

‘On-Board Experience’: a Study on First and Business Class Frequent Flyers

Nadia Olivero*

Abstract

Competition among airline companies demands for a constant and careful evaluation of emerging consumer trends. The demand for on-board services was explored through a means-end study. 40 first and business class frequent flyers were interviewed in order to uncover the individual values associated with their motivations towards products and services. Results showed the significance of spiritual self-development, self-care and relational values as main drivers for multiple needs explaining preferences for health, information and communication related products within an experiential framework. Managerial implications for innovation are discussed.

Keywords: Product Innovation; Consumer Research; Means-End Interviews; On-Board Services; Frequent Flyers Demand; Global Tourism

1. On-Board Innovation

Global competition among leading airline companies reveal the emergence of a novel approach to innovation, where ‘research and development’ efforts are concurrently focusing on both innovation and imitation activities (Arora et al. 2001; Brondoni 2009). Given the objectives of short-term profitability and minimum market risk, companies’ most strategic innovation model is one that is ‘Open’ to the imitation of others successful competitors and to the sharing of information among main market players (Weerawardena, O’Cass 2004; Vorhies, Harcher 2000). Servair Italyⁱ commissioned this research to obtain insights for the development of new offers that could indeed be based on emerging trends within the air transportation industry for more than one of its airline clients (at the time of the data collection, results were intended to inform innovation for the airline alliance Airfrance, Alitalia and KLM).

2. The Demand of Frequent Flyers

In the attempt to increase profitability, global airlines that operate for medium and long hauls need to target frequent flyers carefully. Frequent fliers constitute the

* Assistant Professor of Psychology, University of Milan-Bicocca (nadia.olivero@unimib.it)

most important client base to be reached and maintained through reward-schemes programs and are, at the same time, an important source of information for the monitoring of emerging trends. One of the effects of business globalization is certainly that of the growing number of people who currently spend considerable part of their lifetime on planes. People who travel extensively and globally represent an interesting sample for consumer research into emerging global trends. Various evidences suggest that competition among airlines is not only based on price. Previous research has showed that consumers may be willing to pay more for increased service quality (Balcombe et al. 2009; Espino et al.; 2008; Lee and Luengo-Prado; 2004; Martin et al.; 2008) and business flyers who engage in medium and long hauls flights are likely to show a more complex structure of needs than just a 'best price' preference.

Based on the consumer research literature that argued for the role of values in determining decision making, this study adopts a means-end approach to understand the relation between products and services evaluations, self-relevant values and emerging needs. Since Rokeach (1968; 1973; 1979) contributions, values have been commonly regarded as long lasting beliefs which guide motivation toward actions and decisions according to what is thought to be socially and personally preferable at the most fundamental level. It is assumed that values are forged socially in the relation between the individual and its social context, to reflect social conformity, moral orientation and self-determination. Values determine actions by means of motivation, by defining a hierarchical system of goals, where some goals have been described as instrumental to higher levels of other goals. According to this representation of the decision making structure, previous research has argued that consumers relate to products as means to further ends and that personal values guide the evaluation of product attributes through beliefs about consequences of use (Grunert et al. 1995, Gutman 1981; Reynolds and Gutman 1984; Perkins and Reynolds, 1988). The Means-End Theory sustains that as consumers may perceive products and services as self-relevant, the evaluation of products attributes and the related preferences will go beyond functionality to reveal what is meaningful for the individual values (Gutman 1982). Under this perspective, differences across product categories and consumer targets exist. This paper posits that the evaluation of flight services attributes for consumers who travel very frequently and for long hours will be particularly critical in terms of self-relevance.

3. Means-End Approach and Methodological Implications

The Means-End Theory, and its related approach, developed by Gutman (1982) are based on the assumption that consumers' purchases are fundamentally oriented by individual values. What is self-relevant will determine the evaluation of the positive or negative consequences that are thought to derive from each product or service attributes. The purpose of the methodology is, therefore, that of revealing the hierarchical structures of Attribute-Consequence-Values (A-C-V), which associate products or service attributes to their consequences and these latter to personal values. For a more detailed analysis, authors have suggested the adoption of an amplified A-C-V model, dividing values in instrumentals and terminals, consequences in functional and psychological, and attributes in concretes and

abstracts (Grunert et al. 1995; Walker and Olson, 1991). The methodology for the collection of the data is known with the term ‘laddering’ and usually consists in in-depth individual interviews aimed at identifying existing connections between attributes, consequences and values. Interviews are conducted by means of repeated questions on the ‘subjective importance’, to help toward increasing levels of abstractions from the subjective importance of the product or service attributes toward the subjective importance of higher-level values. A typical question of the laddering technique is ‘why is this important for you?’. These types of questions are prompted any time participants discuss a product attribute to help for a further and deeper understanding of the motivation that is behind the attribute evaluation. For instance, consumers may evaluate positively a fruit juice bottle that is made of glass (product attribute) and by asking ‘why is this important for you?’ one might discover that the consequences associated to that attribute are ‘higher cost’ and ‘longer lasting quality’. The interview may then reveal a preference for the longer lasting quality despite the higher cost. By asking again ‘why is this important for you?’ , another consequence of the product attribute may be revealed, for instance that ‘longer lasting quality is safer’. The laddering technique will then help to reveal the subjective importance of ‘safety’ by showing its links to self-relevant values such as: ‘feeling secure’, ‘protecting the family’ and ‘being a good parent’. The identification of the ladders is based on the quantification of the associations between elements of the means-end chain to allow for the identification of the most relevant ones within a group of consumers. In the example above, the research could have revealed that the value ‘being a good parent’ was the most significant motive behind a number of attribute preferences, thus providing important indications for the communication of the product or even for the development of new product attributes to satisfy the same motivation.

