for different groups of visitors. This goes hand-in-hand with Ekinci and Sirakaya's (2013) work on self-congruence, brand identification, and lifestyle-congruence, and how these are key elements in building loyalty to destination brands, and therefore, the success of the destination brand itself. However, during the focus group, when other meanings were suggested to them, they also agreed. For example, when Bleisure Travellers were asked what they thought about linking Dubai with the 'getaway destination' identity, they agreed regardless of the professional work they originally experience at the destination. Dubai's affluent visitors use lifestyle images to communicate their wealth. A true demonstration of the loud consumption concept is by the visitors who post photos and videos that show their social class and success. As demonstrated by the participants, the Respectful Renegade was keen on showing how he/she lived extravagantly by showing images of their designer brands, their spa days, and their lavish meals. On the other hand, the lifestyle desired by a Raising Generation Z individual was a modern, beautiful and happy family who are wealthy and have popular children. Thus, they focused on showing images of their quality and fun family time and how their children live the modern and luxurious experiences such as indoor skiing, indoor skydiving, and swimming with the dolphins in the most lavish locations. As for the last group, the Bleisure Travellers, their lifestyle images consisted of business and leisure where they communicate their success on personal and professional levels.

When the sources converse about the Dubai destination brand, they are communicating the same lifestyle. This is done by the DMO, the stakeholders, influencers, celebrities and the visitors. As demonstrated in the chapter, they are all on the same page. Dubai is a

destination that offers a luxurious lifestyle through many hedonic experiences that satisfy the symbolic needs of the affluent visitors. Hedonic experiences seem to target all three myth markets in different ways that appeal to each. Something that is now known about Dubai, is that the concept of ‘experience’ is a major player in the overall three-staged-experience of the affluent traveller’s trip. This is discussed in the following section.

### **6.4.3. Experience**

Experiential marketing is not mass oriented. It focuses on an individualised targeting strategy (Schmitt, 1999). Research undertaken by SRI, an international market research organisation, found that experiential marketing drove faster results than traditional methods with consumers, suggesting it led to quick positive purchase decisions (Williams, 2006; Atwal and Williams, 2017). The Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) communicates the Dubai brand experience of pleasure, luxury, and innovation through various tools. Some of these messages are communicated in an implicit way and some are explicit. The destination brand of Dubai relies heavily on simulacra and the hyperreal in their projects. This facilitates their experiential approach of engaging with their customers. Communication by the DMO and its service providers focus on promoting experiences of luxury and pleasure. From the analysis of communication from the organisational side, trigger words such as ‘A breath-taking fusion of rich Indian heritage’ (used by Taj Hotel and Resort), ‘Unwind, balance and uplift with unique spa treatments’ (used by One&Only Spa), ‘Make it unforgettable’ (used by Skydive Dubai) are used to describe the experiences they sell. Other, more family oriented, businesses like Dubai Safari use words like ‘your children can learn something new today in a safe environment’ that show an ‘experience’ oriented communication rather than one that is product focused.

As for business travellers, the communication targeting them focuses on cues that indicate a more professional experience filled with pleasurable elements to do business. An example of this would be ‘combine living, business, leisure and entertainment in one prime location’ (used by The Executive Centre, One Central Dubai).

Visitors of the Emirate experience a different ambience in various locations where some of these locations mimic European countryside villages. This motivates them to frequently take photos in different locations. In the hyperreality that is lived in Dubai, there is a multiplication of myths and simulacra signifiers. Visitors take photos in Britain’s iconic red phonebooths in the centre of Dubai for example. This gives visitors the experience of travelling to multiple destinations during their single visit to Dubai, and thus, share these places with their family and friends. The essence of myth making lies in its facilitation of the articulation of collective identities and desired selves by consumers. Loud consumption communicates the visitor’s wealth, success and aspirational identity. Affluent visitors share posts, photos and videos which creates narratives of their consumer experience. Stories are staged for each of the three myth markets to live, and relive, their fantasies and to pleasure their senses. When being exposed to images which denote hedonic experiences by the DMO, service providers, and media and entertainment industry, affluent travellers perceive solutions to the tensions they feel in their societies. They also find congruency between their goals and sought for benefits, and the Dubai destination brand. This makes the travel experience a continuous interaction between the traveller and their social situation and physical environment as suggested by Kim and Chen (2019). This motivates the tourist to communicate their experiences to validate success and belonging felt throughout this experience.



From their experiences, visitors form opinions, thoughts and eventually emotions towards the Dubai destination brand. These opinions and feelings are communicated amongst visitors and influence the destination brand associations and perceptions. This all impacts on the experience of affluent visitors. The Dubai lifestyle that is marketed can be demonstrated by the experiences which are communicated in the interactional communication environment. This means that the DTCM relies on consumer-to-consumer communication to convey messages about their experiences of the destination. When tourists' experiences are unique, authentic and memorable, they are encouraged to share those experiences on social media platforms, and therefore generate electronic word of mouth (Kim, 2018). This also means that value and the co-creation of a destination image can be defined as a combined effort where both the consumers and the organisations co-communicate and interpolate through continuous and ongoing conversations (Anh and Thuy 2017). This form of communication is vital to the positioning of Dubai's brand as a hedonic and luxurious destination. The entire Emirate is designed to be a luxurious fantasy that can fit all three myth market profiles. This demonstrates by Atwal and Williams' (2017) proposal that experiential marketing is becoming the basis of development in fields such as tourism.

## **6.5.Conclusion**

This chapter discusses the interactional communication that surrounds affluent visitors in Dubai. It has demonstrated how Dubai, its stakeholders and its visitors, the participants of this research, communicate the destination, and through this act of communicative co-creation symbolically create both Dubai and its brand. 'Visit Dubai' by DTCM

communicates a consistent story about the experiences promised by visiting the destination. The following table summarises the main findings (Table 6.1.)

Table 6.1. Main Findings Summary

<b>Main Findings</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Luxury Destination Communication Theme</b>	
Hedonism	Happiness and pleasure of the senses
Lifestyle	Luxurious lifestyles communicated through symbolic meanings of places and products
Experience	The simulation of the story and the lived fantasy
<b>Communication by Visitors during the Stages of the Visit</b>	
Pre-visit Stage	Information search by potential visitors. This could be intentional and /or incidental through communicational surroundings.
Actual-visit Stage	Active and loud consumption of the destination and all experiences and encounters.
Post-visit Stage	Continuous posts and conversations about experiences and exclusive products consumed in the luxury destination.
<b>Key Concepts</b>	
Loud Consumption	The communication counterpart of the Veblenian concept of conspicuous consumption. Individuals repeatedly and actively talk about and show-off to other visitors on social media the luxury which they consume to demonstrate their wealth and status.
Storytelling	When brands use visitor narratives to form brand communities of shared experiences, desires and values, turning these communities into brand advocates.

Source: Author (2020).

From the case study, the same story is told at all touch points. The Dubai destination brand fuels hedonic and symbolic benefits by offering experiences that are built around a clear identity. This results in building positive thoughts, emotions, opinions, and perceptions of visitors.

Such communication creates loyalty amongst Dubai's affluent visitors. They keep coming back and spending their holidays in the Emirate. They also encourage friends and relatives to visit Dubai. Prospective visitors find the groups they want to identify with and follow their steps in belonging to this hedonic destination. In doing so they become members of a self-ascribed elite community. From the findings, it is important to these affluent visitors to continuously communicate their achievements, wealth and status. They 'loudly consume' Dubai by taking photos, sending lists of recommendations, and buying objects that will prolong the experience after they are home.

Being a part of the Dubai experience is being part of a new and modern culture. To affluent travellers, Dubai offers a luxurious and hedonic lifestyle which is congruent with their sought-after benefits, and thus, assuages the tension caused by the cultural shifts that surrounds them. A storytelling approach that conveys these luxurious lifestyles and experiences encourages visitors to show their social circles that they have 'made it'. A perception is built around this message that a fun and exciting and glamorous lifestyle can be lived during a stay in Dubai. Nonetheless, one can also maintain a professional and successful lifestyle, if this is what is aspired to. Eventually, the brand becomes part of their personality as it offers the visitors the space and time to live the hyperrealism and experience of the self that they dream of.

Based on the findings, the Dubai destination brand has become a playground for adults as well as children. The difference between the Dubai destination brand and Disney is presented in the generation it speaks to. Whilst Disney is a space for fantasies to be lived and experienced, Dubai offers a self-enhancing hyperrealism that has continued for years due to the fact that innovation and new attractions are always being added to the Dubai experience. Disney has a nostalgic experience, whereas a Dubai visit is always about modern culture and the future. This is well received by the Millennials and Generation Z who visit the city. Dubai's brand equity is embraced by and enhanced in popular culture and mass entertainment which vicariously relives the brand and communicates its narrative of luxury, modernity, and success. Finally, the three myth markets are active participants and co-creators in this symbolic communication of luxury and hedonism. When they live their fantasy in simulations offered by the destination, they make it a point to loudly consume these experiences for everyone to see. By communicating a narrative of luxury and consumption, these visitors willingly join a chorus of a co-created fairy tale of hedonism, aspirational lifestyles and unique experiences.

