Consumer's perceptions of service experience and service quality of a strategic alliance network.

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The paradigms of service experience and service quality have featured in many services marketing manuscripts and are topics of discussion for services marketing audience. Literature review suggests that, to date, researchers have confined their research to understand consumer's perception of service experience and service quality of an individual service provider. But, researchers have not addressed consumer's service experience and service quality in a multiple service provider context, let alone measuring them. Therefore, this paper makes an attempt to understand the consumer’s perceptions of service experience and service quality, when consumers are sequentially served by several airlines dovetailing their services as an airline alliance network.

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Consumer’s perceptions of service experience and service quality of a strategic alliance network.

Research Introduction:

Insuring a proper service climate and ensuing an excellent service delivery has become a central role for a service provider (Schneider et al, 2002). Popular manuscripts featured in services marketing literature suggest that, consumers rely on service performances than tangible objects for assessing service experience and service quality. Furthermore, consumers form perceptions about a service provider, based on how the service provider delivered the services, the tangibles provided in the service offering and finally the look and manners of service provider. Therefore, perceptions formed by the consumers about a service provider’s services enables consumers to create a service experience, which in turn, influences realistic and emotional perceptions of a firm/organisation’s quality of their service (Berry et al, 2006). Therefore, consumer’s service experience and consumer’s perceived quality are treated as two different paradigms and measured in two different ways. Whilst, consumer perceived service quality measurement is objective in nature. Its assessment focuses on consumer’s cognitive and attitudinal reflection towards functional and technical benefits of a service provider’s external service environment (Parasuraman et al, 1988; Spreng and Mackoy, 1996; Sultan and Simpson, 2000; Cronin and Taylor, 1992, 1994; Dabholkar et al, 2000; Brady and Taylor, 2001; Brady et al, 2002). However, service experience measurement is subjective by nature and it depends on a consumer’s inner feeling during service consumption. Service experience assessments focus on the consumer’s psychological affective representation of an experiential, hedonic and symbolic benefit during a service consumption experience. And, hence it has a holistic approach for assessing service experience (Otto and Ritchie, 1996; Orsingher and Marzocchi, 2003; Berry et al, 2006; Chen and Chen, 2010).

The importance of providing service experience and quality services is embedded in several organisations. Many organisations like hotels, retail stores and airlines have invested in their service environment to provide an excellent service experience for their customers (Bolton et al, 2007). Sir Colin Marshall, former Chairman of British Airways, once spoke about British Airways’ service experience offerings to their customers. He said as an airline company, British Airways’ goal was" to ensure that British Airways is the customer’s first choice through the delivery of an unbeatable travel experience". But, in response to how British Airways’ would provide sound travel experience in a complex airline alliance context. He said “by creating seamless service, I mean dovetailing our route networks and our flight schedules, sharing codes to make it easier for customers to book a trip that involves legs flown with two or more of us, and making it easier and more pleasant to transfer between partners” (Prokesch, 1995).

From the above said statements of Sir Colin Marshall, it can be noticed that British Airways as an airline company wants to provide quality travel experience to its travellers. From the existing service experience and service quality manuscripts, it is possible to measure British Airways customers’ service experience and service quality on any British Airways flight. But, how consumers perceive and assess service experiences when British Airways dovetails its services with its partner airlines in an airline alliance context is not addressed in literature yet, let alone assessing it. Hence, this issue can be very helpful in addressing consumer’s service experience and service quality in a multiple service provider context like an airline alliance.

Research objective:

Literature suggests that, to date, services marketing researchers have confined their studies to measure consumer’s service experience and service quality of sole service provider. However, consumer service experience and service quality in a multiple service provider
context like an alliance network has not been addressed, let alone measuring them. Therefore, this exploratory study makes an attempt to understand; firstly, consumers’ attributes of service experiences and service quality, when consumers are sequentially served by airlines (preferred airline and its partner airlines) that dovetail their services as an airline alliance network. And secondly to build an assessment tool to measure consumers’ perceptions of service experience and service quality, when consumers are sequentially served by airlines that dovetail their services sequentially from one airline to the other as an airline alliance network

**Originality:**

This research aim’s to go beyond our understanding of consumer’s perception of service experience and service quality from sole service provider to a multiple service provider context. As this research aims to understand and subsequently build a measurement construct of service experience and service quality in a multiple service provider context like an alliance network. This research not only bridges the existing research gap, but also provides clues to measure and understand consumer attributes of service quality and service experiences, when consumers are served by one service provider to another in a sequential pattern whilst dovetailing their services as an airline alliance network.

**Research Methodology:**

To accomplish this exploratory research, series of semi-structured interviews are being conducted with regular airline passengers. The interviews are being presently conducted in France, with both men and women, coming from all cultures and from all walks of life (business professionals, public servants and academicians). The interviews are focused on understanding consumer’s perceptions of service experience and service quality of an airline alliance which sequentially dovetails its services from one airline to the other airline. Interviews will be orchestrated for facilitating participants to shed more light about consumer perceptions of an airline alliance’s global service operations, their in-flight and airports service encounters, the service cultures of airline alliance members, and their service deliveries.

The objective element of the interview will be about the service performance and external service environment of the member airlines of an alliance network. This methodology will give better understanding of consumer perceptions of service quality of an airline alliance. The subjective element of the interview will be about the consumer perceptions of the services experienced during a flight journey through airlines of an airline alliance network. This methodology will give better understanding of consumer perceptions of service experience of an airline alliance. Therefore, the participants’ discussion will bring clues to understand how consumers make evaluative judgements of service experience and service quality, whilst sequentially served by one airline alliance member to the other.

**Expected results:**

Successive discussions with participants should provide useful information of consumer perception of the service experiences. This research should; firstly, assist in providing clues about consumer perceptions of service experience and service quality of airlines (preferred airline and partner airlines) during their long haul flight journey with an airline alliance network. Secondly, this exploratory study is designed to understand consumer’s service experience and service quality attributes of an airline alliance network. Thirdly, the exploratory study will subsequently facilitate to build an assessment tool of service experience and service quality of an airline alliance network and fill the research gap that already exists in services marketing literature.
References:


