

## **THE LUXURY TO COMPLAIN: SENIORS' PERCEPTIONS OF LUXURY FINE DINING**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This research examined American senior consumers' perceptions and expectations of luxury fine dining, their ideas of how it differs from quality casual dining, and what causes them to complain in this setting. Fifty-five American seniors over the age of 50 recruited via Qualtrics completed a qualitative instrument that also included quantitative items. In looking at the luxury values most important to seniors in luxury fine dining, functional values related to the quality of the food, service, and uniqueness of atmosphere were most important and what differentiated luxury fine dining from quality casual dining. Food was most frequently mentioned, with both the quality as well as the presentation of the food being important. The service aspect played an especially vital role, with wait staff being attentive, knowledgeable, and accommodating as driving factors. Social values, such as conspicuousness or prestige, did not play a role for seniors' luxury fine dining. A combination of issues made seniors most likely to complain. Finally, while many seniors had differences in expectations based on the type of restaurant, some had similar standards for both luxury fine dining and quality casual dining.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The importance of the senior market has been well documented (Eastman & Iyer, 2004; Iyer & Eastman, 2006; Reisenwitz et al., 2007), especially with respect to their purchasing power (Grougiou & Pettigrew, 2009; Knutson et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2012). Dobbs et al. (2016) note that globally, the 60+ age group is expected to grow by a third by 2030 and that in the US, seniors will be contributing more than 40% of the consumption growth in entertainment, transportation, and housing by that time. The United States Census Bureau (2021) emphasizes their importance in terms of assets and purchasing power, as 30% of the population is over 55 years of age, and 28% of those households earn an income of \$100,000 or more. An additional 26% of those households reported annual incomes between \$50,000 and \$99,999, and fewer than 9% live below the poverty line. Due to increasing life spans, market size, and large market potential with significant purchasing power, seniors are a major force for marketers to consider (e.g., Dobbs et al., 2016; Lee & Hwang, 2011; Meiners, 2010).

Given the importance of seniors as a market segment (Meiners, 2010), it naturally follows that services are a prime area for marketers to understand in the context of marketing to seniors (Grougiou & Pettigrew, 2009; Moschis & Ünal, 2008), especially given the complexity of luxury services (Siahtiri et al., 2022). This is particularly true in terms of complaint behaviors (Grougiou & Pettigrew, 2009; Meiners et al., 2021). Furthermore, luxury services is an important area for study due to the dearth of research in this area (Wirtz et al., 2020), specifically in terms of fine dining (Chen and Peng, 2018; Lim et al., 2022) and the growth of US seniors' consumption of entertainment (Dobbs et al., 2016). As seniors like to eat out (Hu et al., 2008), research is needed to examine their needs in the restaurant domain (Bowden, 2009; Lee et al., 2012). Considering their financial power (Dobbs et al., 2016; Grougiou & Pettigrew, 2009; Knutson et al., 2006; Lee

& Hwang, 2011; Lee et al., 2012), a better understanding of seniors' expectations and complaint behaviors in luxury services, such as fine dining (Lee & Hwang, 2011), will contribute to our understanding of luxury services (Wirtz et al., 2020) and provide marketers targeting seniors a better understanding of these consumers (Susskind, 2005; Lee et al., 2012). Thus, this research contributes to the literature by addressing a needed area of research in luxury services (Wirtz et al., 2020), specifically luxury fine dining as seen by the senior market. This topic has previously been looked at in the contexts of the pandemic (Lim et al., 2022), traveling (Chen & Peng, 2018; Peng et al., 2020), and emotions and loyalty (Chen et al., 2015), but not from the perspective of seniors and what would cause them to complain.

Research suggests that seniors are less likely to complain than younger customers (Bernhardt, 1981; Grougiou & Pettigrew, 2009; Hunt, 1980, 1991), but recent research on seniors' complaint behavior is lacking. In this study, we examine how their expectations and complaint behaviors differ between luxury fine dining and quality casual dining. Luxury fine dining is defined as having a formal style with exceptional food made by world-class chefs using top-quality ingredients and superior service by highly trained staff in an elegant atmosphere. Quality casual dining is defined as a more relaxed ambience with table service, a friendly environment, and mid-range-priced popular dishes that are a step up from fast-casual or fast food (WebstaurantStore, 2019). Thus, understanding senior consumers' perceptions and expectations regarding luxury fine dining (Lee and Hwang, 2011) and what impacts their complaint behaviors contributes toward filling a gap in extant literature.

This research addresses two broad research questions: What are senior consumers looking for in luxury fine dining and how does it differ from quality casual dining? Secondly, what would cause seniors to complain in a luxury fine dining setting and how do these complaint behaviors differ from the quality casual dining setting? We address these questions via a discussion of extant literature and the results of an exploratory qualitative study. Implications for theory, further study, and practice are included.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Social Exchange Theory*

We utilize social exchange theory to ground our research as it is one of the most widely used theories for explaining luxury hospitality services (Jain et al., 2023). Social exchange theory posits that an expectation of reciprocation makes an association attractive; in other words, people give up something with the expectation of getting something in the exchange (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976). For an exchange to be successful in the luxury fine dining domain, consumers expect high-quality food (in terms of a sensory experience, satiety value, and unique menu selection; Lim et al., 2022) along with excellent service (Kwon et al., 2022; Lee & Hwang, 2011) given the price paid. Seniors who are paying for a luxury fine dining experience are willing to do so because of the high quality, value, service, and deep resonance they may have with a luxury fine dining restaurant (Ko et al., 2019). Trust is another key aspect of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964); seniors who are spending the extra funds and time for a luxury fine dining experience trust that they will receive an experience that goes beyond what is offered in a quality casual dining experience.

### *Seniors' Complaint Behavior and Luxury Complaint Behavior*

Luxury services represent "extraordinary hedonic experiences that are exclusive whereby exclusivity can be monetary, social, and/or hedonic in nature. Luxuriousness is jointly determined

by objective service features and subjective customer perceptions” (Wirtz et al., 2020, p. 665). In considering luxury, it is important to acknowledge that it represents more than material possessions (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2018). Lee and Hwang (2011, p. 665) stress that the characteristics of luxury restaurants differ from luxury branded goods as “the different critical factors of luxury restaurants may include service quality, food quality, menu items, staff, and servicescape.”