**Chapter SEVEN: The Luxury and Hedonic Destination Experience Framework**

**Model - A Discussion**

## **7. Introduction**

This chapter will discuss draw together the previous chapters of this research. It will answer the research questions of this thesis and will develop a framework through which the experiences of affluent travellers to Dubai, as an exemplar of a luxurious hedonic destination, can be understood. The chapter will discuss the research questions which were given in the introduction and which were examined in the research chapters of this thesis. In answering these questions, it will fulfil the aim of this research which is to examine how affluent travellers experience Dubai as an exemplar of a luxurious hedonic destination brand. The questions of this research are, Q1. What is the practice and discourse of different segments of affluent consumers in Dubai? What are the characteristics of these consumers and their motivations for consumption? Q2. What factors are involved in the consumption experience of Dubai, in terms of motivation, benefits-sought, interpretation and behaviour of affluent consumers? Q3. What is the nature of hedonic consumption amongst affluent consumers to Dubai? What are the underlying motivations for their consumption of hedonism? Q4. What is the nature of the consumption of luxury by affluent consumers to Dubai? What are the underlying motivations of this consumption? Q5. How is Dubai's luxury and hedonism communicated amongst affluent visitors to Dubai? What meanings and symbolic values are conveyed?

In the following section, the answer to each research question will be discussed. After that, the aim of the research will be explained. In the last section of this chapter, the developed framework derived from this research will be introduced and explained.

## **7.1. What is the practice and discourse of different segments of affluent consumers in Dubai?**

### **What are the characteristics of these consumers and their motivations for consumption?**

Three different groups of visitors to the hedonic destination brand emerged from the data. These groups were described as myth markets because they adhere to and are motivated by distinct cultural ideologies. From the emerged thematic codes, following the coding models of Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Gibbs (2007), the researcher was able to identify three categories of characteristics and motivations for consumption. The first theme indicated a group that seeks pleasure, adrenaline and freedom from consequences. This thematic code was named Respectful Renegades. They express their individuality in Dubai through lavish dining, shopping, extreme sports, nightlife, and visits to resort spas. To them, Dubai is the perfect destination because it offers them the space to feel that they are in the right place in their lives, resulting in happiness and satisfaction.

The second theme found in this research is the Raising Generation Z group, they are parents who have children of generation Z. These parents find in Dubai a destination that offers a perfect combination of activities for the family as whole and/or separately. Because of the ongoing openings of theme parks and entertainment centres in Dubai, the options during each visit are constantly renewed and therefore, they are never bored. The Emirate offers them safety and fun in a luxurious setting. This helps them feel that they are good parents, and that their children are trendy.

The third and last theme in this section is the group of visitors who go to Dubai for professional reasons, however, they combine their work trip with pleasure. They are the Bleisure Travellers, individuals who go to Dubai because it is a business hub of the MENA

region (Middle East and North Africa), and this hub is fast paced and highly advanced. In addition to working hard, they greatly enjoy their down time after work in lounges and restaurants. As different as these groups are, and as varied the benefits they seek, they have commonalities amongst them such as their loyalty to the hedonic destination brand, which carries a strong bond.

Dubai meets the needs and expectations of those three groups in performing and acting as a restorative to their anxieties. Dubai gives them a sense of being part of an ideology that they aspire to belong to. They get a sense that the gap between themselves and the ideology in each of their societies is closing gradually. This is done by how they perceive the hedonic destination brand and how well it matches their self-concepts privately and socially. Their experiences during their visits are built on these similarities between them and the hedonic destination brand. This research supports the suggestion of Escalas and Bettman (2005) that visitors show stronger connections to brands when their overall image is consistent with the image of the group, they wish to become part of. The work of Holt (2004) is central in relation to this topic. He describes myth making as an element in building iconic brands and suggests that contradictions are created by people not being able to live up to the inflated social and cultural standards, particularly in relation to identity and expected behaviour, that are created mainly by marketing and mass media. Iconic brands resolve these tensions by making people feel that they are achieving these standards (Holt 2010; 2012).

This is seen in the three found myth markets, particularly with the first group, Respectful Renegades, as they emerged from a contradiction between how a person who is single was perceived in the past, to how they are perceived in the modern story of singlehood.



Previously they were seen as sad, lonely and lost in the past, yet recently being single has become a lifestyle of someone who is free and liberated, spends money on themselves and is independent. As for the second group, Raising Generation Z, the previous perception was that these parents are pressured, have no time for themselves, and are almost always bored and tired on family trips because in the past the trip prioritised their children with no adult activities. This created a gap between parents stuck in that old perception and the new story of modern parenthood where parents are having as much fun as their children, have nannies to help them, and find time to enjoy their family trip without their children, this allows them to be better parents as they are relaxed and genuinely enjoy their family trip. The last group, Bleisure Travellers, face a contradiction between the old image of a successful professional, who was always under pressure when going on a business trip, who barely found time to enjoy the city they were in, and who was viewed as someone who dreaded being selected to go on the trip. The modern story shifted to a business trip that means that the traveller will be treated as an important person by flying business class, staying in luxurious hotels, finding the opportunity to network socially in fancy lounges located next to a highly professional and designated district in the city.

## **7.2. What factors are involved in the consumption experience of Dubai, in terms of motivation, benefits-sought, interpretation and behaviour of affluent consumers?**

A consumption of a destination brand is an elaborate experience. This became clear after drawing a picture of an affluent traveller's experience in Dubai from the participants. Many factors are involved in terms of the motivation, benefits sought, interpretation and behaviour. The findings helped the researcher understand these factors and their relationship. It was found that the cultural shift that causes the existence of myth markets

acted as the primary motivator. It was the cause and motivation for a visit to Dubai. Whilst the act of visiting Dubai was a result of this. Because of the elaborate experience of tourism, it was necessary to identify the mediating and moderating factors that add clarity and meaning to the experience that affluent visitors go through. The found core symbolic brand benefits explained the relationship between the myth markets and the luxurious hedonic destination brand, and thus, these benefits are considered to mediate the relationship between the visitor and the destination. As for moderating factors, which affect the strength of this relationship, this was found to be the communication and loud consumption of the visitors.

Dubai's affluent visitors felt a shift in cultural meanings and this created tensions that needed solving. The culture surrounding these visitors faced new and modern ideologies that contradicted previous traditions. This created tensions which generated myth markets. These myth markets sought core symbolic benefits, which according to the findings were luxury, belonging, success and joy. The symbolic benefits were found in Dubai, and this gave the myth markets a space to resolve their tensions and anxieties and consequently identify as belonging to their sought ideologies. The more these affluent visitors felt reassurance, the more they visited the destination. This was highly affected by the communication that surrounded them. Cues that conveyed solutions to their anxiety focused on hedonic experiences and luxury. Affluent visitors loudly consumed Dubai, this was found to exceed mere 'showing-off'. This relationship between the cultural shift and the luxurious destination brand grew stronger with the loud consumption of these affluent visitors.

Affluent visitors consumed the destination and all it had to offer in fulfilment of their hedonic needs. Dubai immersed its visitors in experiences that directly fuelled their senses and made them feel that they lived their dreams. These variables, cultural shifts (independent), visiting the luxurious hedonic destination (dependent), seeking symbolic benefits (mediator), and loud consumption (moderator) explain the journey of experiencing Dubai by affluent travellers. Understanding these relationships helped in constructing the overall framework, that is the main contribution of this research.

### **7.3. What is the nature of hedonic consumption amongst affluent consumers to Dubai? What are the underlying motivations for their consumption of hedonism?**

From the findings, Dubai is full of experiences that pleasure the senses and fantasies. Affluent visitors feel that the destination is a free space for living out their fantasies. There were three affluent groups who visit Dubai, and they showed commonalities amongst themselves. However, they were segmented into groups that shared the same needs, desires and aspirations. The first group, Respectful Renegades seemed to perceive the playful and lustful side of the destination. They find pleasure in unique experiences such as spa treatments, expensive nights out, exclusive spots and luxurious experiences. Their hedonic consumption is motivated by their individuality and extravagant and wild selves.

Hedonic consumption by the second group, Raising Generation Z, is slightly different. It is driven by emotional and fantasy motivations. These parents find the opportunity to live the dream of the perfect family. And as found in this research, these parents also care about their 'me time' during their family trip, thus, their hedonic consumption is also driven by multisensory pleasure. They find pleasure in family-oriented experience like the beach,

theme parks and shopping malls with the entire family. After that, they experience spa treatments, a drink by the pool, and a fancy dinner.

The third group's hedonic consumption has a more unique nature compared to the other two groups. Bleisure Travellers seek enacting the fantasy of the successful and important professional. They are motivated by experiences that reassure their success and accomplishments. Members of this group enjoy luxurious and professional treatment throughout their work visit, this is combined with pleasurable experiences such as having a drink in a luxurious lounge with colleagues after a long day of business.

Dubai has become a part of the socialisation and societal expansion for affluent visitors. This role turns the destination brand into an emotional brand that is linked with nostalgia and happiness. Over time, the hedonic destination brand image becomes linked with high levels of credibility, quality, and satisfaction in the consumer travellers' minds. When a brand offers hedonic experiences that pleasure the emotions, fantasies and the multisensory, it will result in positive memories (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Clawson and Knetsch, 1966). This in its turn influences the recalled information about the destination brand when going through the decision-making process of choosing the destination of a holiday or a quick getaway, this echoes the suggestion that encounters with destination brand stakeholders create an experience that will influence revisit decisions (Buhalis and Amaranggana, 2015; Hritz and Cecil, 2019). To these affluent visitors, the decision is always Dubai, and this demonstrates a clear bond between the loyal visitors and the hedonic destination brand that is built around the positive brand experience and the continuous satisfaction of its visitors.

#### **7.4. What is the nature of the consumption of luxury by affluent consumers to Dubai? What are the underlying motivations of this consumption?**

Travel and tourism are considered to be experiential by nature (Quintanilla, 2018). This means that consumers go through thoughts and feeling as opposed to a tangible usage of the product. Destination brands therefore should rely heavily on creating positive cues throughout the experience of the visit. In the case of the Dubai destination brand, from the findings we learn that the brand is consumed symbolically, thus, it is visited for the symbolic meanings associated with it. The destination fulfils two levels of sought benefits, (1) benefits that enhance the private or individual self, and (2) benefits that enhance the social self. Thus, making the destination brand a platform for visitors to express and communicate their aspired selves, which, in its essence, is symbolic consumption.