3.1. Data Collection and Sample Description

Interviews have been conducted in both Italy and the UK between June and September 2016 on an heterogeneous sample of international frequent flyers of business and first class flights. They were 20 women and 20 males, between 28 and 61 years old (means age 43.5 years). 32 were in full time employment in executive positions and 8 were self-employed in various business sectors including finance, innovation technology, tourism, fashion, design, advertising, engineering, managing consultancy, architecture, banking. Most used airlines were: AZ, AF, AA, U2, EK, BA, VY, SQ, LH, DL, UA, WN, YK, KLM, QR. They were all enrolled to at least one frequent flyer program with 15 of them enrolled to more than one, including: Emirates, Airfrance, Alitalia, Lufthansa, British Airways, Qatar Airways, Delta, United, Continental, Southwest, KLM. Flight frequency was between 16 and 40 flights a year with an average of 23 flights a year, the majority of which in medium and long hauls. All the participants were frequent flyers for business reasons, however many of them also reported to engage in additional medium and long hauls flights when traveling for holidays. All participants regularly used lounges when travelling for business. 18 of them reported to fly mainly in economy class when traveling for leisure and personal reasons. 10 of them never travel in economy and 4 mainly in first class. None of them received rewards for taking part in the interview. Recruitment, which was conducted by snowballing among various social and professional networks, lasted longer than

usual as a main difficulty was to arrange a time for the interview rather than the willingness to participate. Participants showed interest in the study. Most of the interviewees were eager to talk about their flight experiences and were somehow anxious to have their voice heard about various issues of dissatisfaction with their travels experiences. We originally recruited 43 individuals but three interviews were discarded because were interrupted at a very early stage before conclusion. The Means-End Approach is often adopted to confront attributes of products of different brands in order to help with brand positioning with respect to competition and to distinguish brand of products in a given product category. In these cases, consumers are asked to describe attributes that differentiate each brand and this is usually achieved by prompting comparisons between the brand characteristics in terms of personal preference or perceived benefit (see Reynolds and Gutman, 1988). The Means-End Approach can be also adopted to investigate motivation for a specific product, and in this case a usual approach will be to ask for the most comprehensive list of product attributes from which to start with the investigation of the laddering. The present study, having the main aim to investigate values and motivations associated to the frequent flight consumption, focused on the general product category and only marginally compared some brand features. A few comparisons between airlines were obtained spontaneously by the respondents but were not investigated deeply as the main goal of the analysis was the identification of uncovered needs for product innovation across brands. This methodological stance is coherent with the idea of open innovation, which relies on imitation as on the global sharing of corporates know-how for the purpose of optimizing performance (Brondoni, 2012). When consumers spontaneously reported a comparison between different airlines the goal of the interview was to uncover evaluations associated to the different attributes in order to explain which ones could satisfy better the consumer need. The interview technique followed the method of ‘differences of occasion’ for which the interviewees is presented with cases of consumption contexts and asked to describe the characteristics of such consumption (Reynolds and Gutman, 1988). They were first presented with the context of “the time at the airport before embarking” and then with the context of “the time during the flight from embarking to disembarking”. For each scenario participants were asked to relate about all events, actions and happenings what they would usually experience in such context of consumption and to then focus on the description of the related service attributes and the evaluation of their consequences.

4. Data Analysis

Interviews material was analyzed according to the laddering method and started with a content analysis to identify ‘meaningful’ material representing evaluations of attributes, consequence beliefs and values, all named ‘elements’. All the identified elements were then coded within the different categories of Concrete and Abstract Attributes, Functional and Psychological Consequences, Instrumental Values, Terminal Values (see Table 1 and Table. 2). Following the coding of the elements, a third step of the analysis consisted in the quantification of the associations between elements, which are represented in the Implication Matrix (see Figure 1). On the basis of the strengths of the relationships between elements a Hierarchical

Value Map was designed (see Figure 2) and finally the most dominant ladders were identified and explored for the explanation of the most significant values and their associations.

5. Selection of Elements

Rough data were dismembered from the interviews by looking at each interview content in search of means-end chains and especially of single elements to be consequently linked to the others according to the laddering method. As suggested by Reynolds and Gutman (1988) special care was given to the search of the most representing sentences with the aim to avoid reporting too many elements with the same meanings.