In looking at perceptions of luxury, Weidmann et al. (2009) explain that luxury value is made up of four components: financial, functional, individual, and social values. *Financial value* addresses the higher prices for luxury products. *Functional value* refers to usability, high quality, and uniqueness. Usability deals with perceived performance being superior in vis-à-vis a particular function or satisfying consumers’ needs, and uniqueness is “exceptional exclusivity and scarcity” (Weidmann et al., 2009, p. 631). *Individual value* reflects self-identity. In the luxury dining context, it represents the hedonic and materialistic values of the “emotional desire for sensory gratification” (Weidmann et al., 2009, p. 631). The literature suggests that consumers who desire hedonism are more likely to see luxury restaurants as providing good service quality (Lee & Hwang, 2011). Finally, *social value* is related to both conspicuousness and prestige. In looking at how seniors perceive luxury fine dining, we make the case that it is useful to consider social value in terms of what luxury restaurants offer in view of customer expectations.

It is important to note that while the luxury literature considers social value in terms of conspicuous consumption, with the main utility being the observation of this consumption by others (Eastman et al., 1999; Eastman & Iyer, 2023; Weidmann et al., 2009), it is viewed as a social process in the consumer satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and complaint behavior literature (Wright & Larsen, 2023). Yang and Mattila (2016) examined luxury values in luxury hospitality services and found that purchase intention is influenced by hedonic value followed by functional value (both tangible – food – and intangible – service), and financial value. Symbolic/expressive value (i.e., signaling status and wealth) did not play a role for their participants, but it is important to note that Yang and Mattila did not examine senior consumers. Some researchers have found that symbolic/expressive value plays a role in satisfaction with luxury dining for diners who saw it as symbolizing status (Gupta et al., 2024; Kiatkawsin & Han, 2019; Peng et al 2020), but none of these studies were conducted in the US or focused on the senior market. Findings in the literature on the roles of functional value and hedonic value in satisfaction are consistent, but none of these studies focused on US seniors (Peng et al., 2020; Yang & Mattila, 2016). To fill this gap, this research will examine if and how social value is described by senior respondents.

Consumers aged 55 to 74 spend more money eating out than other consumer age groups (Lahue, 2000). In addition, intangible qualities assume greater importance for seniors than for other consumer groups (Moschis et al., 2003). These intangibles include the service they receive from employees (Hu et al., 2008) and reliability (Lee et al., 2012), which are important for luxury fine dining establishments to consider. In addition, senior females are more concerned with the responsiveness of wait staff than their male counterparts (Lee et al., 2012).

The findings in the literature are mixed regarding seniors’ satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and complaint behaviors. In comparing seniors with younger consumers, seniors are less likely to be dissatisfied than younger consumers, but when they are dissatisfied, their complaint behavior is similar to that of younger consumers (Lee & Soberon-Ferrer, 1999). Lee and Soberon-Ferrer attribute the lower level of dissatisfaction due to older consumers making fewer major purchases than younger consumers. Research findings support the idea that seniors are less likely to be dissatisfied, perceive fewer marketing practices as unfair, and less likely to seek redress for dissatisfaction (Hunt, 1980, 1991). In their study of British seniors (over 60), Grougiou and

Pettigrew (2009) found that this group was less likely to complain for several reasons: *Image management* (seniors' concern regarding self-presentation), *Cultural inappropriateness* (a sub-cultural difference in which younger seniors are more likely to complain), *Market alienation* (seniors feeling alienated from the marketplace, and thus hold lower service expectations), *Prior experiences* (cumulative experiences of complaining yielding no results that create a resilience to unmet expectations), and *Emotional and physical costs* (older consumers being less likely to complain in order to avoid fatiguing themselves both physically and emotionally). Nimako and Mensah (2012) observed that older and married respondents are less likely to complain about mobile telecommunication services than younger, single consumers. However, Lee et al. (2012) found that older consumers (over 55 years of age) are more likely to be dissatisfied than those under 55. Bernhardt (1981) suggests that while seniors are less likely to complain, when adjusted by the number of purchases made, their complaint behavior is similar to that of the total population. It is important to note that none of these studies examined luxury services, which present a very different level of service expectations.

### *Service Expectations*

Service expectations are created based on numerous internal and external inputs, and there is an expectation of high service quality at luxury restaurants (Lee & Hwang, 2011). A seminal scale to measure service quality, SERVQUAL measures service expectations and perceived service performance (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Zeithaml et al., 1993). Parasuraman et al. defined expectations as “desires or wants of consumers, i.e., what they feel a service provider *should* offer rather than *would* offer” (p. 17). Stevens et al. (1995) conceptualized DINESERV to examine restaurant service quality in terms of reliability, employee attitude, responsiveness, empathy, and the restaurant's physical attributes. These aspects are uniquely suited to our study of luxury restaurants.

In a later work (Zeithaml et al., 1993) posited three levels of expectations: (1) *desired service*, or what the customers want; (2) *adequate service*, or the standard consumers are willing to accept; and (3) *predicted service*, which is what consumers believe is likely to occur. Of interest to our study is predicted service, as it is the most salient construct in seniors' complaint behavior in the context of luxury dining. These predicted expectations are influenced by stimuli that are both internal and external to the consumer. An example of an internal influence would be a customer's recollection of dining at a luxury restaurant in the past. External influences (stimuli) may include advertisements for a luxury restaurant, word of mouth, or any external information source. Social exchange theory suggests that expectations impact satisfaction with the exchange as past experiences influence those expectations (Blau, 1964).

Another seminal framework that explains how external stimuli affect attitudes (hence expectations) is the Mehrabian-Russell model (1974), in which external cues are “stimuli” and internal processes are “organisms.” In this model, stimuli and organisms interact to produce attitudes, which then form expectations. These expectations produce approach/avoidance behaviors, which in the context of consuming luxury restaurant services would lead to continued/discontinued patronage as well as complaint/non-complaint behaviors. This model has been extended and used frequently in the restaurant and service literature to explain environmental (atmospheric) effects on diners' emotions, loyalty (Chen et al., 2015), and behavioral intentions (Jang & Namkung, 2009).

### *Complaint Behaviors*

When predicted service expectations are not met, the Mehrabian-Russell (1974) model indicates that the failure in perceived performance will trigger an approach/avoidance response by the consumer. Approach behaviors imply continued patronage. Avoidance behaviors are far less obvious and likely play across a continuum (Meiners et al., 2021). Bechwati and Morrin (2003) chronicled extreme negative behaviors by which some dissatisfied consumers act beyond complaint behaviors in order to assert themselves and create some negative outcome for the service provider. Of concern in our study are more moderate negative behaviors, particularly complaining. Crié (2003) notes that complaints that are handled quickly will result in repeat business and that marketers need to consider the costs of not finding out about consumers' concerns and handling their complaints. Jones et al. (2002) examined types of complaining behaviors and uncovered three main types of complaints: (1) *non-complaint*, in which the consumer's predicted expectations are not met, but they choose to say nothing; (2) *complain to anyone*; and (3) *word-of-mouth complainers*. Jones et al. revealed that word-of-mouth complainers tended to be Baby Boomers.

Meiners et al. (2021) investigated complaint behaviors specifically among seniors. They stated, "When consumers get what they expect, they are satisfied. When consumers do not get what they expect, expectations are not met and they become dissatisfied" (p. 18). Their sample of German seniors over 60 years old were more likely to complain, especially those over 71 years old. This differs from the findings of Grougiou and Pettigrew (2009) that seniors are less likely to complain. The contradictory results suggest that seniors are not one monolithic group and illustrate the importance of understanding seniors' expectations for luxury fine dining, their concept of how it differs from quality casual dining, and what would cause them to complain and/or not to return to the service establishment. In this study, we seek to provide exploratory evidence to clarify issues related to seniors in luxury restaurant settings and thus help to fill the gap in the literature.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A Qualtrics panel of 55 American senior consumers (defined as those over 50 years old) with an annual household income of \$100,000 or more (to ensure they had the resources to afford fine dining) were the participants in this study. The literature acknowledges the heterogeneity of the 50+ market (Lee & Soberon-Ferrer, 1999; Meiners, 2010), which supports restricting our sample to wealthier seniors as the focus is luxury dining. Although seniors are typically characterized as 60+ (Franco, 2023), there is precedent in the literature for defining them as those 50 years old or older (Arenas-Gaitian et al., 2020; Bae et al., 2021; Holliday et al., 2015; Law & Ng, 2016; Leppel & McCloskey, 2011; Meiners, 2010; Moroza & Gurova, 2021; Niemelä-Nyrhinen, 2007; Pettigrew et al., 2004; Pettinco & Milne, 2017; Porter & Donthu, 2006; Riley et al., 2012; Shen, 2020; Su & Tong, 2021; Tepper, 1994; Trocchia & Janda, 2000). An online panel and survey platform was used for data collection (Qualtrics). Given the focus on luxury dining perceptions, a panel of seniors was necessary that had both the financial means and potential quality of health to dine out. The respondents' mean age was 66.3 years, with 48.2% male and 51.8% female. Most reported that they live in a suburban area (64.3%) and were retired (54.5%). They were also highly educated, with 69.7% having a bachelor's degree or higher.

Through the Qualtrics online survey platform, we conducted an online interview approach with nine pre-determined open-ended questions that allowed the respondents to respond to our questions in detail (Cresswell, 2014). We also asked them to provide an example of a luxury fine dining restaurant and a quality casual dining restaurant as a conceptual check as to whether the respondents understood the difference, which they did. Additionally, after the open-ended

questions, we presented a series of scaled questions in which the respondents noted their social media use (see Table 1) and rated the issues that would cause dissatisfaction and complaining behaviors on a 0 to 100 sliding scale (see Table 2). As seniors are increasingly online (Meiners, 2010), utilizing an online platform to collect data is reasonable to collect national US data.

Participants were asked a series of 14 open-ended and several closed-ended items about their luxury dining perceptions in an online qualitative instrument. The use of both qualitative and quantitative measures to study seniors has support in the literature (Lee et al., 2012). An online survey was reasonable as Faverio (2022) illustrates that the majority of adults between 50 and 64 years old and a large portion of those over 65 years old own a smartphone (83% and 61%, respectively) and use social media (73% and 45%, respectively). Social media usage among our sample indicates that the most preferred platform is Facebook, with 75% using that platform on a regular basis, and 28.6% using it between 5 and 40 hours per week. The least-used social media platform was Snapchat, with 85.7% reporting that they do not use it (for a detailed breakdown of social media usage, please see Table 1). Thus, the participants were selected utilizing purposive and theoretical sampling techniques (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

**Table 1: Social Media Usage by Platform**

*QUESTION: For the following items, please select the choice that most accurately describes the hours per week you spend on different kinds of social media. (If you do not have an account on that platform, please mark N/A.)*

Platform	Time Spent Per Week In Hours					
	Less than 5 Hours	5 – 10 Hours	11 – 20 Hours	21-30 Hours	30-40 Hours	N/A
Facebook	46.4%	19.6%	3.6%	1.8%	3.6%	25.0%
Instagram	33.9%	1.8%	0.0%	1.8%	1.8%	60.7%
Twitter	30.4%	5.4%	1.8%	0.0%	1.8%	60.7%
LinkedIn	35.7%	3.6%	3.6%	0.0%	0.0%	57.1%
Pinterest	26.6%	7.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	64.3%
TikTok	16.1%	1.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	82.1%
Snapchat	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	85.7%

To ensure quality responses, an attention check item was utilized (“If you have read this item, please mark neither agree nor disagree”); those who selected the wrong answer were dropped from the study. Additionally, Qualtrics utilized a speed check, determining the average time to complete the qualitative study was 756.5 seconds; those respondents answering the questions in less than 379 seconds were automatically excluded. Thus, the authors have confidence in the quality of responses.

## RESULTS

To examine the open-ended responses, two researchers familiar with the luxury literature coded the written responses to identify key themes along with representative sample quotes. The first set of open-ended questions dealing with perceptions and expectations were coded utilizing the four luxury values operationalized by Weidmann et al. (2009). Responses that discussed price were coded as a monetary value. Responses that discussed usability, quality, and/or uniqueness

were coded as a functional value. Responses that discussed self-identity, hedonic, and/or materialistic value were coded as an individual value. Finally, responses that discussed conspicuousness and/or prestige were coded as a social value. The definitions and operationalization of these values described by Weidmann et al. (2009) were a significant aid in coding the written responses and eliminating any disagreement among the coders. The items dealing with complaint behavior were coded for the following items that could impact a meal: price, food, service, ambience, or other (such as noise or wait time). As these are distinct categories, there was no disagreement among the two coders.