As different as the three visitor groups to Dubai are, they are bound to have commonalities amongst them due to the fact that they are all myth markets, meaning they are aspiring to belong to an ideology (unique to each group). Another reason is the fact that they are all living in Saudi Arabia under the same traditions, rules and culture, and lastly, due to the fact that they are loyal to the same destination brand, Dubai. They perceive the same cues and association to the brand in a broad sense, however, the cues are interpreted differently in each group. From the findings, visitors underwent the same process of the symbolic consumption, the steps of the process were categorised thematically, (1) the luxury theme, experiencing luxury was a foundation from which to reach a social and individual aim, (2) the belonging theme, being able to experience that luxury gave them a sense of belonging to their different aspired social circles, which led to (3) the success theme, feelings that they have succeeded in positioning themselves in the desired place as an individual in their

unique societies, resulting in (4) the joy theme, a positive feeling of happiness and pleasure with a unique definition of joy in each group.

Symbolic consumption can be conceived as a process which can clarify how the hedonic destination brand is consumed by the three affluent myth markets. The first stage is the consumption of luxury. This is followed by how luxury adds to the sense of self by creating a feeling of belonging. Belonging to aspirational groups enabled visitors to feel successful as individuals. This final stage of success brought individuals feelings of joy.

Luxury is a common theme of association with the hedonic destination brand according to this research's findings. Visitors of all three groups perceived luxury, experienced it and consumed it. Consuming luxury proved to be transformational, regardless of the specific definition of each group. Luxury, for a Respectful Renegade, mended the gap that was created by anxieties of not being rich and indulgent, an ideology they aspired to be a part of. Luxury is an enhancer of how modern and successful they are. These individuals seek the benefits of being modern and trendy privately (inward) and being rich and indulgent socially (outward). Luxury acts as a reassuring transformational tool. As for Raising Generation Z, their anxieties were related to aspiring to be good parents and to make sure that their children were keeping up with their peers. They also needed to feel that they had time for themselves as well as their children, calling it 'me time'. Seeking private benefits such as doing right by their children and assuring they had fun and were happy (inward), and social benefits of being well-off and successful as modern parents (outward). Luxury played a role in facilitating the overcoming of these anxieties. As for the last group, the Bleisure Travellers, luxury was an indicator of how professional, powerful and successful they were in their careers. Anxiety was created due to the shift in the understanding of what

it meant to be important in one's career. Luxury in the interiors of offices, transportation, outfits and social spots all poured into the enhancement of the self individually and socially. Being able to experience luxury made them feel valuable in their field through networking with successful and established people.

The 'belonging' theme, is a stage that is reached after visitors experience the luxury in tangible and intangible market offerings throughout their visit. Luxury, however differently interpreted by each group, acts as the one constant condition to have a good life. These individuals aspire to belong to ideologies that are pleasurable, and therefore rely on luxury. When these myth markets experience feelings of showing off the luxuries they are consuming, they are instantly positioned as part of the groups they aspire to, whether on a private level or a social one.

These affluent visitors always chose Dubai because it gives them the opportunity to do what is necessary to become the self that they aspired to. Meanings that are associated with Dubai, overruled any obstacles such as hot and humid weather, lack of natural landscape and lack of historical building. It is a space where anyone can be free and wild, a family person and a good, well-off parent, or a successful professional who has an important position in their career. These associations were created and stressed over time by visitors to Dubai, service providers, influencers, and the destination itself. It is noteworthy to differentiate between the social circles of each myth market because this directly affects the belonging stage as to which ideology they successfully belonged to.

From the data, it became clear that Respectful Renegades aspire to a socially indulgent segment of consumers. Buying a trendy designer bag, for example, that is exclusive to a

department store in Dubai and showing it off and loudly consuming it was of high importance in order for them to position themselves amongst this socially indulgent class. As for the Raising Generation Z market, these parents aspire to be good parents who make the right, and smart, choices for their children which are in line with the new parenting techniques. They consume material goods for the symbolic meanings they carry. This finding proved to be the rationale behind their decisions. The last group, the Bleisure Travellers were found to aspire to belong to the ideology of being successful and professional in their careers. They used objects like business suits, briefcases, pens and laptops for the symbolic meanings they carried and communicated and these totemic items therefore, made it easier for people to position them.

Following the 'belonging' stage is the 'success' stage. Success is defined here as being able to attain the norms, values and outcomes of one's social group and to position one's self within this group. This can be both material and ideological. The success stage is where the individual consumer feels that they have achieved their goal of being the person they privately and socially seek to be. It was found that each group interpreted success in terms of meeting their unique needs. This means that a Respectful Renegade felt successful in being a wild person who is open to life, a rich individual and socially indulgent. By being able to use the necessary tools of shopping, nightlife activities and visits to spas, the destination offered to the consumer to opportunity to re-invent themselves in their desired image. Individuals of the Raising Generation Z group believe that they are good parents who always find time for themselves and their family. Dubai offered them the activities and necessary services to achieve that ideology, and therefore, they can view themselves as succeeding as modern-day parents. As for Bleisure Travellers, Dubai offers them the



space to network with the right people and be in the places that help position themselves as closer to their sought ideology, defined as important professionals.

The final theme is the joy stage of the symbolic experience. This is defined as the result of having positive emotions and thoughts. This definition is interpreted differently amongst the three groups, however, it is a consistent outcome of satisfaction due to needs that were met by the destination brand experience. From the data, the three groups felt joy in the luxury they experienced, which in return made them feel that they belong to the ideology to which they aspire, and thus they succeeded in positioning themselves socially. A Respectful Renegade defined joy as the feeling they get when out enjoying Dubai's nightlife, indulging in spa treatments and shopping, and feeling free of consequence. As for Raising Generation Z, they defined joy as feeling that their children are happy, enjoying pleasurable time for themselves as parents, and enjoying family time together. The last group, Bleisure Travellers, define joy as the feeling they get when experiencing the highly professional culture in Dubai, networking with the business elite and being able to experience a pleasurable time after work.

From the above, it is clear that the Dubai destination brand is consumed symbolically on two levels, both individually and socially. Although most of the consumption is of material and tangible objects such as highly rated hotels, luxurious cars, expensive restaurants and neat offices, it is noteworthy to say they are consumed for the symbolic meaning behind them. They act as personality enhancers and tools of communication to express who these individuals seek to become.

## **7.5. How is Dubai's luxury and hedonism communicated amongst affluent visitors to Dubai?**

### **What meanings and symbolic values are conveyed?**

Hedonism and the promotion of hedonic consumption are seen throughout the interactional communication cycle amongst the DMO, stakeholders, media, visitors, celebrities, and influencers. Meanings that are attached to the Dubai destination brand are in all touch points between the affluent visitor and the destination's service providers. From the findings, three main themes showed to be essential in communication and conversations about Dubai, (1) hedonism, (2) lifestyle, and (3) experience. All three themes are of a hedonic and pleasurable nature. After analysing multiple communication efforts by the DMO, stakeholders, celebrities, influencers, and amongst the affluent visitors themselves, the overall approach took a storytelling direction. Most communication conveyed a narrative that related to the aspired lifestyles of the myth markets. It was found that the luxury and hedonism of the destination is communicated loudly and conspicuously. Affluent visitors loudly consumed the destination, meaning they communicated their every move making sure they included luxurious lifestyles and hedonic experiences. A concept introduced for the first time as an extension of the Veblenian 'Conspicuous Consumption' theory, is loud consumption. This is considered to be the communicational counterpart of conspicuous consumption.

The interactional communication surrounding the affluent visitors was found to almost always convey elements of hedonism. Visuals included beautiful beaches, exotic resorts, extreme sports, activities, and themed places. Posts on social media and offline campaigns focused on buzz words and certain cues that convey pleasure and happiness. Another element found in communication amongst all sources was the lifestyle factor. The cases

analysed in this research showed that affluent visitors communicate their desired lifestyle at every chance they could. This was also heavily adopted by media sources such as movies, music videos and television shows. Lastly, the experiential element was a strong element in communication amongst affluent visitors. Dubai seemed to be a place for pleasurable experiences, these experiences could range from adrenaline rush experiences, to living nights of fantasy. Affluent visitors documented every experience through their social media accounts during their visits and talked about them after returning from Dubai.

#### **7.6. The Luxury and Hedonic Destination Experience Framework Model**

After answering the research questions, the research aim can now be discussed. This research aimed to examine how affluent travellers experience Dubai as an exemplar of a luxurious hedonic destination brand. The research carried out a case study strategy with an interpretive approach. The collected insights from the focus groups and in-depth interviews were interpreted and presented in a thematic coding style following the Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Gibbs (2007) approach. In this section of the chapter, the overall experience of affluent visitors to a luxurious hedonic destination will be discussed. All the findings come together here to form a framework that will create a Luxury and Hedonic Destination Experience Framework Model.

Some destination brands are associated with religion, exploring, discovery, history and/or nature, the Dubai destination brand is a hedonic one. By positioning the destination as a hedonic brand, it competes with destinations like Las Vegas, Singapore and Atlantic City (Kattiyapornpong and Miller, 2012; Buncle, 2015). These destinations have elements in common such as being modern, man-made, luxurious, and fulfil the need to experience

radical and wild experiences. They target tourists who are interested in pleasure and hedonism. What differentiates Dubai is the fact that it is always introducing something new, which renews the experience every time the affluent traveller revisits the destination, making it almost impossible to grow bored of it. This strategy of constantly opening new locations and grand theme parks goes hand-in-hand with the addictive nature of hedonic personalities that are always wanting more (Kennett, 2013). These affluent visitors are on multiple social media platforms, they post, comment and repost as much as they can about their trips. This creates word-of-mouth communication that communicates their extreme happiness, satisfaction and success. Many of these loyal visitors are celebrities and influencers (Thomas, 2016). This is where the consumer plays a role in co-creating the destination brand image.

