

The Marketing of Cultural Experiences – Malta's Potential Contribution

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ABSTRACT

The research studies the marketing of Malta's cultural experiences and its potential for further growth. Culture represents an invaluable asset to the Maltese islands, which together with cultural experiences can successfully strengthen the development of Malta's brand image. By means of a face-to-face administered questionnaire, a random sample of 100 tourists was asked to describe their cultural experience together with their appreciation for the Maltese culture along with their feedback. Moreover, a qualitative approach was undertaken by means of a face-to-face interview which allowed for further analysis into the research topic.

By means of the questionnaire results, it is suggested that the guests' appreciation for the Maltese culture was only to a certain extent as they felt they were not fully immersed in Malta's authentic culture. Moreover, a mere half of the respondents sustained that the activities experienced granted them a feeling of Malta's culture. Thus, it is evident that further potential exists in enhancing the guests' authentic experience. It is vital to keep note that the study was carried out during the shoulder months of November, December and January. Further developing the off-peak season is imperative for Malta's tourism industry so as to continue reducing the issue of seasonality. The results of both the quantitative and

qualitative approach are deemed essential in today's tourism, travel and hospitality industry as the perceptions obtained from such cultural experiences influence the uniqueness of Malta's distinctive image. Thus, the study offers the researcher's recommendations to the stakeholders of the industry.

Cultural experience – branding – authenticity – Maltese culture

STATEMENT OF AUTHENCITY

I, Bettina Attard, declare that this long essay entitled 'The Marketing of Cultural Experiences – Malta's Potential Contribution' is my own and has been carried out under the supervision of Dr. Nadia Theuma.

BETTINA ATTARD

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Throughout the past decades, administrators have been persistently seeking to profitably shift the focus of Malta's hospitality industry from mass to upmarket tourism. Consequently, this may have shifted their focus, to some extent, from the marketing of cultural experiences in terms of Malta's unique heritage. As an undergraduate, backed by work experience within the hospitality industry, it is deemed indispensable that strategists operating within this sector dedicate more efforts in exploiting the potential of this sphere.

The marketing of cultural experiences represents a niche that has further potential for continuous research, at least within the local context. This situation may be considered to be quite ironic as culture represents one of Malta's invaluable assets. The latter may potentially act as a unique selling proposition (USP) in securing a more appealing destination branding strategy. The design of a thorough marketing program in spearheading cultural experiences may profitably

secure a cutting-edge within the highly competitive Mediterranean hospitality industry. Furthermore, the marketing of cultural experiences may effectively entice year round tourism, thus sustaining Malta's socio-economic development.

1.2 Culture - Malta's Invaluable Asset

The Maltese Archipelago, in view of its geo-strategic location within the hub of the Mediterranean, has persistently been impacted by diverse colonial powers throughout the course of its eventful history (Blouet, 1984). These may have successively contributed to its cultural individuality. Eventually, it is highly likely that this cultural enrichment process contributed to the unique blend of *Maltese cultural experiences*. The latter are directly interlinked with the social, religious, rural, and folk identities amongst others.

This host of cultural experiences embraces the colourful village feasts – 'il-festi' commemorating distinct patron saints, the carnival celebrations, the traditional boat race known as *Ir-Regatta*, together with the processions and pageants linked to the Holy Week and Easter. Moreover, it is noteworthy to include public holidays. The

latter identify hallmark historical and political events of the island's constantly evolving cultural experiences. Gozo being Malta's sister island, prides in its uniquely blended cultural activities and experiences. This further enriches the culture of the Maltese Archipelago.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

The intended objective of this research probes the extent and nature of culture experiences within Malta's marketing strategy, and how far these are aligned with the characteristics of the guest profile visiting our Archipelago. As cultural experiences are unique to every destination, they may potentially serve to reinforce Malta's brand destination and ensure a winning leverage within the highly competitive international tourism sector. Moreover, assessing the "positioning" of these cultural experiences and their effectiveness in enticing and retaining overseas guests is crucial.

It is pertinent to state that the issue under review may not be a thoroughly explored territory within the context of hospitality related research, and should to be tackled

from a fresh perspective. The research objectives are translated in the following questions:

- Within the hospitality sector, are cultural experiences granted a respectable priority in Malta's marketing strategy?
- Which cultural experiences are marketed and what are the criteria of this choice?
- Are the promoted cultural experiences in line with the characteristics of the guest profile visiting Malta?

In view of the complexity and sensitivity of the research area, it is deemed appropriate to expand the topic in such a way that it is aligned with the three questions highlighted. The first two questions are of primary strategic importance, whilst the third question is a clarification of the insights derived from the two preceding questions. This will secure a comprehensive approach to the subject area under review, keeping in consideration that the island's partially exploited yet invaluable asset is essentially *culture*.

Finally, the objective of this research is not intended to serve as a means to an end. The issue is not merely concerned with Malta's potential in the marketing of cultural experiences, but rather with the degree of promotion-effectiveness in view of the wide ranging host of activities, interests, and opinions that are embraced by overseas guests. The research seeks to provide a constructive background for substantial recommendations so as to smartly charter the way forward within this dynamic sector.

1.4 Research Methodology

The research seeks to capitalise on both quantitative and qualitative research methods, thus presenting a comprehensive approach. The questionnaire is based on a random sampling technique. It is designed to be addressed to overseas guests, who throughout the forthcoming months will be visiting Malta. An on-street questionnaire is strongly favoured within this research. Telephone interviews, apart from being interpreted as an invasion of privacy, may generate profound ethical concerns.

An interview is further going to be carried out with Mr Dominic Micallef, who is highly qualified in the History and Culture segment at the Malta Tourism Authority. This approach is deemed indispensable in terms of personal experience and profound insights within Malta's hospitality industry. The interview is unstructured so that the respondent will be granted the opportunity to come along with insights, which may have not been initially identified by the researcher. This approach will further augment the value of this research.

1.5 Research Overview

Chapter One entitled Introduction identifies the research area, focusing on the marketing of cultural experiences. This represents a relatively under-researched area in the current literature, particularly within the context of the Maltese hospitality industry. At a later stage in the chapter, the research questions and objectives are identified, together with the methodology. This is followed by a research overview.

The Literature Review is expounded in Chapter Two. The primary areas which are highlighted include culture as a commonly shared social space, the content of cultural experiences together with vehicles promoting cultural experiences. The benefits generated by guests, after being immersed in cultural experiences, are followed by an appreciation of the links between cultural experiences and brand destination marketing.

Chapter Three dedicated to Methodology clarifies the quantitative and qualitative approaches in terms of both their theoretical and practical dimensions. The relevance of the questionnaire and the interview are assessed in terms of their respective benefits and drawbacks. This is followed by the practical limitations encountered by the researcher.

The Analysis and Results are presented in Chapter Four. The descriptive approach served only as a take-off to a more critical evaluation of the research area under review. A number of common and different outcomes are evident between the interview and the questionnaire, thus presenting space for insightful reflections.

Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations found in Chapter Five presents the research objectives highlighted in the first chapter. It qualifies the manner and extent by which they are reflected through the findings of the questionnaire and the interview. These are followed by a set of recommendations so as to ensure that the outcomes of this research can profitably contribute to fresh developments in the future.

1.6 Conclusion

Throughout the whole research, a systematic and prudent approach has been adopted. The researcher was highly sensitive to the pioneering nature of this research and also to the fact that cultural experiences involve a blend of interacting elements.

The forthcoming chapter entitled Literature Review expounds the different facets of cultural experiences. These are presented not merely in the strict technical sense, but likewise aligned with the marketing discipline and the perspectives of distinct stakeholders generated from within the hospitality industry.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Overview

The following chapter thoroughly identifies the notion of culture, focusing on a number of publications and thus obtaining more of an objective point of view. This shall be followed by the content of cultural experiences along with the positive outcomes that surface from them. Moreover, the forces that promote cultural experiences are likewise to be highlighted. Further emphasis is given to the inter-linkage between cultural experiences and place branding together with destination marketing, and is thus stressing its importance for the development of the tourism industry. The chapter shall be finalised by identifying the trends which the Maltese tourism industry is currently facing.

2.2 Introduction

The core issue of 'cultural experiences' within the framework of the Maltese hospitality industry is going to be evaluated from both descriptive and critical

perspectives. As a take-off to the literature review, it is prudent to qualify the underlining distinction between culture and cultural events, which in turn translate into cultural experiences. An additional interlinked dimension incorporates Malta's contribution to the hospitality industry, in particular within the Mediterranean context. This approach is deemed essential so as to assess the marketing of cultural experiences within a broader context. In view of intensive and ever increasing competition, the marketing of cultural experiences addressed to distinct guest niches helps in securing a differentiated marketing offer, promising novel benefits. This acts as a sustainable Unique Selling Proposition (USP) in destination branding.

2.3 Culture – A Commonly Shared Social Space

Culture represents the social heritage of a group, serving as a wider reflection in the identification of their common social space and individuality. This is characterised in both physical and psychological terms. Moreover, culture sheds light on the community's organisation as regards particular patterns, which represent both discovered as well as developed responses to both present and emerging cultural needs. The latter tend to evolve throughout the distinct

transitions of the community's history. Thus, culture is the manifestation of a group's identity together with the individual's subjective experiences within it.

Researchers have failed to define culture on the basis of universally agreed criteria (Belshek, J.A., 2006). They sought to interpret culture in view of their respective academic disciplines, ranging from anthropology to sociology. In essence, culture is a totality of diverse interacting attributes embracing art, history, religious and moral beliefs, language and literature. Other components of culture include myths together with artistic artifacts. They are all directly integrated within cultural symbols that are representative of a defined geo-physical context. These characterise the functioning of a group in qualifying its mainstream behaviours and attitudes. In this regard, the notion of culture embodies not merely the members of the civic society, but also the respective institutions. These include political, legal, religious, social and cultural organisations, which help in differentiating the particular community from the rest.

Hofstede, 1980

The collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another.

(Belshek, J.A., 2006)

From an analytical perspective, the notion of culture ventures beyond the subjective perspective of Hofstede. It incorporates a vast reserve of values, beliefs, meanings and experiences. Complimentary non-tangible components of culture include time and spatial associations, together with the individual's and community's world view. It is justified to argue that the intangible components of culture lie at a more profound level than the tangible counterparts. The totality of these cultural attributes exerts their impact on both the quality and extent of the 'culture experience'. Moreover, our emerging global culture is characterized by intra and inter-regional social mobility, which is further impacting the recipient local cultures.

The German sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel referred to culture as

The cultivation of individuals through the agency of external forms which have been objectified in the course of history.

(Goodread, n.d.)

The latter entails that culture is an insightful reflection of human phenomena which are not shaped by genetic inheritance and which is eventually legitimised as the identity or individuality of a particular community or society. Simmel's perspectives

of culture tend to be highly influenced from his philosophical and sociological insights, thus lacking in objectivity.

Finally, culture is impacted by forces generated from both within and outside its assumed social parameters. The latter is highly meaningful as the emerging global culture is exerting a direct impact on the highly vulnerable local and national cultures from within their very grassroots (Levy, M., 2007).

2.4 The Content of Cultural Experiences

The cultural transmission process endorses the dissemination of behaviours, beliefs, values and symbols. It entails a transmission to upcoming future generations. This involves a multi-stage process of imitation, internalisation, absorption and expression of distinct cultural traits. In this regard, a culture experience goes beyond the grass root level of the notion of culture. The former is engrained within the human mind to represent culturally related experiences through specifically chosen symbols. The latter will enable the community members to act imaginatively and creativity.

Cultural experiences represent the subjective interpretation of cultural, artistic, and social events which are deemed both valuable and enlightening. As has been highlighted, cultural events are subjectively interpreted. Skelton and Allen (1999) sustain that

One individual's experience of culture will be affected by the multiple aspects of their identity – race, gender, sex, age, sexuality, class, caste position, religion, geography, and so forth – and it is likely to alter in various circumstances.

(Levy, M., 2007)

Skelton and Allen's perspectives of cultural experiences are similarly shared by distinct researchers. They indicated that in 'digging' deeply within cultural experiences, one comes across different contrasting layers of meaning. This develops a tendency that favours a wide spectrum of mixed interpretations, particularly when filtered through the subjective experiences of guests. Guests within the hospitality industry are mere temporary outsiders to this cultural experience and thus they are easy victims to misinterpretation.