### *Perceptions and Expectations*

The first three questions asked respondents to describe the characteristics of a luxury fine dining restaurant, how it differs from a quality casual dining restaurant, and their expectations when going to a luxury fine dining restaurant. In evaluating these perceptions, we utilized the luxury values described by Weidmann et al. (2009).

### *Characteristics of Luxury Fine Dining*

The vast majority of respondents (47 out of 55) mentioned functional values (Weidmann et al., 2009), including the quality of the food and service as well as unique elements in the atmosphere of the restaurants. A sample quote to illustrate this is “Reservation required. Comparatively small menu of skillfully prepared dishes that the average or better home cook doesn’t normally attempt. Comfortable seating, linen-covered tables and a wait staff that is attentive and knowledgeable to the smallest details on the menu” (Respondent 47).

Eight respondents discussed monetary value in terms of the higher expected prices for luxury fine dining; often this was discussed along with the functional value. Five respondents discussed monetary value in terms of individual value, focusing on hedonic aspects, and then related it to functional value as represented in the following quote: “A more secluded table. Nicer linens and tableware. A personal waiter to keep your food coming at the right time and your glass filled. A larger menu and more expensive fare, less noise, usually nice music playing softly. Your waiter and busboy standing by to clear empty dishes and fill requests for items and food” (Respondent 30).

Social value was the least discussed, with only four respondents mentioning it. They focused on the dress code along with other value elements as illustrated in the following quote: “Table linens. Full place settings. Host to seat you. Menu with apps, salad, entrée, dessert. Upscale dining choices that require silverware. Waiter maybe with a helper. Diners dressed appropriately” (Respondent 17).

### *Luxury Fine Dining vs. Quality Casual Dining*

Most participants (44) described the differences between a luxury fine dining restaurant and a quality casual dining restaurant in terms of functional value, such as higher-quality food, better service, and improved ambience with tablecloths, cloth napkins, and presentation: “A good casual restaurant usually has a theme such as steak or seafood and alternates and mixes entrees and sides with various preparation methods. Most of which are very good but not up to par with fine dining. Wait staff is good but stretched further” (Respondent 47). Several also mentioned differences in liquor availability. Price was also frequently mentioned (9) as in the idea that fine dining would have “higher priced offerings” (Respondent 2). Five participants discussed social

value, mostly in terms of the absence of children and less crowding in the restaurant. No participants mentioned differences in terms of individual value, such as hedonic differences.

### *Luxury Fine Dining Expectations*

In their expectations for luxury fine dining, the majority of respondents (40) stressed the functional values of the highest-quality food, professional service, and a comfortable and quieter atmosphere as illustrated with these examples: “Quieter setting, staff is very accommodating. Finer cuts of steak, fish/seafood options” (Respondent 31) and “A high price, excellent service with food expertly prepared and served in a very comfortable atmosphere” (Respondent 53). There was more mention of individual hedonic value as part of their expectations (15), such as “To feel like a queen” (Respondent 32), “A great night out for a special occasion” (Respondent 3), and “A great time” (Respondent 23). Individual hedonic value was often worked into the discussion of functional values, such as “To eat excellent food and be treated exceptional” (Respondent 15). Finally, nine respondents noted their expectations for higher prices and only one noted social value.

The next two questions compared the expectations of luxury fine dining to quality casual dining more specifically in terms of service and the meal itself. The majority (44) mentioned the wait staff in terms of functional value, discussing the need to be attentive, knowledgeable, and accommodating: “Wait staff having time to ensure prompt pleasant service. Not rushed. No long waits for service. Accurate description of food and orders” (Respondent 17). The respondents demonstrated very high expectations for wait staff, such as “The best! Extremely attentive, multiple staff” (Respondent 31). Higher expectations were communicated by the eight respondents who described service more in terms of hedonic value: “They must be at my service immediately upon arrival” (Respondent 4); “To be seated in a private area, have waiter available at all times” (Respondent 6); and “Caters to my every need” (Respondent 40).

With respect to the meal itself, 44 of the respondents described functional value in terms of both the quality of the food and its presentation: “The food should be excellent, prepared with top-quality ingredients by master chef(s), and presented elegantly” (Respondent 18) and “Elevated presentation, premium quality food” (Respondent 33). Also important was freshness and unique, high-quality ingredients that were perfectly cooked: “Food quality is superb and freshly harvested locally” (Respondent 27) and “the freshest food is used for all of the dishes, a more adventurous menu with authentic flavors from all around the world” (Respondent 21). Respondents did not expect a large quantity of food, with five respondents mentioning more modest food portions, such as “The food is of higher quality, portions are usually smaller” (Respondent 8). Eight of the respondents discussed the meal in more hedonic terms in terms of taste and being delicious and beautiful. Finally, as these are elderly consumers, none of them described the meal as being Instagram-worthy, though one did note a social value aspect, “The meal should be unique. Different and delicious to the point you tell others about it” (Respondent 47).

We then asked the respondents what would be needed for them to feel that they had a true luxury fine dining experience. For 21 respondents, it was quality-driven in terms of food and service. For 14 respondents, it was a combination of food, wine, and service quality along with ambience: “Fine wine, great service and ambience, terrific menu” (Respondent 18); “Candlelight dinner with great service and outstanding food presentation” (Respondent 24); and “quiet elegance in a comfortable surrounding with prompt, excellent service and highest-quality food and drink” (Respondent 53).

Another major theme was how the experience would make them feel. Eight respondents discussed the need to feel special, contented, and like the only diner there: “I would need to feel



like the only diner there. The food would need to be better than I can cook and something I would remember a week later” (Respondent 17) or “I am blown away by the experience” (Respondent 32). Seven respondents focused on the atmosphere of the restaurant.

Finally, four participants mentioned the idea of a unique experience, such as “a varied menu with many options of dishes with an exquisite unique flavor” (Respondent 25).

### *Complaint Behavior*

The next set of open-ended questions focused on complaint behavior, asking seniors what types of issues would cause them to complain at a luxury fine dining restaurant, if these issues differed compared to a quality casual dining restaurant, and if the type of issue that would result in their complaining to the manager or not returning to the restaurant would differ for a luxury fine dining restaurant compared to a quality casual dining restaurant.