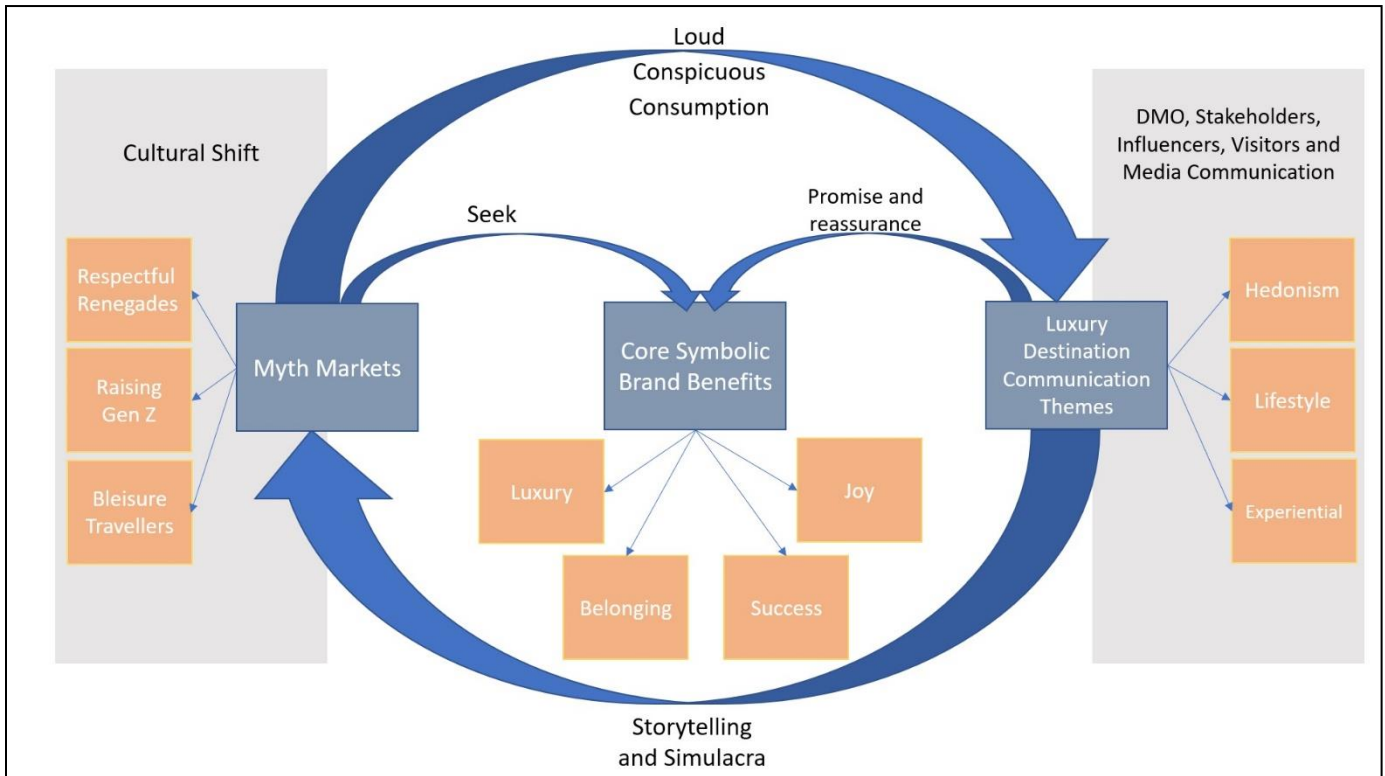
The DTCM of Dubai realises the importance of these posts and use them in their official social media accounts to create transparency and give a real-feel to the destination brand promise and show that the promise is met. This unifies the story that is told about the destination brand and its benefits. The Dubai destination brand adopts a life of its own through its co-creation by consumers. This cycle of co-creation feeds into the destination brand-visitor's goal congruency, which helps the destination's DMO and service providers to satisfy their visitor's needs and create better experiences.

The Dubai destination brand constructs the modern narrative of the three myth markets of this research. It offers them the chance to live and be a part of sought for ideologies. Therefore, it acts as a solution to the manifold contradictions which these groups face. By succeeding in doing this, the destination brand of Dubai created a community of 'Dubai Goers' who loudly consume the brand. This community is split into three sub-communities

of (1) the modern single person, (2) modern parents, and (3) modern professionals. These communities actively engage with the brand and create an on-going positive word-of-mouth that has a ripple effect of motivations to visit the destination, exceeding the “buying into the brand” role. This is applied by Dubai visitors, ranging from celebrities who have a large impact in creating awareness and recall of the brand and its associations, to the individuals who co-create the brand within their social circles.

The following framework (see figure 7.1.) demonstrates the phases that affluent travellers experience in the luxurious hedonic destination brand of Dubai, drawing on commonalities between the three myth markets of affluent travellers. It has emerged from patterns of cognitions and behaviours that became coded as core themes of this research. However, identifying the differences amongst visitors is also crucial, as those differences guide the destination and its service providers and enable them to target and understand the goals and aspirations of these groups and to better serve and satisfy them.

Figure 7.1. Luxury and Hedonic Destination Experience Framework Model



Source: Author. (2020)

In this framework, the first stage is of the affluent traveller’s experience is when he or she is faced with tensions and anxiety that resulted from a shift in their cultural environment. During this stage, motivation is formed based on an appeal to new ideologies. Amongst Dubai’s affluent visitors, three groups were found, (1) Respectful Renegades, (2) Raising Generation Z, and (3) Bleisure Travellers. These groups were defined as myth markets because they demonstrate Holt’s (2004) myth making model. Holt suggests that there are three main elements in a myth market, the first is national ideology. This is a system of concepts found amongst the community and nation. The second is cultural contradiction. This occurs when individuals aspire to the new cultural ideologies by the nation but find difficulties in achieving or fulfilling them. This results in tension and anxiety. As national ideologies develop aspirational models for living, the gap between these models and

everyday living creates a need for symbolism and myths that will manage these contradictions. The third element is populist worlds. These worlds are not motivated by commercials or politics, and are imaginary and symbolic connections to the world (Holt, 2004; 2012; 2016). According to Holt (2003) cultural brands are an implicit national conversation in which a wide variety of cultural products compete to provide the most compelling myth. In the above it is suggested that when destinations communicate a narrative that creates a myth sought by these markets, these myth markets are motivated to visit and consume the destination that is associated with their desired status. Myth markets are motivated to visit destinations when they promise to simulate a story that they dream of living.

For the myth markets of this research, single individuals (Respectful Renegades) feel that they are expected to be living the good life, meaning going to fine restaurants, partying wildly and splurging on designer brands and spa treatments. Parents (Raising Generation Z) are facing the modern parenting techniques that pressure them to have trendy children who keep up with their peers, while being caring parents who spend time with their families, and yet still find time for themselves. Lastly, business travellers (Bleisure Travellers) are expected to be successful and professional by going on business trips to luxurious and pleasurable destinations. Defining these three groups and their anxieties will pave the way to understanding their motivations, goals, needs and desired ideologies.

Myth markets of luxurious hedonic destination brands, like Dubai, seek two levels of hedonic benefits, those experienced individually and socially. Four core symbolic benefits were established in the findings, Luxury, Belonging, Success and Joy. Each of the core symbolic benefits were interpreted differently amongst the three myth markets. It was also

found that they were bound to have resemblances that shaped their experiences in the destination due to two reasons, (1) they were all facing feelings of anxiety and desired an ideology, and (2) they are loyal to the same destination brand, Dubai. The affluent groups consumed Dubai symbolically, meaning all tangible goods bought were consumed for the symbolic meanings they carry. And all intangible experiences and places visited in the destination are consumed through the emotions and thoughts that they create.

However differently luxury was interpreted amongst these visitors, the result was that it helped them feel that they were closer to belonging to their unique sought ideology. This supports the notion that lifestyle trends that communicate social status are still a strong motivator of present luxury consumption (Li, Li, and Kambele, 2012). A consistent theme was that they felt that they succeeded as individuals if they were perceived as being part of a distinct social group with an accompanying lifestyle. Feelings of success in achieving this gave them joy and satisfaction by reinforcing the assurance that they are where they needed to be. When affluent groups felt satisfied during this stage, they had the urge to loudly consume the destination to reassure their newly found status. During this stage, affluent consumers experience the actual visit to the destination. This stage is also when they constantly consume the destination conspicuously to display their wealth as suggested by Granot *et al.*, 2013. When the destination communicated a promise to resolve those anxieties of the myth markets, and then kept it, during this stage the visitor will start to loudly consume the destination and become a co-creator of the brand's story and image and effecting the decision-making and behaviour of potential visitors (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Hudson and Thal, 2013).



When visitors become sources of conversations that later on become motivators to other affluent visitors, they help create a narrative of living the fantasy and of living the myth. This cycle of communication becomes much larger and more effective when the story is unified amongst all communicators. In this case study, the analysed communication showed themes that are considered key in luxurious destination's communication approach. The found themes are Hedonism, Lifestyle, and Experiential elements. The storytelling approach encouraged the visitors to loudly consume the destination. The concept of Loud Consumption has been pioneered by this research. It is defined as the communication counterpart of the Veblenian theoretical construct of conspicuous consumption.