Examples of the main sentences on attributes are:

- *“Seats need to be comfortable and one needs to be able to sleep...otherwise you cannot work once you arrive at destination”;*
- *“Good airlines offer high quality food, gourmet and healthy food”;*
- *“I am not interested in too many desserts or glasses of champagne, what I care most is light healthy food, vegetables and fresh fruits...with all this travelling.. health is important”;*
- *“I usually keep up-to-date with news or films on the plain, to find ‘new films releases’ that are actually old is annoying”;*
- *“I almost never buy from the duty free catalogue, selections of products are useless. In recent years they have improved, still I think that on the plan they should just sell useful products like device chargers or toothpaste, products you need when you travel”;*
- *“Ideally I would like to find more services dedicated to wellbeing, quality toiletry kits, health and beauty products”;*
- *“It is important to be ready for work meetings – and the time of the flight could be used for beauty treatments - I know that Virgin Atlantic gives this service both in flight and in their ClubHouse at Heathrow airport”.*

Main attributes sentences are identified together with consequences and values sentences. Sentences, and then elements, are selected on the basis of the observed associations and their significance. Examples of consequences and values sentences are:

- *“My work is demanding, I have no time to waste, time is precious, anything that helps improving efficiency would be good, I like to find newspapers in different languages, financial news...connectivity is great..I am more then willing to pay for it if it really works”;*
- *“Connectivity is going to become a must – however the fact that is not always available is kind of good... I can relax and watch a movie instead”;*
- *“Emirates, Singapore Airlines and Qatar are the best for luxury, they make you feel pampered at anytime, I have never seen them loosing control, there is a special atmosphere, everything is designed to*

convey relax and luxury, lights, colours..even noises are silenced thanks to the noise cancelling headphones”;

“Flight assistants wear the same very distinctive fragrance – that is also on the warm towels – it is all about luxury and experience – you feel in heaven”;

“I don’t mind about traditional and typical food, unless it is an excellence...what is needed is efficiency and high standards of services not folklore, sometimes a strong association with a flag is just a minus – in the globalization era people look for international standards”;

“When the crew is unfriendly that means poor training, and this reminds me that the airline is not a good airline, I feel uneasy, mainly because I am worried that their poor service may be an indication of poor maintenance and lack of safety”;

“the flight is an empty free time, a lonely time, in case you do not like the entertainment and you do not have a good book..choice is limited..unless you end up working”;

“when I drive I always take advantage of the time to call friends and relatives...on the plain this is not possible, it’s necessarily time that you need to spend on your own”;

“I would like to have more free time to take care of myself, looking good and feeling good is important, it gives the rights strengths to solve every day problems...being always on the go means that you must perform at optimal levels but if there is no time for self-care even work is affected to not talk about personal relationships of course..”;

“sometimes I feel like there is another me that is being ignored, that I should take care of more, a real me who is not only work, who cultivates friendships, cultural interests, hobbies...she must be the one who gives me that terrible head-hake that forces me to stop!”.

The identification of the main sentences guided the selection of the key elements that appeared to be more frequent across interviews and, at the same time, more significant because of their frequent association with other elements of the ladder A-C-V. The number of the elements that emerged was originally 168, that were subsequently analyzed with the aim to reduce and discard any repetitive elements or those that did not appear to be leading to any deeper meaning as well as those that were not considered relevant to the analysis. Examples of the elements that were discarded at this stage are: “excellence”; “typical” (abstract attributes); ‘water’, ‘reading lights’ (concrete attributes) because did not clearly relate with the attributes consequences and/or they were already represented by elements that recurred more frequently. At this stage 64 elements were identified and classified in the Summary Table of the Content Codes (Table 1). A further overview of the interview data provided some indications on the main patterns of associations between elements. In relating about the first consumption context of ‘The time at the airport before embarking’, interviewees focused on two main topics: (a) the airline operations, mainly to stress their appreciation for all the dedicated services that could speed up waiting times for security controls, check-in, loading of baggages, airport transfers; (b) lounges and their services, mainly to indicate their

dissatisfaction for the lack of consistency or quality of certain services such as showers, massages, beauty treatments, connectivity, device charges, entertainment, information, food and drinks.

Table 1: *First Wave Analysis : Attributes – Consequences – Values*

| CONCRETE AND ABSTRACT ATTRIBUTES | FUNCTIONAL CONSEQUENCES | PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES | INSTRUMENTAL VALUES | TERMINAL VALUES |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| (1) Speed of operations (2) Priority for disembarking and baggage reclaim (3) Dedicated transfers (4) Punctuality (5) Health and beauty treatments in the lounges (6) Comfort of seats (7) Space for legs (8) Privacy of seats (9) Pillows and blankets in natural fabrics (10) Quality of the meals and drinks (11) Variety of food and drinks (12) Assistance (13) Cleanliness (14) Age of aircraft (15) Quality toiletry kits (16) Fragrances (17) Courtesy of crew (18) Website usability (19) International approach (20) Nationalism (21) Information on board (newspapers, magazines) (22) Language courses (23) Entertainment-education (24) Quality of Entertainment (25) Music (26) Elegance of uniforms (27) Connectivity and device chargers (28) Functional Duty free catalogue (29) Beauty –health-treatments | (30) Time saving (31) More time to work (32) More time to shop (33) Better organization (34) Ability to rest (35) Ability to work (36) Looking good (37) Good nutrition (38) Being Fit (39) Information update | (40) No time waste (41) Privilege-Differentiation (42) Importance (44) Rest-Relax (45) Entertained (46) Pampered (47) Lonely (48) Isolated (49) Feeling Good (50) Gratification (51) Pampered (52) Readiness (53) Self-Confidence | (54) Efficiency (55) Performance (56) Recognition (57) Privacy (58) Health (59) Culture (KNOWLEDGE) (60) Social-connections | (61) Happiness (62) Self-affirmation (63) Well-being (64) Family (65) Love |

Some interviewees also reported feeling isolated in the lounge, as they would have preferred to have some type of exposure to the shopping options presented in the airport. For the scope of the Means-End Analysis most of the attributes associated with the lounge context were merged with the attributes emerged from the second consumption context ‘the time during the flight from embarking to disembarking’ as they represented overlapping concepts. For this second context of consumption, interviewees described three main categories of attributes. A first category referred to concrete and physical attributes of the aircraft such as ‘the comfort of the seats’ with reference to the ‘space for the legs’ or the ‘opportunity to transform the seat in a fully-flat bed’; the ‘cleanliness of the aircraft’ and its ‘modernity’. The comfort of the seats was observed to lead to the consequences of ‘ability to work’ and ‘ability to rest’, as well as, together with the attributes ‘cleanliness’ and ‘modernity’, to a psychological perception of ‘security’. A second group of attributes referred to the quality of the services such as the quality and the variety of food and drinks on offer, the quality of the toiletry kits, the quality of the

fabric of pillows and blankets, the quality of the entertainment. The attribute of the quality of the food was associated with the consequence of assuring a 'good nutrition' and together with the other attributes to the psychological consequences of 'privilege-differentiation' and of feeling 'pampered'. A third main category of attributes referred to services associated with the concept of knowledge such as 'news and information', 'education through entertainment' and 'information'. These attributes led to consequences such as 'being up-to-date', 'readiness, and 'ability to work'.

Based on the above descriptive overview, a second round analysis allowed for the discarding of further elements when they were overlapping concepts and when they were not meaningfully associated to other elements. More specifically, attributes that were repeated for both the lounges (element 5) and the flight (element 24) were merged together as they represented the same motivation. Element 3 (Dedicated transfers) was discarded because appeared to overlap with both element 1 (Speed of operation) and element 2 (Priority for disembarking and baggage reclaim). Interviewees who expressed a desire for dedicated transfers talked about a need for differentiation besides a more functional 'time saving' goal. The same concept of differentiation was associated to the elements 1 and 2 in relation to the main objective of saving time at the airport. The psychological consequence of 'Differentiation' (38) was associated (and not merged) to the consequence 'Privilege' as they appeared to express almost overlapping concepts with potentially different associations. The element 'Space for legs' which was very frequently described among the most important product attribute was merged with the more comprehensive element 'Comfort of seats'. Similarly, 'Punctuality' (4) was discarded as the same meaning was represented in 'Speed of operations' (1). 'Cleanliness' (13) and 'Age of aircraft' (14) were merged in 'Aircraft conditions'. To account for the consequences associated with 'Pillow and blanket fabric'; 'Courtesy of crew', 'Fragrance', 'Toiletry kit', 'Elegance of uniforms' the element 'Experience' was added in the psychological consequences and 'Gratification' was discarded. Further, 'pillow and blanket fabric' was merged with 'Comfort of the Seats' and 'Elegance of Uniforms' was discarded to be merged with 'Courtesy of the crew' in the new attribute element 'Crew attitude'. The element 'Nationalism' (20) was discarded as did not relate to relevant consequences. Elements from 21 to 25 were merged in three main ones 'Entertainment'; 'Knowledge' and 'Information'. The three functional consequences 'More time to work' (31), 'More time to shop' (32), 'Better organization' (33) and 'No time waste' (40) were discarded because overlapping with 'Time saving' (30) and 'Ability to work' (35). Finally the element 'Importance' was discarded because overlapping with 'Privilege' and the element 'Isolated' was merged with the element 'Lonely' to be then further discarded because the element could not well represent the consequence of one specific product attribute as it was rather associated to the general context of consumption. The concept was however taken into account in the interpretation of values associated with inner wellbeing and social connections. Table 2 presents the final elements that were used to quantify the strengths of the ladders A-C-V.

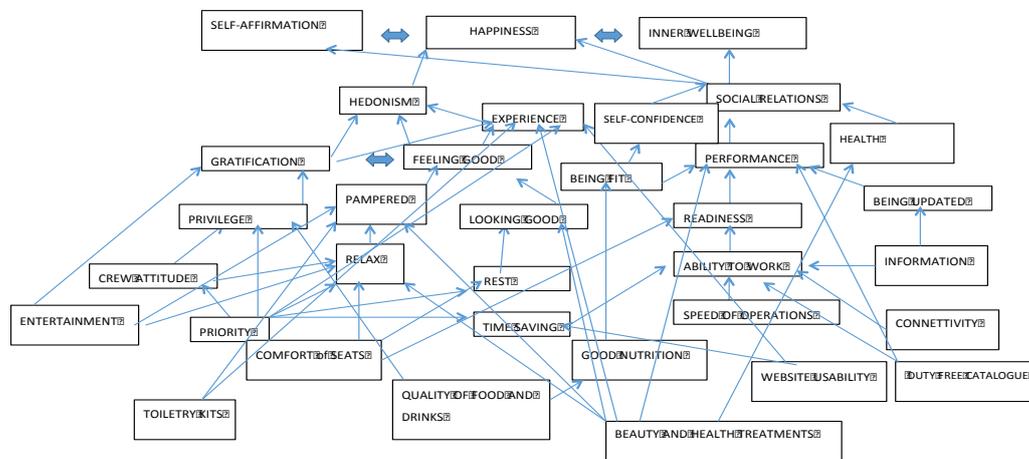
| CONCRETE AND ABSTRACT ATTRIBUTES | FUNCTIONAL CONSEQUENCES | PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES | INSTRUMENTAL VALUES | TERMINAL VALUES |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| (1) Speed of operations (2) Priority for disembarking and baggage reclaim (3) Comfort of seats (4) Privacy of seats (5) Quality of the meals and drinks (6) Assistance (7) Quality toiletry kits (8) Crew attitude (9) Website usability (10) International approach (11) Information (12) Knowledge (13) Entertainment (14) Connettivity and device chargers (15) Functional Duty free catalogue (16) Beauty and health treatments (17) Aircraft conditions | (18) Time saving (19) Ability to rest (20) Ability to work (21) Looking good (22) Good nutrition (23) Being Fit (24) Being updated | (25) Privilege-Differentiation (26) Relax (27) Entertained - Gratified (28) Pampered (29) Feeling Good (30) Readiness (31) Self-Confidence (32) Experience | (33) Efficiency (34) Performance (35) Recognition (36) Privacy (37) Health (38) Knowledge (39) Social relations (40) Edonism | (41) Happiness (42) Self-affirmation (43) Inner Well-being |

Table 2: *Second Wave Analysis: Attributes – Consequences - Values*

6. The Implication Matrix

The Implication Matrix represents the frequency with which each element precedes another element. This frequency shows the strengths of the relationships in a ladder and this helps in the identification of the most significant ones. The number of the direct relations among the elements are presented in Table 2. The number of indirect relations with which elements are associated to one another are taken into account in the analysis to evaluate and compare the strengths of the associations of the ladders. In table 2, elements that do not precede the other but for which there are indirect associations only are marked with (*).

Figure 1: *Hierarchical Value Map*



7. Hierarchical Value Map

The Hierarchical Value Map is built with the purpose to show the most significant chains of relations and interconnections between elements as they emerged from the Implication Matrix. Here, the ladders of elements presented in the verbalizations of all the interviews are collapsed by means of a two-steps procedure, first, a quantification of the strengths of the associations between elements and, second, a selection of the most significant chains. The dismembering of the original ladders of elements served the aim to show recurrent relations across the entire sample allowing for the identification and further representation of the most meaningful values. Starting from the attribute 1, a first relevant chain associates ‘Speed of Operations’ with the consequence ‘Ability to Work’ (20), and this to the psychological consequence ‘Readiness’ (30) with the instrumental values of ‘Performance’ (34) and ‘Social Relations’ (39), leading to both the values of ‘Inner Well-Being’ (41) and ‘Happiness’ (40) which also appear in mutual relation between each other. Although they may appear as overlapping constructs, the value of Happiness (as it will be shown further in the analysis) is expressed by a hedonistic motivation (40). The association of Happiness to hedonism shows it as a distinct value focusing on pleasure and gratification, which relates without totally overlapping to the type of inner-wellbeing deriving from the achievement of a state of mind of calm and deep satisfaction toward all the aspects of life, including

‘Health (37)’, ‘Knowledge (38)’ and relational aspects. The relation between ‘Well-being’ and ‘Knowledge’ also leads to the further value of ‘Self Affirmation’ (42). The same type of chain is fostered by the associations with the attribute 2 ‘Priority for disembarking’, which also lead to another significant path. Priority (2), in association with the ‘Crew Attitude’ (8), leads to the psychological consequences of ‘Privilege’ (25), ‘Gratification’ (27) and ‘Feeling Good’ (29), which finally associate with the instrumental value ‘Hedonism’ (40) and to the terminal values of ‘Happiness’ (41) and ‘Inner-Well-being’ (43).

At this stage of the analysis, two main Paths of Chains emerge. A first ‘Hedonic’ one that through a sense of privilege, gratification and hedonism reaches the terminal values of happiness and wellbeing; and a second ‘Performative-Relational’ one that through the consequences of readiness and performance leads to social relations and, finally, happiness. These two Paths of Chains emerge as a constant pattern in the further analysis of the other elements in the implication matrix. The attribute ‘Priority’ (2) leads to functional consequences of ‘Time Saving’ (18) and ‘Ability to Work’, which relate to the psychological consequence of ‘Readiness’ (30) and to the instrumental values ‘Performance’ (34) and ‘Social Relations’ (39) toward the terminal values of ‘Happiness’ (41) and ‘Self-Affirmation’ (42). The attribute ‘Priority’ (2) also leads to the consequences ‘Ability to rest’ (19) and ‘Looking good’ (21), which are associated to ‘Feeling good’ (29), to ‘Hedonism’ (40), ‘Happiness’ (41) and ‘Inner-Wellbeing’ (43). A similar pattern of associations is showed between ‘Priority’ (2), ‘Privilege’ (25) and ‘Gratification’ (27), leading, as for the previous chain, to ‘Hedonism’ (40) and finally to ‘Happiness’ and ‘Inner-Wellbeing’. An additional ladder is that merging ‘Priority’ (2) with ‘Relax’ (26) toward ‘Pampered’ (28) and leading to ‘Experience’ (32) and then to ‘Hedonism’ (40), toward ‘Happiness’ and ‘Inner-Wellbeing’.

The implication matrix shows that Priority (2) also leads to Experience (32), which has strong associations with Hedonism. Indeed, an emerging route toward ‘Hedonism’ and ‘Happiness, appears to be the one going through ‘Experience’. The attribute ‘Comfort of seats’ follows very similar paths to those described above, it shows associations to both the consequences ‘Ability to rest’ (19) and ‘Relax’ (26), leading to similar chains toward the psychological consequence of ‘Feeling good’ (29) and to the instrumental value ‘Hedonism’ finally leading to ‘Happiness’. ‘Comfort of seats’ is equally conducive to the consequence of ‘Readiness’ (30), which is, as described above, associated to the ‘Performative-Relational’ Value Chain. Similarly, the attribute ‘Privacy of seats’ (4) is conducive to both the Value Chains described, that is: the ‘Hedonistic’ route, by leading to ‘Feeling good’ (29) through ‘Privilege-Differentiation’ (25) and ‘Gratification’ (27), as well as through ‘Relax’ (26) and ‘Pampered’ (28); and the ‘Performative-Relational’ route through ‘Ability to work’ (20) and ‘Readiness’ (30). ‘Quality of Meals and Drinks’ (5) is associated to ‘International approach’ (10) and to ‘Crew Attitude’ (8), leading to the Hedonistic route through ‘Privilege’ (25) and ‘Gratification’ (27). The attribute ‘Quality of Meals and Drinks’ (5) show strong relations to the functional consequence of ‘Good nutrition’ (22) and ‘Being fit’ (23), leading to the instrumental value of ‘Performance’ (34) and ‘Social relations’ (39) along the ‘Performative-Relational’ Value Chain. ‘Quality of Meals and Drinks’ (5) also leads to ‘Gratification’ (27), which in turn is associated to Experience (32) and ‘Feeling good’ (29) leading in both cases to Hedonism (40). Food quality shows then to play a double important role in the consumers’

perceptions, both in terms of functional consequences that are associated to performance and in terms of gratification and experience. The concrete attribute 'Quality toiletry kits' (7) leads to the psychological consequences of 'Pampered' and 'Experience', both associated to the Hedonistic Value Chain as well as to the attribute "Crew attitude", which leads to the Hedonistic Value Chain also through the consequences "Pampered" (28) and "Experience" (32). The 'Web site usability' (9) shows a double association to both the Hedonistic Value Chain, through the association with 'Experience' (32), and to the Performative-Relational Path, by means of the perceived consequence of 'Time saving' (18), associated with 'Ability to rest' (19) and 'Ability to work' (20). These latter are associated to 'Readiness' (34) and then to the instrumental value of 'Performance' (34), which is linked to 'Recognition' (35), to "Social Relations" (39) and finally to 'Happiness' (41) and to 'Self-Affirmation' (42). The attribute "Information" (11) leads to the values 'Performance' (34) and 'Social Relations' (39) through its associations to 'Ability to work' (20), 'Readiness' (30) and 'Being Updated' (24). Entertainment (13) leads to the psychological consequences of 'Relax' (26), 'Gratification' (27) and 'Pampered' (28), all associated to the consequence 'Feeling good' (29), which leads to 'Experience' and then to the Hedonist Value Chain. The attribute 'Connectivity' (14) leads to 'Ability to work' (20) and to 'Readiness' (30) toward the Performative-Relational Value Chain, as well as the attribute 'Functional Duty free catalogue' that associates to "Ability to work" and to 'Performance'. The last attribute that shows significant associations is 'Beauty and health treatments' (16), leading to the consequences of 'Looking good' (21) associated to 'Self-Confidence' (31), and from this to 'Social Relations' (39) toward 'Happiness' (41). Further associations of 'Beauty and health treatments' (16) are the psychological consequences of 'Relax' (26), of 'Pampered' (28), of 'Experience' and of 'Feeling good' (29) leading to Hedonism (40) and then again to 'Happiness' (41). The attribute 'Beauty and health treatments' (16) also leads to the Performative-Relational Value Chain through the functional consequence of 'Being fit' and the psychological consequence of 'Readiness' (30). Finally, 'Beauty and health treatments' (16) are associated to 'Health' (37), leading to 'Social relations' (39), and to the terminal values of 'Happiness' (41) and 'Inner Wellbeing' (43).