### *Complaint Behavior for Luxury Fine Dining*

Most (26) responses related to a combination of issues occurring during the same meal, such as problems with both service and food and possibly ambience or other customers: “Less than perfect food, poor presentation, less than perfect service, other than a super clean restaurant, lack of service” (Respondent 50) or “anything not exceptional” (Respondent 42). Three respondents noted that they had higher expectations for a luxury fine dining experience: “slow service, undercooked or overcooked food, dirty silverware or glasses, something that tastes no better or fresher than a casual dining restaurant across the street” (Respondent 21). In terms of naming one specific issue, respondents cited food (12) or service (8) issues most frequently, followed by ambience (2), wait (2), and other issues (noise, crowd; 2). The importance of the staff taking care of them is highlighted with this example “Waiters not as attentive as desired (i.e., not refilling bread baskets and drinks, not bringing food hot to the table and prepared as ordered, not bringing the check in a timely manner)” (Respondent 18). One noted that they wouldn’t complain, they would just never return.

### *Complaint Behavior Differences for Luxury Fine Dining vs. Quality Casual Dining*

Many participants (19) noted multiple potential differences that would cause them to complain based on whether it was a fine dining or quality casual restaurant that illustrate higher expectations for luxury fine dining, such as “Yes. I’m paying more, and I expect better food, atmosphere, and service” (Respondent 18). Others (15) noted there would be no differences that would cause them to complain, with a few of these suggesting they had similar expectations: “No. If I’m paying for something, I expect it to be correct” (Respondent 12). Respondents reported that most difference between restaurant types causing complaints were related to service (10), suggesting that they have lower expectations for quality casual dining, such as “I can tolerate an incorrect order on occasion from a quality casual dining restaurant, especially if understaffed or extremely busy” (Respondent 16). Also mentioned were food (5) and ambience (2). Four respondents noted that cost differences would affect their expectations and whether they would complain, such as “When you pay luxury prices you expect more” (Respondent 42).

### *Escalating Complaint Behaviors*

In answer to whether they would escalate the complaint to the manager and whether this would differ based on a luxury fine dining versus quality casual setting, 15 said “no,” with one suggesting the same expectations regardless of the type of restaurant: “No. Every patron has a right

to an enjoyable meal” (Respondent 47). Nine said there would be differences due to the cost (e.g., “Yes definitely and it is all because of what you pay,” Respondent 38) and eight said there would be differences due to the luxury aspect of fine dining (e.g., “the level of ‘luxury’ dictates expectations,” Respondent 10, and “Yes, I would expect much more from a luxury fine dining restaurant,” Respondent 24). The issues that would cause one to complain to the manager included a combination of issues (9); service-only issues (8), such as “Rudeness of the wait staff is not acceptable in a fine dining environment. Casual dining tends to have younger & less experienced staff and lower expectations” (Respondent 54); ambience (3); and other/noise issues (2).

When asked what issues would cause them not to return and if this would vary for luxury fine dining versus casual dining, 14 respondents said there were no differences in the issues, with 4 suggesting similar expectations (e.g., “No. Both cost a lot,” Respondent 23). Many did see differences, specifically in expectations (11) due to price differences (7): “Yes, I have very high expectations for a luxury dining experience. I am paying for perfection” (Respondent 50). Several (6) noted differences with multiple issues (6), with a few noting how the issues that would impact them would differ, such as “For both the food would be the first issue to cause me to not return. Rude service at a fine dining place is not acceptable. At a casual place as long as I get food, drink, and check, I don’t need much else. So it is not so much of a problem” (Respondent 17).

For those who noted that they would not return due to only one type of issue, service-only issues (6) were the most noted, followed by food issues (4), such as “Poorly prepared food is number one in a luxury restaurant as they should have high-quality, professional chefs” (Respondent 53). Least mentioned were wait time (1) and other/noise (1) issues. Finally, it is important to note the idea that luxury fine dining is often to celebrate a special occasion: “I’m more likely not to go back to a luxury fine dining restaurant if it proved disappointing, since the price is much higher and the occasion more important and rare” (Respondent 18).

### *Recent Luxury Fine Dining Experiences*

The last open-ended questions asked about a recent luxury fine dining experience and requested that the respondents provide examples of what they considered to be a luxury fine dining and quality casual dining restaurant. The majority (29) mentioned a combination of quality food, service, and ambience: “enjoyed a lovely meal at a restaurant located in a casino. The food was excellent as was the service, and the atmosphere was quiet and upscale” (Respondent 18). Fifteen noted that they have not had a recent fine dining experience, with some blaming COVID: “have not dined out since COVID” (Respondent 9).

Interestingly, nine respondents discussed it as a negative experience, “Negative. Valentine day reservation at a very expensive restaurant. Unknown to every patron, the entire wait staff had quit that day. We were strung along for hours and never served a meal” (Respondent 46) and “It was a negative, the waiter had so many individuals to address, we waited a long time to be served, issues in the back with the cooking staff, he was overwhelmed” (Respondent 12). Four mentioned that it involved a special or social occasion, “I went to a local fine dining restaurant to celebrate my birthday, I often go here for special events because the food there is consistently great and the service is always attentive, and it has a cozy and warm atmosphere most other restaurants in the area just don’t offer! I’m willing to spend extra money for an experience like this for a special occasion!” (Respondent 20). Three mentioned how it made them feel, “Soothing feeling during meal and a feeling of sheer contentment upon leaving” (Respondent 5).

### *Examples of Luxury Fine Dining and Quality Casual Restaurants*

As examples of luxury fine dining restaurants, the respondents noted both chain restaurants with multiple locations (Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, Morton's, Flemings, Lawry's, Spago, McCormick and Schmicks, Fishbones) as well as those with limited locations (Mahogany Prime Steakhouse, Bay Tower Room, Monty's, Norman's (Ritz Carlton), Sullivan's, Palo, Andria's, Ken Stewart's Grille, La Beredean, Oceanaire, The Golden Steer, The Rittenhouse, Heston Blumenthal, Katz 21, Texas Republic, Antoine's, Maestros, The Prime Rib, The Mansion on Turtle Creek, French Laundry, 555, Sparks Steakhouse, Volt, 801 Fish, Son of the Butcher, Izzy's Steakhouse). Ruth's Chris Steakhouse was the most frequently mentioned, and steakhouses in general dominated the examples of luxury fine dining.