The conversations between the destination's DMO, service providers, media, celebrities, influencers and the affluent visitors themselves all communicate a certain lifestyle by containing hedonic cues that are relevant to the three myth markets. Loud consumption is more active and explicit when there are experiences for it to buy into. To further explain this, when the communication that surrounds and is generated by affluent visitors conveys luxurious lifestyles by showing hedonic cues and hedonic buzz words in its visuals, individuals are able to construct a story about a lived fantasy. This not only fuels the myth, but also motivates affluent visitors to buy into the brand. Experiencing what the destination has to offer, leaves these visitors with joyful feelings and resolved anxieties. This motivates them to communicate their newly found social and individual positions.

The framework suggested in this research introduces universal elements that can be applied to different destination brands. These elements are the three central elements, Myth Markets, Core Symbolic Benefits, and Luxurious Destination Communication Themes.

This research argues that all luxurious hedonic destinations create myth markets, however, the definition of these markets may differ from one destination brand to another or differ for the same destination brand when temporal elements are significant (i.e. different generations). When the defined myth markets are similar to found groups of this research, we can apply the entire framework with few changes. This is because if the motivations and characteristics are the same as the suggested descriptions in this research, they will be expected to have the same sought benefits and to behave the same way. This, however, will need to be clarified by further research.

Dubai's myths were undisputed amongst the three groups during the research. Meaning that a Respectful Renegade perceived a Dubai Bleisure Traveller as successful and professional, a Raising Generation Z family as a modern and happy one, and the latter two groups perceived the first group to be wild and indulgent. The Dubai destination brand promises its visitors success in their lives, pleasure during their visit, feelings of wealth and luxury, and a chance to experience their aspirations. It is important to know the relationship between these findings, and the relationships between each of these elements. This was achieved by answering the research questions and linking them together through the emerged framework as presented above.

## **7.7. Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the research aim in order to understand how affluent consumers experience hedonic luxurious destination brands. This was done by breaking the aim into sub-questions and answering each of them in relation to the findings. The chapter discussed each research question and answered it. The discussed questions were, Q1. What is the

practice and discourse of different segments of affluent consumers in Dubai? What are the characteristics of these consumers and their motivations for consumption? Q2. What factors are involved in the consumption experience of Dubai, in terms of motivation, benefits-sought, interpretation and behaviour of affluent consumers? Q3. What is the nature of hedonic consumption amongst affluent consumers to Dubai? What are the underlying motivations for their consumption of hedonism? Q4. What is the nature of the consumption of luxury by affluent consumers to Dubai? What are the underlying motivations of this consumption? Q5. How is Dubai's luxury and hedonism communicated amongst affluent visitors to Dubai? What meanings and symbolic values are conveyed?

Following this, the research findings were presented in a model that linked all the concepts and findings of this research and provided a holistic theoretical framework of the experience of the affluent visitors to a luxurious hedonic destination brand. The suggested framework is a template for all destinations that are similar to Dubai, though the research acknowledges the limitations of its potential application. This is an ideal type, inflected by the vagaries of space and time, rather than a universal model. The framework presented an integrated view of different players in the overall experience of visitors. It also explained the relationship amongst the central elements of this research which are, Myth Markets, Core Symbolic Benefits, and Luxurious Destination Communication Themes.

**Chapter EIGHT: Conclusion**

## **8. Introduction**

This research focused on affluent visitors' perspectives, their motivations, and behaviour patterns in experiencing Dubai. The main aim of the research was to understand how a luxury hedonic destination brand is experienced by affluent visitors. This chapter will summarise the research findings and the Luxury and Hedonic Destination Experience Framework Model that was provided in the last chapter. The chapter will also review how the research questions have been answered and how the objectives of this research have been met. In addition, the contribution of the study from both a theoretical and managerial perspectives will be discussed. After that, the research limitations will be explained, and future research areas will be outlined, with the aim of enhancing an understanding of the experience of luxurious hedonic destination brands from the consumer perspective.

### **8.1. Research Summary**

This research undertook an interpretive approach using a case study methodology. The research topic is, to some extent, an unexplored area. After the literature review, a number of existing theoretical models were used in the guidance of the data collection and interpretation. This was necessary since this study adopted an a posteriori framework, and therefore had no theoretical framework before the data collection stage. The research drew links between the myth making model (Holt, 2004), hedonic consumption theory (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982), and Veblen's (1899) leisure class and conspicuous consumption theory, all in the context of a luxurious and hedonic destination brand experience. This was done by firstly categorising the perceptions, motivations and behaviours of affluent visitors to Dubai. By creating and understanding their psychographic

profiles, it was easier to provide a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of their insights and define the symbolic benefits of each profile of the three groups. From the participants' experiences during their visit, Experiential Marketing Theory (Schmitt, 1999) helped establish the moment of truth, which is what the visitor actually went through during a visit looking at this in relation to what was promised in the communications by the destination brand's stakeholders. The analysis of the communication by the destination, service providers, stakeholders and visitors, was guided by Fill and Turnbull's (2019) interactional communication model, which looks at communication as a combination of conversations from multiple sources with two-way directions. These models which started from myth making and cultural brands, moved on to the nature of consumption and sought benefits, and ended with the interactional communication model, helped form the Luxury and Hedonic Destination Experience Framework Model.

The research was conducted by using a case study approach because it describes and analyses an individual case that is investigated in a real-life setting (Yin, 1989). A case approach study helps in identifying the factors involved in the interactions between the participants, and between the participants and the destination. All participants had to meet very important criteria: they had to be regular Dubai visitors, regardless of their reason for their visits, they also had to be satisfied visitors. The researcher started with identifying a few acquaintances who travelled frequently to Dubai. As a second step, the researcher requested that those participants recruit or recommend other people. This was done with all the participants who agreed to participate. Participants were made aware that they did not have to provide any other names if they did not feel comfortable doing so. The referred prospective participants were contacted directly in person or via telephone. The data

collection tools were focus groups, in-depth interviews, and advertising and social media material analysis. It became clear after a few focus groups that there are three types of visitors to Dubai, friends and couples without children, families, and business travellers. They were, therefore, grouped accordingly in the focus groups. The focus groups then were conducted in group discussion format for the first two groups, and the third group members were individually interviewed in-depth, due to their busy schedules. This process carried on until the data saturation stage. The collected data was then analysed into thematic codes following Strauss and Corbin's (1990) model and Gibbs (2007). These thematic codes were discussed in three findings chapters: Myth Markets of Hedonic Destination Brands, Symbolic Consumption and Enhancement of the Self, and Interactional Communication of Luxurious Destination Brands and Affluent Tourists.

By answering the research questions, the researcher was able to form a framework that suggests the core themes of an affluent traveller's experience to a luxurious hedonic destination such as Dubai. The research also introduced and defined a new concept, Loud Consumption, which will be further discussed in this chapter. The research introduced three main myth markets who were grouped based on their motives, behaviours and sought lifestyles, *Respectful Renegades*, *Raising Generation Z* and *Bleisure Travellers*. By understanding their anxieties, needs, goals, and consumption patterns, the researcher was able to draw a roadmap of the entire experience of luxury destination brands by affluent tourists. The destination's affluent visitors consumed *Luxury* when seeking *Belonging* to a new social ideology, they then felt *Successful* as an individual and part of a social circle, and therefore felt *Joy*. Communication proved to be a key player in the destination brand experience. The analysis of communication from different sources such as the DMO,

stakeholders, media, celebrities, influencers, and the affluent visitors showed that *Hedonism* was a consistent theme that helped convey a narrative of the desired *Lifestyle* by these myth markets, and *Experiential* elements provided the chance to live the myth. The framework was formed based on the emerging themes from the data.

## **8.2. Summary of Research Findings**

The research main question was: How do affluent travellers experience and consume luxurious hedonic destination brands? In answering this question, the research produced a framework that offers Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) and stakeholders in luxury tourist destinations insight into the perceptions, motivations, and experiences of affluent groups of travellers. This was achieved by breaking the main question into sub-questions that help form an overall answer. Q1. What is the practice and discourse of different segments of affluent consumers in Dubai? What are the characteristics of these consumers and their motivations for consumption? Q2. What factors are involved in the consumption experience of Dubai, in terms of motivation, benefits-sought, interpretation and behaviour of affluent consumers? Q3. What is the nature of hedonic consumption amongst affluent consumers to Dubai? What are the underlying motivations for their consumption of hedonism? Q4. What is the nature of the consumption of luxury by affluent consumers to Dubai? What are the underlying motivations of this consumption? Q5. How is Dubai's luxury and hedonism communicated amongst affluent visitors to Dubai? What meanings and symbolic values are conveyed?

This was guided by the research objectives, (1) to carry out empirical research and collect data to understand affluent consumer motivation and behaviour. (2) To understand and analyse the different segments of affluent consumers visiting Dubai, and establish their



motivation, brand engagement and behaviour. (3) To examine reasons behind affluent consumers' activities in Dubai, and the effect of these experiences on them. (4) To relate the choices of affluent consumer groups to their socio-cultural environment to find patterns that can be used for theory and application. (5) To examine how affluent consumers interpret Dubai's luxury and hedonism, and how it impacts their self-concept. (6) To bridge gaps found in the current related literature to aid a holistic view of the relevant areas. (7) To conceptualise the process of constructing luxurious destination branding through the development of an a posteriori framework based on an inductive approach that utilises research data and existing theories. (8) To provide advice to marketing organisations, and related parties, on how to develop and enhance their emerging and evolving destination brands by integrating luxury, and hedonic experiences to attract affluent consumers.