The observed relations show that among the attributes 'Comfort of seats' (3) is by far the most important of all with the highest number of direct relations. 'Comfort of seats' together with 'Privacy of seats' lead to the consequences of 'Ability to rest', 'Relax', 'Looking good', 'Feeling good' as well as to 'Ability to work', showing that the concrete attributes associated with space and comfort have a fundamental basic importance in the evaluation of the flight. It is important to note that they relate to both the emerged Value Chains: the Hedonistic and the Performative ones. Another attribute with a significant number of relations is 'Quality of meals and drinks'. The associations of this attribute clearly indicate that next to the psychological (symbolic) consequences of 'Privilege' and 'Gratification', participants care about a 'Good nutrition' and about 'Health' as instrumental value toward the terminal value of 'Well-being'. By looking at the psychological consequences with the highest number of relations, in terms of number and frequency of associations, 'Experience' is the most important one, leading to 'Hedonism' and finally to 'Happiness'. The attributes that contribute to the on-board experience are: all the priority services that are linked with consequences of privilege and differentiation, the quality of assistance, the quality

of the meals, the quality of the toiletry kits, the attitude of the crew, the website usability, the quality of entertainment, connectivity and beauty and health treatments. An experiential framework can be adopted for the understanding of the main factors affecting satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the frequent flyers. Positive experiences are fostered by products and services that have a positive impact on mood, by leading to consequences such as gratification from a hedonistic and sensorial point of view, or that have a positive effect on the evaluation of the standards of the services quality in direct association with the values of efficiency and performance. However the main antecedent of Experience is the psychological consequence of 'feeling 'pampered', which is strongly associated with the 'sensorial' dimension of food quality and 'the hedonistic-relational' dimension of being well treated by the crew. Indeed, the two factors both lead to the instrumental values of Hedonism and Inner Wellbeing.

8. Discussion of Results

Happiness, Wellbeing and Self-Affirmation emerge as the most relevant values for the interviewees. As discussed by Brondoni and Franzoni (2016), global tourism trends reflect social change and new consumers values. In the last years, a shift of values explained the success of personalized and enjoyment-based offers. Numerous contributions have related about the increasing importance of positive experience on customers' willingness to involve in subsequent exchanges and described how overall experience can even affect the evaluation of products quality (see De Nisco et al. 2015). The present results indicate that frequent flyers motivations in the evaluation of the airline and the on-board services are based on two main dimensions, one hedonistic and one performative-relational. The hedonist value chain leading mainly to the final value of Happiness is explained by a need for personal gratification and associated to a need for social differentiation. Products and services that have the potential to gratify and give pleasure are well evaluated. Enjoyment is a sought after result and it can also be associated to symbolic meanings of social differentiation and prestige. These latter appear to be motivated by the value of Self-affirmation, which indeed is the link between differentiation and the need for social appreciation as according to the performative-relational value chain. Self-affirmation is here conceptualized as a value for a full and truthful expression of the self, as a synonymous of the need for self-actualization (Maslow, 1943), that is for realizing personal potential and seeking personal growth. As indicated by Maslow (1954), self-realization is a continuous need, which has the potential to direct people lives and achievements in the search for a meaning to life. The motivation for self-actualization leads people in different directions (Kenrick et al., 2010), certain people will value work performance while others will feel a need for an artistic expression or for family related achievements. The value for self-affirmation is equal to a value for the pursuing of personal growth and the association between performance and social relations here reveals that for the frequent flyers target, professional performance can be also seen as instrumental to social acceptance, as a way to achieve and maintain satisfying interpersonal relationships. Research participants showed to care mostly about services and products that could help them performing at their best professionally and socially while at the same time making them 'feeling good'

and ‘being pampered’. It is important to note that interviewees have spoken about the loneliness and the isolation associated with the frequency of long hauls flights: the time of the flight is often considered as ‘free time’ or even described in terms of ‘dead time’. Data have shown that a common worry among interviewees was the lack of time for a satisfactory interpersonal life and, at the same time, a real need for more self-care. The frequency of their long-hauls flights clearly had an impact on their perception of missing ‘important things’ in life. Interviewees showed high expectations toward the on-board services potential in filling this empty time meaningfully. In line with market-driven managerial research that put forward the emerging significance of experience and sensation for tourists and travelers (Brondoni, 2016), products and services should guarantee positive on-board experiences by fulfilling their self-care and self-affirmation needs while pampering them on an emotional and sensorial level. Healthy food and beauty treatments should be accompanied by information-education services and entertainment that can satisfy interviewees’ needs for culture and knowledge. Results clearly indicate that whether high standards of services are always expected on the other hand luxury by itself is not enough to completely satisfy the frequent flyers target of consumers. The cognitive structures with which products and services attributes have been evaluated suggest the emerging demand for products and services that can meet self-care and self-growth personal goals.