In comparison, when asked to provide an example of quality casual, the majority mentioned chain restaurants such as Outback, Carrabba's Italian Grill, Longhorn Steakhouse, Cheesecake Factory, Applebee's, Olive Garden, Bonafish Grill, Chipotle, Ted's Montana Grill, Texas Roadhouse, Chili's, Cracker Barrel, Red Lobster). Twenty respondents mentioned local quality casual dining (typically mentioned with multiple options by the same respondent). There was very little overlap between fine dining and quality casual with the exception that two mentioned Ruth's Chris as a quality casual restaurant. It should be noted that for those two respondents, their examples of luxury fine dining were Morton's and Volt (a Michelin star restaurant). This suggests that the sample understood what luxury fine dining was.

### *Quantitative Support for Qualitative Responses*

We asked participants what a luxury fine dining meal (dinner, food only) should cost. Responses to this item were clustered around the value ranges "\$51 – 75" and "\$76 – 100," with each range receiving 23.2% of responses. The next largest concentration of responses was for the range, "\$101 – 125," which represents 17.9% of responses. We then quantified the issues surrounding luxury fine dining through means of a sliding scale (0 – 100) and asked the respondents to rate the type of issue that would: (1) cause them to complain to the manager, (2) cause dissatisfaction but not lead to complaining, and (3) cause them never to return to the restaurant ever again. The results are shown in Table 2.

The answers reflect the statements from the qualitative (open-ended) section. At a luxury restaurant, service and food issues drive the tendency to either complain or exhibit avoidance behaviors by not returning. The first block asked respondents about complaint behavior only and the third block asked about an implied service failure that goes beyond complaining to the point of never returning. The mean scores and distributions for both sets of questions were very similar. This implies that the standard of expectations within the senior market is high for luxury restaurants. Further study with a larger sample size and more sophisticated analyses is warranted.

### *Selected Word Cloud Analyses*

To further explore the qualitative statements, word clouds were utilized to illustrate the frequency of the words utilized by the respondents in answering the open-ended questions. Word clouds were developed for the following questions: (1) What are the characteristics of a luxury fine dining restaurant? (2) How does luxury fine dining differ from quality casual dining? (3) What would be needed for you to feel you had a true luxury fine dining experience? and (4) What type of issues would cause you to complain if they occurred at a luxury fine dining restaurant?

**Table 2:** Descriptive Statistics for a Luxury Fine Dining Context

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*QUESTION: In a luxury fine dining context, what type of issues would make it more likely you would go beyond complaining to the serving staff to complain to the restaurant manager? (Scale: 0 – 100)*

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<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
Service Issues (such as the server not being attentive, rudeness)	<b>77.36</b>	<b>25.83</b>
Food Issues (such as temperature or taste)	<b>71.21</b>	<b>28.95</b>
Wait (time) Issues (such as waiting for a table or to order)	<b>57.09</b>	<b>27.54</b>
Ambience Issues (such as comfortable seating, decor)	<b>45.45</b>	<b>31.69</b>
Other Customers (such as noise)	<b>49.30</b>	<b>28.17</b>

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*QUESTION: In a luxury fine dining context, what type of issue would cause you NOT to complain, but would cause you to not return to the restaurant ever again? (Scale: 0 – 100)*

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<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
Service Issues (such as the server not being attentive, rudeness)	<b>59.41</b>	<b>32.75</b>
Food Issues (such as temperature or taste)	<b>60.72</b>	<b>32.03</b>
Wait (time) Issues (such as waiting for a table or to order)	<b>51.21</b>	<b>29.10</b>
Ambience Issues (such as comfortable seating, decor)	<b>40.76</b>	<b>28.64</b>
Other Customers (such as noise)	<b>45.76</b>	<b>28.29</b>

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*QUESTION: In a luxury fine dining context, what type of issue would cause dissatisfaction to the point that you would NOT RETURN to the restaurant ever again? (Scale: 0 – 100)*

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<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
Service Issues (such as the server not being attentive, rudeness)	<b>75.27</b>	<b>26.60</b>
Food Issues (such as temperature or taste)	<b>77.83</b>	<b>24.16</b>
Wait (time) Issues (such as waiting for a table or to order)	<b>60.76</b>	<b>30.79</b>
Ambience Issues (such as comfortable seating, decor)	<b>52.01</b>	<b>29.78</b>
Other Customers (such as noise)	<b>46.83</b>	<b>31.04</b>

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Word counts and word clouds were produced from input regarding the salient qualitative questions presented in the survey. The text analysis utilized a Natural Language Processing (NLP) algorithm. Word counts were produced after text preparation which included tokenization, parsing, lemmatization, and stop word removal (Srinivas & Ramachandrian 2024). The word counts showed that food was the most important factor overall in respondents’ perception of defining fine dining, distinguishing fine dining from quality casual dining, the perception of a fine dining experience, and cause for complaint. While service plays a major role in shaping perceptions of fine dining and complaint behaviors, perceptions of food quality also play a major role. This is visualized in the form of word clouds, which are included as Figures 1-4. The word counts are included in Table 3.





**Table 3: Word Count for Select Qualitative Questions (After Pruning)**

*QUESTION 1: What are the characteristics of what you perceive to be a luxury fine dining restaurant? Total raw word count = 529; after data preparation, the substantive (tokenized) word count was 231.*

<b>Word</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Food	22
Menu	11
Service	11
Table	9
Quality	8

*QUESTION 2: How do you think a luxury fine dining restaurant differs from a quality casual dining restaurant? Total raw word count = 376; after data preparation, the substantive (tokenized) word count was 129.*

<b>Word</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Food	23
Service	15
Quality	15
Better	9

*QUESTION 3: What would be needed for you to feel you had a true luxury fine dining experience? Total raw word count = 412; after data preparation, the substantive (tokenized) word count was 154.*

<b>Word</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Food	25
Service	25
Great	13

*QUESTION 4: What type of issues would cause you to complain if they occurred at a luxury fine dining restaurant? Total raw word count = 453; after data preparation, the substantive (tokenized) word count was 142.*

<b>Word</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Food	32
Service	23
Bad	13

## DISCUSSION

This study contributes to the literature on luxury services by focusing on an important and understudied area of luxury services, fine dining (Lee & Hwang, 2011; Lim et al., 2022), and on a market segment not typically examined in the luxury domain, seniors. Given the relatively high level of resources in this segment, the omission of seniors in the research on luxury settings is surprising. Our findings show that what seniors are looking for in luxury fine dining relates to functional luxury values in terms of high quality of the food and service as well as unique elements in the atmosphere of the restaurants. Luxury fine dining differs from quality casual dining in its functional value, featuring higher-quality food, better and more professional service, and special ambience with tablecloths, cloth napkins, and presentation of dishes served in a comfortable, quieter atmosphere. Our participants reported that a combination of issues, rather than a single issue, would give rise to complaint behaviors, including service, food, and to a lesser extent ambience and other patrons. These issues were noted in view of seniors' expectations based on luxury fine dining, though a number of respondents stated that the same expectations apply to casual dining contexts.