Three groups of affluent visitors to Dubai were defined as, (1) Respectful Renegades, (2) Raising Generation Z, and (3) Bleisure Travellers. A psychographic profile was created for each group according to their lifestyles, motivations, and behaviour patterns. The Respectful Renegades were defined as individuals who enjoy a wild and extravagant lifestyle. They are single, or unmarried couples, who enjoy experiencing the nightlife in Dubai and spending money on pampering themselves. They are called Respectful Renegades because they respect the laws and regulations, and cultural traditions where they live, and choose to exercise their wild and rebellious lifestyles in another place. As for the second group, their profile is that they are young parents who try to keep up with the trends of new parenthood. They are individuals who care about appearances and care about being good parents. Their name came from the generation they are raising as parents, Raising Generation Z, meaning that they have at least one child who is from generation Z, a child

who demands a phone or tablet, must always be connected online and who is interested in products and fun activities rather than experiencing history and nature (Nessel, 2019). The last emerged group was the group of individuals who visit Dubai for work reasons, they are bankers, executives, and managers. They care about having a good time along with the work they are there for, hence their name, Bleisure Travellers, they mix business with leisure. They enjoy a trip to Dubai because mixing work and pleasure is very easy there.

From the discussion, it was suggested that individuals of these groups build a bond of loyalty with the destination brand when they find goal congruency, this happens when their sought benefits are fulfilled in the destination. It was also found that the sought benefits represented both private and social aspirations. These symbolic benefits were fulfilled by hedonic experiences, thus turning the destination brand into a self-enhancing tool. Affluent tourists experience the following emerged core symbolic benefits in their experience, (1) luxury, perceived wealth and exclusivity of their surroundings, (2) belonging, to their aspired groups, (3) success, in reaching their desired position and status, and (4) joy, feelings of happiness as a result of that success.

Affluent visitors felt motivated to communicate their experiences in Dubai. These visitors loudly consume the destination. The concept of 'Loud Consumption' emerged from the data and is defined as the active communication by consumers to convey their wealth and luxurious lifestyle. It is the communication counterpart of the Veblenian 'Conspicuous Consumption' theory, and is particularly influenced by the exponential spread of social media amongst consumers and travellers, which is defined by its heavy practice of consumer to consumer communication. It suggests that these affluent tourists do not settle for subtle showing-off of the luxurious and hedonic experiences and products they buy

when in Dubai. These visitors actively talk about their experiences with other affluent tourists, they share photos, and posts. It was found that, like the communication these visitors were exposed to, their own communication efforts presented themes of hedonism, lifestyle, and experience. Communications by the DMO, stakeholders, celebrities, media, and the visitors showed similar elements of the key messages. Those messages were tailored to target each of the myth market and their lifestyles.

Service providers like telecommunication companies and airlines communicated the same promise of luxury. This was then mirrored in the consumers' reviews and photos. This consistency helped create a clear brand image, and therefore played a direct role in forming the brand story which became unique to the destination brand. Meanings and values of the Dubai destination brand were integrated in multiple outlets in entertainment like movies, music videos, social media influencers and celebrities. The destination brand's narrative conveys the desired hedonic and luxurious lifestyle that fuels the myth and the story of the new ideology. All analysed visuals, for example, showed spas, shopping, extreme sports and night clubs when targeting Respectful Renegades, happy family outings, theme parks and family waterparks when targeting Raising Generation Z, and professional work areas, restaurants and skyscrapers when targeting Bleisure Travellers. This suggested that this interactional communication by all parties helps to co-construct the unique cultural and symbolic meanings associated with Dubai and its brand experience.

The answer to the main question of how do affluent consumers experience a luxury hedonic destination brand became clear through answering the research questions and was illustrated in the developed Luxury and Hedonic Destination Experience Framework Model. The framework demonstrated the overall experience of luxury hedonic destination

brands such as Dubai by affluent tourists. When there is a cultural shift, feelings of tensions arise amongst individuals making them seek symbolic benefits to relieve their tensions. For the groups in hand, these core symbolic benefits were luxury, belonging, success and joy. The core benefits were sought privately and socially amongst all the affluent groups in this research, they were however, interpreted differently in each group. When these tourists found congruences between their goals and the benefits offered by the destination brand experience, they loudly and conspicuously consumed it. Meaning they communicated every part of their experiences for reassurance and confirmation of social repositioning and status. This aggressive communication by the visitors became a factor in the experience of the destination and its consequent story. The cycle of communication surrounded affluent tourists before the visit, during the visit, and after the visit. In all three stages, communication conveyed three main themes related to luxury. These were hedonism, lifestyle, and experience. The destination brand image became associated with these themes creating a story of lived fantasies that powered the myth of each market.

### **8.3. Research Contribution**

This research has contributed both theoretically and managerially. This will be discussed in the following sections.

#### **8.3.1. Theoretical Contribution**

The main theoretical constructs of this research were hedonic consumption, luxury consumption, myth making, and destination branding. Contribution to each area is discussed in turn in this section, along with contribution to other existing literature.

This research addresses the gap in work related to Hirschman and Holbrook's (1982) hedonic consumption theory. For instance, this research expands on the consumer experience of destinations and how their emotions are developed. It examines how the consumption experience of tourists develops specific emotional responses and connections which has been ignored by the Consumption Emotion Scale (Richins, 1997; Faullant *et al.*, 2011), as suggested by Johnson and Stewart (2005). In this research, it is claimed that the emotion of 'joy' was developed as a result of visitors feeling that they have succeeded in positioning themselves amongst their desired groups. Experiencing luxury triggered a chain of feelings that result in joy and exhilaration.

Hosany (2012) has argued that the strategic segmentation of tourists should be based on their goals and advertising content that enhances self-concepts and shows destination congruence. This psychographic and symbolic approach to segmentation has been adopted by a number of destination marketing scholars (Prayag *et al.*, 2013; Weaver, Kwek, and Wang, 2017; Scott and Dung, 2017). In his paper, he extends the established cognitive theories in tourist's emotional experiences. Hosany (2012) investigated the relationship between appraisal patterns and emotions, making his paper one of the first to comprehensively attempt to examine factors of tourists' emotional responses toward destinations, which strategically aids the marketing, segmentation and communication efforts. This research furthers Hosany's (2012) contribution in terms of the strategic segmentation of visitors according to their emotions and fantasies.

This research applied Holt's (2003) myth making to destination brand experiences. This was done by introducing strategically segmented profiles of the affluent tourists that visit luxury hedonic destination brands. Each group was based on a myth created by a cultural

shift in societies surrounding the Dubai visitors. This research looked at a destination brand that acted as an identity enhancer and a tool of self-expression that helped these individuals relieve tensions, thus making the luxury hedonic destination brand new territory for “identity brands that compete in myth markets” as Holt (2012) puts it. Looking at visitors to luxury destinations as strategic segments leads to greater insight into what they feel and why they feel it, and the role of these emotions in the levels of satisfaction and loyalty. This research shows that when affluent visitors experience luxury, and feel that they have succeeded in belonging to their desired social positions, they will feel joy and will want to share their experiences to garner reassurance from others. They will become loud consumers. They will portray, talk about, and even post things about their experiences and items purchased. This makes them a part of the storytelling sources, fuelling the myth and encouraging others, who feel the same anxieties, to do the same. This relates to existent research on understanding the role of emotions in the outcome of the tourist experience (Bigné, Matilla, and Andreu, 2008; Hosany, 2012; Ma *et al.*, 2013; Tlili and Amara, 2016; Pestana, Parreira, and Moutinho, 2019).

There is currently only a small amount of literature on consumer brands and myth making, and this is mostly done by Douglas Holt who mainly focuses on men as consumers (e.g. Budweiser and Jack Daniel’s). Holt’s model has only been used in cultural branding of the modern British Conservative Party (Smith and Speed, 2011), where the authors explain the phenomenon in UK politics by considering political brands as cultural brands. They also suggest that a political party gains a long-term competitive advantage when it is compatible with the common culture in society. Another application of Holt’s model is found in the *“Outposts of Britain” the General Post Office and the Birth of a Corporate Iconic Brand*,

*1930-1939* paper by Heller (2016). This paper examines the construct of iconic corporate branding of the General Post Office (GPO) in Britain during the 1930s by historically analysing the establishment of public relations department at the GPO which created narratives which responded to anxieties found in British society at that time. The study adopted and adapted Holt's myth market model. Holt's model was also used in the de-iconisation of brands theory developed by Testa, Cova and Cantone (2017) where they present an analysis of the iconisation, de-iconisation and re-iconisation process of a brand by exploring the relationship between a change in society and in brands through a study of myth making in Italy. They performed a socio-historical study of cultural change in Italy, following the path of Heller (2016), which provided historical context for their study of the Alfa Romeo brand and how it dealt with Italian anxieties between 1970 and 2015. The paper applied a brand genealogy method in analysing the brand's cultural performance. Another piece of research using Holt's work on iconic and cultural brands has been done by Pineda, Sanz-Marcos, and Gordillo-Rodríguez (2020). Their paper extends the application of Holt's model to patriotism, casing Spain in their work.

This paper builds on Holt's concept of iconic branding by applying myth making to tourist destinations positioned on luxury and hedonism. It frames these destination brands as foci of stories and symbolic meaning that impact consumers on the emotional and self-expressive level. This has been ignored by most destination branding and marketing literature. The literature has failed to apply the conceptual framework of cultural myth making and branding to destination brands. This research is the among first to examine myth making in a destination brands context, viewing destination branding as a natural area for cultural and iconic brands. The suggested framework in this research demonstrates that

cultural elements can become co-opted by myth markets and their ideologies. This research combines myth making with hedonic consumption and applies it to destination brands. The research also contributes to the recently growing interest in the intangible side of experience in the travel and tourism industry (Malone *et al.*, 2014). This paper not only is among the first to apply myth making to destinations, but can also be considered to be the first to combine myth making in luxury and hedonic consumption markets. The research looks at all groups of luxury destination consumers (i.e. both genders, singles, families, and business professionals), thus expanding Holt's consumer brands which are usually focused predominantly on men.