These results reflect emerging global consumer trends and are in line with the current tendency toward standardization across markets and geography (Liu et al. 2004). Interviewees could well represent the demand for international high-level standards in contrast with the ‘typical of the local’, which they describe as unnecessary folklore with specific reference to the catering offer. Managerial insights are supportive for the sharing of customer strategies and product innovation for a global standardization of services within the airlines alliance. Future contributions should however further address the potential conflict between areas for standardization and coexisting needs for product-brand differentiation within highly competitive market dynamics.

Bibliography

- Ashish, A., Fosfuri A., Gambardella A., (2001) Markets for Technology and their Implications for Corporate Strategy, *Industrial and Corporate Change*, (2), 419-451.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/icc/10.2.419>
- Balcombe, K., Fraser ,I., Harris, L. (2009). Consumer willingness to pay for in-flight service and comfort levels: A choice experiment. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 15(5), 221-226.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jairtraman.2008.12.005>
- Brondoni, S. M (2012). Innovation and Imitation: Corporate Strategies for Global Competition. *Symphonya, Emerging issues in Management*, 1, 10-24.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4468/2012.1.02brondoni>
- Brondoni, S. M., (2016). Global Tourism Management. Mass, Experience and Sensations Tourism, *Symphonya. Emerging Issues in Management*, 1, 7-24.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4468/2016.1.02brondoni>

- Brondoni, S. M. and Franzoni, S. (2016) Overture de 'Market-Driven Management in Global Tourism, *Symphonya, Emerging Issues in Management*, 2, 1-6.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4468/2016.2.overture>
- De Nisco, A., Mainolfi, G., Marino, V., Napolitano, M. R. (2015). Tourism satisfaction effect on general country image, destination image, and post-visit intentions. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 21(4), 87-110.
- De Nisco A., Mainolfi G., Marino V., Napolitano, M. R. (2012). Tourism experience, country image and post-visit intentions: a study on international tourists in Italy. In: Bertoli G., Resciniti R. (eds.) *International marketing and the country of origin effect: the global impact of made in Italy*. P. 65-80, Cheltenham, UK/Northampton, MA:Edward Elgar.
- Espino, R., Martin, J.C., Román, C. (2008). Analyzing the effect of preference heterogeneity on willingness to pay for improving service quality in an airline choice context. *Transportation Research Part E: Logistics and Transportation Review*, 44(4), 593-606.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tre.2007.05.007>
- Grunert, S. C., & Juhl, H.J. (1995). Values, environmental attitudes, and buying organic foods. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 16(1), 39-62.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/0167-4870\(94\)00034-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0167-4870(94)00034-8)
- Gutman, J. (1981). A Means-End Chain Model Based on Consumer Categorization Processes, *Journal of Marketing*, 46(2), 60-72.
- Gutman, J. (1981). A means-end model for facilitating analyses of product matrices based on consumer judgment. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 8, 116-121.
- Kenrick, D.T., Griskevicius, V., Neuberg, S.L., Schaller, M. (2010). Renovating the Pyramid of Needs: Contemporary extensions built upon ancient foundations. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 5, 292-314.
- Iatrou, K., Alamndari, F. (2005) The empirical analysis of the impact of alliances on airline operations. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 11(3), 127-134.
- Lee, D., Luengo-Prado, M.J. (2004). Are passengers willing to pay more for additional legroom?. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 10(6), 377-383.
- Liu, W., Guillet, BD, Xiao, Q., Law, R (2004). Globalization or localization of consumer preferences: The case of hotel room booking. *Tourist Management*, 41, 148-157.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jairtraman.2004.06.005>
- Martín, J.C., Román, C., Espino, R. (2008). Willingness to Pay for Airline Service Quality. *Transport Reviews*, 28(2), 199-217.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01441640701577007>
- Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and Personality*. New York, Harper.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>
- Perkins, W.S., Reynolds, T.J. (1988). The explanatory power of values in preference judgments: validation of the means-end perspective. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 15,122-6.
- Reynolds, T. J., Gutman, J. (1988). Laddering theory, method, analysis, and interpretation. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 2(1), 11-31.
- Reynolds, T. J., & Gutman, J. (1984). Advertising is image management. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 24(1), 27-36.
- Rokeach, M. (1979). Some unresolved issues in theories of beliefs, attitudes and values. *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, 27, 261-304.
- Rokeach, M. J. (1973). *The Nature of Human Values*. New York: The Free Press.
- Rokeach, M. (1968). *Beliefs, attitudes, and values: A theory of organization and change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Vorhies Douglas W., Harcher Michael (2000) The Capabilities and Performance Advantage of Market-Driven Firms: An Empirical Investigation, *Australian Journal of Management*, September, n. 25, pp. 145-171

Walker, B.A., Olson. J.C. (1991). Means-end chains: Connecting products with self. *Journal of Business Research*, 22(2),111-18.

Weerawardena Jay, O’Cass Aron (2004) Exploring the Characteristics of the Market-Driven Firms and Antecedents to Sustained Competitive Advantage, *Industrial Marketing Management*, July, n.33, pp. 419-428.

Notes

ⁱ Servair, third in the world ranking among the service providers for air transport services, operates in approximately 40 airports for about 120 client companies.