RQ1 asked about the differences in expectations for luxury fine dining versus quality casual dining. For our respondents, the biggest difference is higher functional value expectations for luxury fine dining in terms of food, service, and ambience. In answer to RQ2 regarding differences in what would trigger complaint behaviors for luxury fine dining versus quality casual dining, price played a role for 35% of the sample, as the higher cost increased expectations that needed to be met. For 27% of the sample, however, the type of restaurant made no difference in whether they would complain, suggesting that seniors may have high expectations regardless of the type of restaurant. Furthermore, they would have a similar likelihood of escalating the complaint to management. One area in which seniors may cut some slack for quality casual restaurants is with service, as 18% of the sample discussed having higher tolerance for mistakes in the service area.

### *Theoretical Implications*

This research contributes to social exchange theory by demonstrating its usefulness in a luxury service setting. Our respondents did not expect a large quantity of food with luxury fine dining as no one discussed it in terms of being a good value. People are not dining at luxury restaurants because it is economical (Chen & Peng, 2018). Nevertheless, the senior respondents in this study did expect to be pampered by the servers with a very high-quality meal. This suggests that what senior consumers are looking for in their dining are not benefits that can be measured monetarily, but social experiences. This idea of consumer satisfaction being a social process, "where meaning is negotiated in a social setting" (Wright & Larsen, 2023, p. 100) has support in the literature. Social exchange theory in the area of luxury hospitality revolves around the social interactions between customers, employees, and organizations (Jain et al., 2023): servers' attentive behaviors to fine dining customers increase consumers' emotional attachment to their servers. Thus, the importance of a high-quality social exchange with wait staff plays an important role in a satisfactory exchange for senior consumers.

While luxury restaurants have been seen as signaling status for a general population (Chen & Peng, 2018), an interesting finding about the seniors in this study is that they did not discuss the social aspect in terms of impressing others, conspicuousness, or status (Eastman et al., 1999; Weidmann et al., 2009) and they only infrequently mentioned going out to dinner with friends for special occasions. Instead, social value was reflected in how the wait staff made the customer feel. The feeling of specialness is a key component of the luxury fine dining exchange for the seniors



who participated in our study. This relates to the social process of satisfaction discussed in the literature (Wright & Larsen, 2023). The importance of utilitarian value, especially hedonic value, in luxury services has support in the literature (Kwon et al., 2022), specifically in the context of luxury restaurants (Chen et al., 2015; Kiattipoom & Han, 2019; Lee & Hwang, 2011; Yang & Mattila, 2016).

In relating the findings to Weidmann et al.'s (2009) components of luxury value, functional value was key; the vast majority of respondents mentioned the importance of high quality and several discussed luxury fine dining as a unique dining experience for a special occasion. The importance of functional value with fine dining, which is supported in the literature (Peng et al., 2020), was also cited by the respondents in this study. The high prices for luxury fine dining (financial value) were noted by several, and individual value also played a role for a few in the hedonic aspects of luxury fine dining.

Similar to observations of Yang and Mattila (2016), social value was not really discussed by any of the respondents in terms of conspicuousness or prestige. This is counter to other findings from younger samples that suggest that luxury fine dining can serve as a signal of wealth and status (Gupta et al., 2024; Kiatkawsin & Han, 2019; Peng et al., 2020). Instead, seniors discussed social value as it related to the dress code for a fine dining restaurant. This suggests that seniors are not looking at luxury fine dining in terms of snob, conspicuous, or bandwagon type consumption. This finding has some support in the literature, as social value has not been observed to have an influence on satisfaction in terms of luxury hotel services (Kwon et al., 2022), but does suggest a potential difference between senior luxury fine diners and younger diners.

Although Grougiou and Pettigrew (2009) noted that seniors are less likely to complain, our results suggest that the majority of seniors would complain to the manager when there are service, food, or wait time issues. This willingness to complain is supported in the literature (Lee et al., 2012; Meiners et al., 2021). Bechawti and Morrin (2003) note that dissatisfied customers can engage in extreme negative behaviors. While this was not exhibited by most of the respondents in this study, it is important to note the anger in the comments when there was a negative experience, such as "I left because I was ignored and a month later the restaurant was closed because I complained to the owners of the franchise, not the local owners" (Respondent 51). Social exchange theory proposes that this anger is due to a trust violation (Blau, 1964). Finally, while the consumer complaint literature has noted that the presence of others may impact complaint behaviors (Yan & Lotz, 2009), this was not discussed by any of our respondents.

Our findings support Wirtz et al.'s (2020) idea of luxury services as extraordinary hedonic experiences that encompass both objective features of luxury fine dining as well as subjective perceptions. This can be seen in how often our respondents connected both the food and the waitstaff in their descriptions of their expectations as well as what would cause them to complain. A large proportion of our respondents expected perfection and a feeling of being special when at a luxury fine dining establishment.

This research contributes to the luxury literature, as there is a need to examine luxury services specifically (Wirtz et al., 2020) and there has been little investigation of luxury fine dining and senior consumers. Chen et al. (2015) found that food quality perceptions can have a significantly negative effect on diners' emotive responses, and that these emotions can impact loyalty. In looking at our word clouds with a senior sample, we also found food to be the term most frequently utilized in the open-ended responses. Past studies have shown that food quality, especially taste and presentation, significantly affects customer satisfaction for midscale to upscale restaurants (Namkung & Jang, 2007). This exploratory study of seniors' perceptions of luxury

dining supports previous findings regarding the importance of food in luxury fine dining (Chen et al., 2015; Chen & Peng, 2018; Lim et al., 2022; Namkung & Jang, 2007; Peng et al., 2020). Additionally, while service quality has also been identified as important (Chen et al., 2015), this exploratory qualitative study found that what mattered to seniors in terms of service was a feeling that they are treated as being special. A final contribution to the literature is the finding that the social value of status or prestige does not really play role for the senior luxury fine diner.