Literature about luxury tourism views luxury as elite specific, and the focus is usually on a specific class of travellers (Hansen and Wanke 2011; Thirumaran and Raghav, 2017). In addition, numerous studies address the transformational impact of luxury travellers' perspectives when they encounter retail shopping and other amenities (Pritchard, Morgan and Ateljevic 2011; Dion and Arnould 2011; Bendell and Thomas 2013). There is, however, limited focus on affluent consumers in the literature in terms of behaviour and experience. At the moment, the literature mostly suggests that luxury tourism is for elite and wealthy consumers. This ignores the new in consuming luxury, where it is no longer highly limited nor exclusive, and where the symbolic and experiential is emphasised (Yeoman, 2007; Thirumaran and Raghav, 2017). Aspirational classes need further investigation and research (Yeoman and McMahon, 2006; Thirumaran and Raghav, 2017). The emerging aspirations of consumers to be affluent and how this relates to luxury destinations should be acknowledged. It forms the basis for the creation of myths by entrepreneurial luxury destinations that is the foundation of this research setting. Buying



into the myth of luxury, wealth and hedonism is at the core of the luxury hedonic destination brand experience by affluent travellers. This research addressed the desire to belong to the luxury class, regardless of the monetary ability of the found groups. The main focus was to look at the impact of the destination brand experience on the aspiring classes.

Another contribution of this research to the literature is its analysis of the relationship between destination branding and hedonism. This has been studied by a number of scholars who have focused on tourist's emotional experience in hedonic destinations (Goossens, 2000; Hosany and Gilbert, 2010). The research expands on existing research by addressing the impact of hedonic cues on affluent visitors and how this eventually help co-create destination brand myths, suggesting that hedonism and luxury help relieve tensions amongst these individuals and encourages them to communicate their experiences. When they loudly consume the luxurious destination, they become part of the story and the emotional becomes behavioural. It also draws a link between hedonic consumption and the interactional communication elements from numerous sources such as the DMO, stakeholders, celebrities and influencers. This research contributes to the literature by furthering the work of Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) on hedonic consumption and applying it to destinations. This is demonstrated in the findings that suggest that the focus on luxury and simulacra is essential when building luxurious and hedonic destinations which engage the multisensory, emotions and fantasy. This research also expands on visitors' cognitive and fantasy processes that affluent travellers experience in luxury hedonic destinations. The suggested processes were demonstrated in the Luxury and Hedonic Destination Experience Framework Model, where the thoughts, perceptions,

motivations, feelings, and fantasies of the affluent visitors have been factored into the overall destination brand experience.

Most current destination branding literature cases natural and historic destinations like Byrne and Skinner (2007) on Dublin and Ireland, Botti, *et al.* (2009) on France, and Teye and Paris (2010) on Caribbean tourism. These cased destinations are touristic by their nature and history. However, many emerging destinations are choosing to develop quick projects rather than taking steps towards service economies. These projects rely heavily on luxury, which makes luxury tourism of significance in the current tourism market. There is not enough attention from scholars to help developers of destinations on the use of luxury to attract affluent consumers (Thirumaran and Raghav, 2017). The focus in this research has been on artificial/ man-made destinations with little natural resources, expanding on Usakli and Baloglu's (2011) self-congruity of tourists in Las Vegas, a similar destination brand when it comes to the degree of artifice and adaptability to the consumers' need for change and novelty. In comparison this research studied similarities between tourists and Dubai in an in-depth approach. Another development by this research was in examining the model of the symbolic consumption of destination brands by tourists (Ekinci and Sirakaya, 2013) where this research created strategic psychographic profiles of Dubai visitors based on their motivations, socially and privately sought symbolic benefits, and their perceptions.

The research also extends the ideas of self-congruity, motivation and symbolic consumption (Gazley and Watling, 2015) to communication efforts that co-create the destination brand image and myths associated with this. This research supports Berrozpe's *et al.* (2019) findings on the link between destination brand identification and brand loyalty,

and claims that high measures of tourist identification with a destination brand will lead to intense loyalty, and consequent co-creation of the meanings associated with the destination brand. In addition, the notion of the relation between self-congruence and culture, and brand attachment (Japutra *et al.*, 2019) was tested and proven by this research, where it was found that there was a culture of ‘Dubai Goers’ who shared loyalty to the destination brand.

The research contributes to destination branding literature in being amongst the first to explore the cognitive and emotive sides of consumer travellers’ experiences in an in-depth approach by applying qualitative research methods. There has been limited qualitative research exploring emotions in the context of tourism experiences. This research has carried out a qualitative case study on visitors to Dubai, utilising an interpretivist approach. Its qualitative approach examined consumer motivation, emotions, symbolic and hedonic benefits and resulted in gaining deeper insights and elaborate descriptions of their experiences. Qualitative methods allowed the researcher to draw a detailed picture of visitors’ experiences and what they felt and thought with the aim of understanding why they act the way they do in a certain situation or place. This thesis contributes to the existing destination branding literature which has traditionally relied on surveys and quantitative methods by being one of the first to explore symbolic and intangible benefits in a detailed and in-depth approach.

This research examined the importance of hedonic cues in attracting and retaining visitors who seek pleasurable lifestyles and experiences. As the existing literature debates the morality of hedonism (Warburton, 1996; Veenhoven, 2003), this research reaches beyond this problematisation of hedonism, and suggests utilising the search for fantasy, pleasure

and multi-sensory and emotional highs as a destination brand experience-building tool by feeding into the continuously evolving needs of hedonists and their myths. It was also found that hedonism, lifestyle and experiences were key elements in the destination brand communication. It was found that affluent tourists communicate their experiences more elaborately on their social media accounts conveying the key elements of hedonism, lifestyle, and experiences. Veblen's (1899) conspicuous consumption of the destination brand was extended to the communication counterpart of the notion, introducing the new concept of 'Loud Consumption'. The term came from the determination of affluent tourists to show-off, talk about and post images of expensive items, services and experiences which they buy and consume. To these individuals, communicating their experience in Dubai gave them reassurance about their newly found status and position.

### **8.3.2. Managerial Contribution (Implication)**

The applied contribution of this research is relevant for destination marketing organisations' (DMOs) and service providers' use. The suggested framework of the study can help current and emerging tourism destinations plan communication strategies with the desired target market segments that relate to the myth markets elaborated upon in this research. The framework can act as a template for Dubai and other destinations. Some of the concepts are specific to Dubai, while others, in a bounded and contextual (i.e. in destinations broadly similar to Dubai) sense, are universal. Even for luxury and hedonistic destinations which are dissimilar to Dubai, the model can be used as a template whereby destination specific factors, variables, and relationships can be devised and organised. This will help DMOs better understand consumers and current needs in their market(s) and therefore position their destination brands to compete more successfully. The framework

suggests three main phases in the affluent tourists' experiences of a luxurious hedonic destination brand. The first phase emphasises the need to identify existing market segments and profile them using a psychographic approach, identifying sought symbolic benefits, motivations and lifestyles. The found profiles of Dubai visitors were Respectful Renegades, Raising Generation Z and Bleisure Travellers. These profiles can be used separately or combined for other destinations, meaning that a luxurious hedonic destination might target all three groups as Dubai does, or one of them. Understanding the myths of the targeted markets and their goals will help create effective communication and market offerings, with attractive elements that will entice visitors and their subsequent co-creation of the experience. It is important to contrast the targeted groups to find common themes amongst them for the overall positioning of the destination, to have clear unique associations to the brand, and to find identifiable differences in order to develop, co-ordinate and communicate market offerings.

After identifying the targeted markets, the phase of analysing the experiences, perceptions and expectations of visitors becomes crucial to build bonds of intense loyalty with consumers and to attract potential new ones. This is shown in the stages that the three groups of Dubai visitors' go through in fulfilling their sought symbolic benefits, Luxury, Belonging, Success and Joy. These themes were common amongst the myth markets of Dubai, however, they were interpreted differently in each group. This helps the DMO in providing solutions for their visitors, with the aim of providing satisfaction and therefore ensuring repeat visits and loyalty. Luxury was always the gateway to the other stages of the Dubai visitors' experiences, and thus proved to be key for hedonic consumption of luxury destinations. The nature of the hedonist is her/his addiction to pleasure. They

continuously need more (Kennett, 2013). It was found that by always offering new restaurants, new theme parks, and new spots, Dubai's visitors were never bored of visiting, in fact, they could not stay away for long.

A hedonic destination deals with a materialistic market, meaning the consumers care about objects and products, however, they buy and consume products for their symbolic meaning and how these products make them feel and appear to others. An example of this is when a visitor buys a designer bag from Dubai, just to appear wealthy and successful when saying: 'I bought it from Dubai'. This type of symbolic consumption creates an opportunity for the destination brand to generate experiences that live up to the brand promise and perpetuate the story through simulacra and narratives. Dubai visitors consume these built-places for the stories behind them. The opportunity is endless because these visitors do not care about natural landscape and locations, therefore, man-made beaches and islands, for example, become an endlessly expandable option, along with theme parks, artificial souks (markets) that look traditional, man-made canals, and flower parks, all of which apply the destination brand promise. This creates major opportunities for investments in the destination, for business owners, for jobs, and helps maintain a steady, if not increasing, financial flow from tourism in the country.