From a critical standpoint, it is logical to assume that individuals experience both tangible and intangible components as they undergo a diversity of culture

experiences, particularly within different cultural contexts. Thus, their interpretation of a seemingly homogenous cultural experience tends to be somewhat differentiated among various guests. This is particularly the case whenever they share different ethnic, racial, and social class backgrounds. It is advocated that both the short- and long term implications of the culture experience are far deeper and impactful than what is initially assumed at face value. Thus, multiple challenges for strategists currently operating within the hospitality sector in the marketing of cultural experiences arise. The latter is to be aligned to a pre-determined and intended targeted segment or niche, whilst addressing an exclusive position in the guests' perceptual map.

2.5 Benefits Generated from Cultural Experiences

The contributions of cultural experiences are equally shared by guests and locals, and furthermore sustain the economic development of the host destination. Cultural experiences impact distinct categories of guests within the host destination, irrespective of their cultural background or gender. These experiences serve to broaden their knowledge and to further enrich their lives in terms of

values, skills, behaviours, and ways of thinking. Guests are exposed both consciously and unconsciously to inspirations, which tend to be durable and impactful in the long term. Moreover, guests will become equipped with meaningful guidelines which are indispensable when facing present and future challenges in a more constructive manner.

Cultural experiences, other than being beneficial to overseas guests, directly contribute to the enrichment of the life of the locals. When locals are introduced and eventually immersed in meaningful cultural experiences, they have a tendency to act as more responsible and sensitive citizens in their approaches to a wide range of social issues. The latter includes the historical, environmental, economic and ethical factors among others. The interest sustained on their part will enable them to act as effective problem solvers. This approach is deemed healthy since locals enjoy grass root contacts with their own culture. In turn, other than being active recipients of culture experiences generated by their own community, they also represent its shapers.

Culture experiences empower locals in adopting a more altruistic approach within their social perspectives, whereby the interest of the community are granted priority

over personal interests. As a result, the community's ability in being selective to social cultural trends strengthens. The latter is generated from within the parameters of their community and beyond. To a respectable degree, direct exposure to cultural experiences improves the educational achievement on the part of the locals. This creates a higher degree of social understanding whilst enabling them to perceive, think, feel and act more responsibly.

Direct participation and on-going involvement in a wide range of cultural experiences - generated to a substantial degree by the hospitality sector – exert a meaningful impact on the economy's performance. This is particularly the case as regards island states, which are highly dependent on the tourism industry. Malta is a case in point. In this regard, cultural experiences act as a catalyst for economic growth in terms of employment opportunities. The injection of foreign income raises the standards of living for the host economy. The latter sustains a positive social and economic multiplier effect. The authenticity of cultural experiences, which in its essence reflect the uniqueness of the tourist destination, secures a dynamic competitive advantage within the global market place in the long run. Economic benefits are thus addressed to individuals and stakeholders of the hospitality industry, and are injected within the wider community.

2.6 Vehicles Promoting Cultural Experiences

Profit and non-profit organisations serve as effective agents in disseminating a rich and varied range of cultural experiences. These include heritage sites and museums, which provide insights on both the historical and archaeological legacy of our community. Theatres, within the context of the performing arts, expose us to divergent perspectives, whilst scientific organisations build awareness of ecological issues. These are likewise present as science centres and zoos.

Vehicles promoting cultural experiences comprise of museums, feasts, architectural styles, historical places, and cultural and creative performances together with all other experiences that engage a tourist's culture with another. In practice, the cultural experience refers to the notion of diversity, making all cultures unique.

2.7 Destination Branding and Marketing

Morgan and Pritchard (2002) sustain that:

Branding is perhaps the most powerful marketing weapon available to contemporary destination marketers.

(Hassan, S. B., Hamid, M., et al., n.d)

A destination's image is influenced by the perceptions acquired of a destination. In fact, S. Anholt (2008) sustains that destination branding refers to a destination's "competitive identity" (Dumbraveanu, D., n.d.) Moreover, Baloglu and Brinberg (1997) advocate that destination branding is a highly sensitive area. It represents the moment of truth, underpinning the prospects of success;

Image differentiates tourist destinations from each other and is an integral and influential part of the traveler's decision process

(Siriangkul, A., n.d.)