### *Managerial Implications*

As “today’s silver generation is active, self-confident, demanding, adventurous, experience-driven and forward looking, keen to consume and pleasure loving” (Meiners, 2010, p. 299), this segment is especially important for fine dining restaurants. Nimako and Mensah (2012) observed that the most important motives for complaining involved seeking corrective action, explanation, and remedy. This being the case, marketing managers need to consider how they will address complaint behaviors and train employees to address them quickly.

Fine dining restaurant marketers and managers should note that it is not one issue that will impact seniors’ luxury fine dining experiences, but rather the totality of the experience. While food plays a critical role, professional servers who make the customers feel special are also particularly important (Hu et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2012; Moschis et al., 2003). It is vital that luxury service providers create positive experiences that encourage emotional connections with their consumers (Siahtiri et al., 2022). Wait staff should give their senior consumers a sense of respect and attention to every need. Given that seniors spend more than other segments on eating out (Lahue, 2000), our findings highlight the need for luxury restaurants to develop comprehensive training programs to ensure that the wait staff are prepared to serve customers according to their high expectations (Lee et al., 2012).

Something luxury fine dining restaurants need to consider is that senior consumers have very high expectations. This can be seen in our respondents’ mentions of perfection in what they expect in a luxury fine dining experience. High price is a key characteristic of luxury fine dining (Lee & Hwang, 2011) and in light of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976), it is important for luxury fine dining restaurants to ensure they are meeting senior consumers’ expectations for the exchange. Meeting these expectations will be difficult, especially in a post-COVID landscape where quality servers may be difficult to find (Bagheri et al., 2023); a few respondents noted issues with lack of wait staff.

When asked about a recent luxury fine dining experience, 16% noted it was negative. This percentage was higher than expected, suggesting that fine dining restaurants are still struggling to provide the perfect experience senior consumers are looking for post-COVID. It is also important to note that 27% of the respondents reported they have not been to a luxury fine dining restaurant since the pandemic began. Concerns about hygiene in luxury fine dining post-COVID have support in the literature (Lim et al., 2022) but are an even bigger issue for senior clientele. Promotions to encourage seniors to come out to dinner should emphasize the cleanliness and safety protocols put in place since COVID.

Another key issue is wait time, as for the majority of respondents, this will impact complaint behaviors and if they will return. Managers need to effectively manage consumers’ expectations as to when they will be seated and when their food will be ready, reflecting the need to effectively manage the reservation process.

Finally, a sizable portion of the sample (27%) had similar expectations for quality casual dining as they had for luxury fine dining. This suggests that quality casual restaurants also need to take care in serving their senior guests.

The fact that the vast majority of our respondents were willing to complain to restaurant managers highlights the need for training not just servers but also management in addressing problems when they occur. “A restaurant can be more successful when the managers keep striving to make the elderly feel respected and comfortable” (Lee et al., 2012, p. 223). Managers will need to train servers to recognize potential service and food issues before customers complain. With regard to food, both taste and presentation influence customer satisfaction (Namkung & Jang, 2007). A majority of our senior respondents noted that while they may not complain when there are service, food, ambience or wait time issues, they will not return. Therefore, it is very important that managers talk to customers to ensure their satisfaction. A final factor for managers to consider is the impact of other customers (such as noise); while this issue was not as strong a concern as service, food, and wait time, more than 40% of respondents stated that it would impact their complaint behavior and if they would return. Thus, luxury fine dining managers need to consider how they will address problematic customers, who affect the luxury dining experience for all.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

One potential implication of this exploratory study is that given the value of loyal customers in high-margin luxury restaurant operations, further study is needed to better understand seniors’ complaint behaviors and the drivers behind them. The field of consumer satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and complaint behavior is complex (Wright & Larsen, 2023). Given the need for research on luxury services (Wirtz et al., 2009) and the financial strength of the senior market (Dobbs et al., 2016; Lee & Hwang, 2011; United States Census Bureau, 2021), more research should be devoted to better understanding seniors’ satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and complaint behaviors in the area of luxury services and how they differ from those of younger consumers. For example, longer and more in-depth qualitative interviews could be conducted to determine if luxury dining is considered an “extraordinary experience” that is made up of emotional intensity and extreme enjoyment (Petersen et al., 2021).

A limitation of our exploratory research is that it only examined seniors’ perceptions of what would cause them to complain in a luxury fine dining environment versus quality casual dining. Future researchers could examine actual complaint behavior and compare older and younger consumers as well as include the perspectives of service personnel and managers of luxury fine dining restaurants. A related area for further research is to examine service recovery for seniors in the context of luxury fine dining in order to better understand how luxury restaurant managers can successfully mollify consumers who complain about service, food, or wait time issues in order to retain them and discourage negative word-of-mouth. Similarly, research is needed on the consequences of consumer grudges (Nordstrom & Egan, 2021; Thota & Wright, 2006) against luxury restaurants, such as negative social media reviews relating to unsuccessful complaint resolution.

A key limitation of this research is that it only examined perceptions of American seniors making over \$100,000 a year. Previous researchers have found cultural differences in consumer complaint behaviors (Blodgett et al., 2006). Therefore, further research is needed to examine senior diners in other countries to determine the generalizability of our findings.

Furthermore, while there were some closed-ended questions, most of the items in our questionnaire were open-ended. Empirical examination of the results found in this study would be

useful to expand the findings obtained here. An additional area for future research is to specifically examine how seniors' luxury service experiences impact their loyalty.

Finally, the sample size for this study was small, which seriously limits the generalizability of the results. Survey research with a larger sample would allow comparison of younger-old (50-64 years old) with older-old (65+ years old) seniors (Pettigrew et al., 2004). In spite of the limitations, we hope that our findings encourage continuing research on an important segment of consumers (American seniors) in an under-researched area of luxury (fine dining).

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