The last phase of the affluent tourist's experience is where the brand promise is constructed and reassured. Having clearly established communicated associations that aid in the storytelling approach, a clear narrative utilising all communication stakeholders such as the DMO, service providers, celebrities, influencers, and visitor with key elements of hedonism, lifestyle, and experience is the foundation of all communication efforts that build the luxury destination brand experience. These cues feed the myth and impact on its

experience. DMOs must address that hedonic markets are, by definition, ephemeral and need ever-changing options to renew satisfaction. This is done by always evolving the market offerings to gain and retain visitors and, therefore, occupy a powerful position amongst luxurious hedonic tourism destinations. When the moment of truth proves to be satisfying to the affluent visitor, and the brand promise of relieving the visitor's tensions is fulfilled, the tourist feels the need to loudly consume the destination. Meaning that the visitors will communicate every moment that helps position them in their desired class. For managerial application, this means that having 'picture worthy' spots, and attractive hashtags might be key in engaging visitors in the co-creation of the brand experience. The strategic segmentation of visitors in this research helps DMOs and service providers better understand their customers and thus build experiences and communication efforts that address their needs and goals.

#### **8.4. Research Limitation**

In order for a researcher to achieve the most valid and reliable results, limitations must be considered. In this research, there were two types of limitations, first, limitations faced during data collection, and second, the limitations of the changing tourism landscape in the area. The first type included (1) privacy issues: where participants were not comfortable to share their nightlife experiences with the researcher in front of other participants, this impacted on the number of participants feasible in each focus group for it to become a more stress-free environment. (2) Timing constraints of the high season in Dubai limited the availability of all group members at the same time. (3) The research was based on data collected by conducting focus groups and interviews in a relatively small sample, this was due to the nature of the applied methodology which was a qualitative and in-depth case

study. (4) Another limitation was the fact that this research cased only one destination brand and therefore, some of the themes might only be applicable to the cased destination, and similar destination brands that are positioned on luxury and hedonism. Some of the found concepts could be universal in the broad comparative sense, however, some of the principles are unique to Dubai. (5) The nature of the cased destination is artificial and manmade, this limits the application of findings for luxury destinations with a similar history and heritage. Lastly, (6) restrictions of stakeholders and their confidentiality policies made it difficult to reach and interview people of interest and decision makers in Dubai's DMO. Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing of Dubai (DTCM) employees have refused to cooperate on multiple attempts despite sending them the information sheet and consent forms that stated clearly their freedom to decline to answer any question they were not comfortable answering. To solve this, the researcher opted instead to analyse advertisements and PR efforts made by the DTCM. In addition, an interview was conducted with a manager working with the Dubai government, who kept the interview very short and declined to answer most of the questions.

The second type of limitation was the changes in the political, social and cultural environments in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the period of conducting this research, which might have impacted on the tourism scene in the area, including the UAE. As Saudi Arabia is a neighbouring country to the cased destination brand, these changes could potentially impact the position of Dubai. (1) Changes in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia included allowing women to drive, opening cinemas and introducing gender-mixing approach in public and work places. There was an overall shift in strict traditions in the culture to a more liberal style, which directly affects individuals residing in the



Kingdom, whether Saudi nationals or others, who were the main participants of this study. On the other hand, (2) on an international level, the Kingdom has introduced short-term visit visas to encourage tourists to attend events such as international music concerts, Formula E, The Chess World Cup, etc. and visit historical locations in Saudi Arabia with organised and secure tours. This created a competing destination in the area which is rapidly increasing in popularity, and could impact the travel patterns of this research's participants.

### **8.5.Future Research**

The originality of this research created many research opportunities to examine the notion of luxury and hedonism in destination brands and myth making. As this was a qualitative research, future research can apply a quantitative method to further validate the current findings, using the suggested framework to examine to what degree the suggested themes can be applicable to other artificial destination brands. As this research focused on the destination brand of Dubai only, and applied a purely qualitative approach, some elements of the framework are universal, however, some are clearly specific to Dubai. Future research can examine other emerging luxury destinations to find which themes are consistent and which are unique to the Dubai. This research also focused on participants who live in Saudi Arabia, further researchers are recommended to investigate different samples such as Europeans who visit Dubai. This could test the consistency of the developed psychographic profiles of the markets in this study, and their symbolic consumption patterns.

Another recommendation for future research is to revisit the found myth markets of Dubai and examine how the changes in the surrounding political and cultural environments have impacted on consumers' travel intentions and behaviours. This would be done by choosing a sample with the same criteria of this research for reliability and confirmation of the data. Lastly, as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision is being applied, it has rapidly and aggressively entered the tourism market as evidenced by advertising for the 2019 Jeddah Festival in cities such as London. This creates a research opportunity to examine the destination brand of Saudi Arabia, and how it could become associated with myths and stories that will resolve the tensions of potential visitors. A study could also be carried out to examine whether or not the rise of the tourism industry in the Kingdom will become a threat to Dubai's status. This also creates an opportunity for researching what threats luxury hedonic destination brands might face in general.

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## **Appendices**

### 3.11. Appendix ONE: Semi-structured focus group guide (Respectful Renegades)

#### Focus Group 1 Guide

1. Topic 1: Who they are.
  - a. Their background: education, ages, income, social status.
  - b. Average visits to Dubai, and length of stay.
  - c. Changes in their travelling patterns.
  - d. How they spend their stay and what they do.
2. Topic 2: why Dubai?
  - a. Motivations.
  - b. What they value in Dubai.
  - c. And what are their feelings and thoughts.
  - d. Why are they Loyal?
3. Topic 3: Consumption patterns and their meanings (refer to answers of 1.d. *How they spend their stay and what they do*)
  - a. Why do you go to...?
  - b. Who they really are/ want to be: e.g. describe the life you aspire to, describe who you would like to be seen as.
  - c. Use of third person, hypothetical scenarios.
  - d. How do they measure the success of becoming who they want to be? How Dubai makes them feel about themselves.
  - e. Satisfaction and measurement.
  - f. Compare Dubai to other destinations of the same qualities and proximity.
4. Topic 6: communication.
  - a. Describe the emirate.
  - b. What platforms they post on.
  - c. What platforms they use for reviews.
  - d. Where they take photos.

### 3.12. Appendix TWO: Semi-structured focus group guide (Raising Generation Z)

#### Focus Group 2 Guide

1. Topic 1: Who they are.
  - a. Their background: education, ages, income, their children's background.
  - b. Average visits to Dubai, and length of stay.
  - c. Changes in their travelling patterns.
  - d. How they spend their stay and what they do.
  
2. Topic 2: why Dubai?
  - a. Motivations.
  - b. What they value in Dubai.
  - c. And what are their feelings and thoughts, and how do their children behave
  - d. Why are they Loyal?
  
3. Topic 3: Consumption patterns and their meanings (refer to answers of 1.d. *How they spend their stay and what they do*)
  - a. Why do you go to...?
  - b. Who they really are/ want to be: e.g. describe the life you aspire to as a family and as a parent, describe who you would like to be seen as.
  - c. Use of third person, hypothetical scenarios.
  - d. How do they measure the success of becoming who they want to be? How Dubai makes them feel about themselves.
  - e. Satisfaction and measurement.
  - f. Compare Dubai to other destinations of the same qualities and proximity.
  
4. Topic 6: communication.
  - a. Describe the emirate.
  - b. What platforms they post on.
  - c. What platforms they use for reviews.
  - d. Where they take photos.

**3.13. Appendix THREE: Semi-structured interview guide (Bleisure Travellers)**

**Interview Guide**

1. Topic 1:

- a. Type of work.
- b. Average visits to Dubai.

2. Topic 2:

- a. How they spend their stay and what they do work/ personal.
- b. What do they do after work?

3. Topic 3:

What they value in Dubai. And what are their feelings and thoughts before, during and after a visit.

4. Topic 4:

Compare Dubai to other destinations of work they have been to.

5. Topic 5:

Satisfaction and measurement.

How do you measure the success of the trip? Work and personal.

6. Topic 6:

Describe the emirate. By giving adjectives of how you see it.



### 3.14. Appendix FOUR: Examples supporting thematic codes

Thematic Code no.	Thematic Code Name	Thematic Code Definition	Example of Quotes
1	Myth Market no.1: Respectful Renegades	Visitors to Dubai who seek adrenaline, nightlife, and extravagance	<i>“I go to nightclubs, lounges, drink, and meet people. I would not be able to do that back home”</i> Participant I.
2	Myth Market no.2: Raising Generation Z	Visitors to Dubai who seek family quality time, fun and safety	<i>“We went into Dubai Mall one day with the intention of just having lunch, we ended up spending the entire day there without realising the time.”</i> -Participant AT.
3	Myth Market no.3: Bleisure Travellers	Visitors to Dubai for work reasons mixed with pleasure	<i>“We tend to cramp everything into the few days we are staying because we are needed back home urgently.”</i> M.O., HR Manager.
4	Luxury	Fancy and expensive surroundings in the destination	<i>“Dubai is very luxurious because of the standard of service there, they treat you like royalty, so you have to act like royalty”</i> Participant Y.
5	Belonging	The feeling of belonging to the aspired group.	<i>“When I share our plans of going to Dubai, and one of my friends say that they are also going, I feel like we are from the same class”</i> Participant AL.

6	Success	Perceived success of the individual on a private and social level	<i>"My kids thanking me for the trip is so reassuring!"</i> Participant AV.
7	Joy	Feelings of happiness and satisfaction	<i>"I do not get a chance to enjoy my evenings after work where I live because of my routine. When I am in Dubai, it is a nice reward to myself after closing a deal or finalising a meeting."</i> M.O.
8	Hedonism	Happiness and pleasure of the senses	Dubai advertisements analysis. E.g. Taj Resort and Hotel print advertisement.
9	Lifestyle	Luxurious lifestyles communicate through symbolic meanings of places and products	Media integration of Dubai analysis. E.g. Music video by Yungen.
10	Experience	The simulation of the story and the lived fantasy	Participants' photo analysis. E.g. Smurf Village.

### 3.15. Appendix FIVE: The DTCM Report



### 3.16. Appendix SIX: Interactional Model of Communications

