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THE VALLETTA BRAND

AUDIENCES' EXPERIENCES OF THE VALLETTA 2018 BRAND

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Objectives

The study aims to offer an insight into how audiences engage with the different forms of communication forming part of the Valletta 2018 communications programme. Longitudinal in nature, this project aims to determine the effects that each type of communications purport on different audiences as reflected in individuals' attitudes and behaviours.

Methodology

In acknowledging that audiences engage with brands through a multitude of encounters that range from direct instances⁴ to other indirect experiences⁵, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach involving real time experience tracking (RET) (Baxendale, Macdonald, & Wilson, 2015; Macdonald, Wilson, & Konus, 2012) as well as focus group discussions about audiences' perceptions on encounters and experiences with the Valletta 2018 brand.

Key to this methodology is the use of a smart phone app that offers an improved participant engagement with RET approaches. This app was developed by a

⁴ like advertising or actual event participation

⁵ involving word of mouth from friends or acquaintances or third party social media contributions (as would be acquaintances posting on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, among others)

subcontracted developer and questions that participants had to answer related to personality characteristics (to ease individuals' clustering) as well as brand experience (by relating to sensory, affective and intellectual dimensions that are relevant to Valletta 2018 as an experienced brand).

Results

A total of 91 participants used the new app in three waves of field work (one in 2016, two in 2017) to report on their experiences with a diversity of events forming part of the Valletta 2018 programme of events. These participants reported a total of 488 encounters.

By following the methodology of Asendorpf, Borkenau, Ostendorf, & Van Aken (2001) and Rammstedt, Riemann, Angleitner, & Borkenau (2004), participants categorised into three groups by relating to their personality characteristics. Indeed, 90 participants could be categorized in three personality types: resilient ($n = 47$), undercontrolled ($n=35$) and overcontrolled ($n=8$). One participant could not be categorized because her responses lay well outside the $z = \pm 3$ range.

As for brand experience (after Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009), this study notes no discernible improvement in participants' impressions on their Valletta 2018 experience from the start to the end of the RET data collection (all paired t-test comparisons suggest no significant difference in sensory, behavioural and intellectual dimensions in responses at start and at end of the field work).

In 2016, most encounters reported related to Valletta Pageant of the Seas (93 encounters) followed by the Valletta Film Festival (57 encounters) and Ghanafest (36 encounters). In 2017, the most common encounters related to Valletta Film Festival (18 encounters) and Malta Jazz Festival (13 encounters) during the Summer wave, and, Notte Bianca (19 encounters) and Science in the City (16 encounters) in the Autumn wave.

Most encounters involved mere internet browsing, television viewing or chat with acquaintances face-to-face. However, it is the direct encounters (involving direct participation in events) that hold a bigger opportunity for value co-creation and satisfaction as evident from all waves of research so far. As for the specific events, in 2016 participants perceived the Malta International Arts Festival as the most important event, followed by Strada Stretta events and Malta Jazz Festival. In 2017, participants indicated the Malta Jazz Festival (Summer) and Notte Bianca (Autumn) as the most important events. The more satisfying encounters related to the Malta Jazz Festival, Strada Stretta events, Valletta Green Festival and Valletta Pageant of the Seas in 2016 – and – Malta Mediterranean Literature (Summer) and RIMA Digital Story Telling Workshop (Autumn) in 2017.

RET reflections and qualitative data captured from focus group discussions and interviews conducted in 2017 so far indicate five dimensions of value that can be co-created by actors, participants and other individuals involved in the co-creation network: social (or experiences that help participants engage with other individuals in a temporary or longer-term rapport), educational (or experiences that participants see as opportunities for learning or enriching), word-of-mouth or pride (or experiences that propagate positive word-of-mouth), relevance to one's interests (or experiences that are suited to the target audience) and access (or experiences that are accessible to participants from a logistical, time, language or economic perspective).

This analysis is ongoing and more insight is emerging as more RET data will be captured during 2018, offering bigger opportunities for data corroboration by relating to qualitative data captured from interviews and focus group discussions.

Way forward

During the second quarter of 2018, a bigger communications campaign (than the one adopted in 2017) shall be launched to attract more RET participants and gather more data to analysis of experiences that uncover patterns in brand engagement. RET data collection is planned to happen in two waves, the first wave taking place between April and June 2018 and the second wave taking place between the end of August and October 2018. This field work shall also comprise a variation in the way participants are engaged in the study as well as the use of more attractive incentives to encourage participation.