Keller (1993) asserts that place branding represents a "network of associations in the consumers' mind" (Zenker, S., Braun, E., 2010). It transpires that brands are not merely representative of the communicated expression. They are more skin

deep since they are essentially the perceptions of those expressions found within the mind-set of the targeted group.

Destination branding ensures that the destination enjoys a competitive edge, boosts sustainable tourism and facilitates on-going economic development. Moreover, it contributes to user-friendly way finding strategies so as to link the needs, desires and interests of the guests with the actual benefits enjoyed at the destination. Effective destination marketing, in view of the intensely competitive environment, improves the destination's holistic image. Whenever the guests' expectations are not going to be fulfilled, destination branding will serve as a counter-productive strategy generating short term gains. Thus, the implementation of destination branding entails a high degree of resource commitment, objectivity on the part of stakeholders, backed by the necessary expertise. The latter has to be supported by brand education, together with the wider support generated by the related stakeholders within the host destination. The underlying objective is to ensure profound marketing focus. This is deemed essential in sustaining an affluent hospitality industry. From a critical perspective, strategists are not merely seeking to design a destination brand, but one which can be effectively sustained.

A highly recommended approach in the design of place branding is to prioritise product development and investment. This secures an enjoyable and memorable holiday for the guest. In this respect, the product development process needs to address the destination's unique cultural assets, backed by a unique selling proposition (USP). Destination branding can best be designed by the identification of the unique attributes of a destination, which can be translated into competitive advantages, the adoption of optimal positioning approaches, and the design of product differentiation in building the right perspectives. This approach is insightfully expounded in the PIB Model – Positioning, Image and Branding. The process needs to be complemented by promoting research, international partnership building and granting full importance to socio-cultural identity. Positioning plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions through images.

Destination branding represents a war of competition, identity, images and perceptions so that destinations seek to be different and most importantly to be themselves. Thus, a brand is more than just a logo. Destination brands need to be developed in an on-going manner, in view of their reputation, citizenship and identities. Other sensitive areas include the exploration of the socio-cultural, economic, and spatial roles on host destinations as impacted by the hospitality industry.

2.8 The Re-imagining of Malta as a Tourism Destination

The development of Malta's tourism industry somewhat mimics the model of Butler's tourism life cycle. Initially, Malta's tourism development took off at a relatively slow pace, whilst later undergoing a period of fast growth. Malta's tourism industry likewise took a down turn as it experienced a period of stagnation, later followed by the rejuvenation phase. More of an effective approach was undertaken by means of the *Tourism Master Plan*, which primarily focused on market diversification, product improvements, market segmentation and seasonality issues.

In addition, the establishment of the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) resulted in similar goals, including the re-imagining of Malta and an improved marketing campaign. In relation to the issue of Malta's tourism product, concerns were made as Malta was sending out mixed messages as regards its image (Theuma, N., 2006).

Furthermore, it has been suggested that the MTA is seeking to alter Malta's image "to one that is more competitive and culture-oriented" as sustained by Grech

(2003) (Theuma, N., 2006). The brochures designed by the MTA are highly culture based as the majority of the illustrations shown are heavily directed towards heritage, followed by images of sports, local characteristics, and cultural feasts. The MTA has long realized the success that may be achieved by targeting specific segments, including culture, religion and gastronomy. The latter markets are evidently inter-linked enhancing a tourist's experience in Malta's deep-rooted culture.

2.9 Current Trends within the Maltese Hospitality Industry

In view of the Tourism Policy 2012-2016, strategists assert that,

Our tourism industry now faces a new set of challenges that require novel solutions which need to be implemented whilst heeding the lessons learnt and the achievements made over the past five years.

(Ministry for Tourism, Culture and the Environment, 2007)

From a critical perspective, this entails an assessment of the respective strengths and weaknesses of the Maltese tourism industry, consolidation strategies and the

exploration of opportunities in terms of profitable guest segments – in our case cultural tourism.

Aligned to the above is the importance of evaluating market trends in the Maltese hospitality industry. These include a description of the salient guest features so as to aid customer service and to construct the guest history in order to forecast future trends. An assessment of current trends is deemed essential to reflect changes in customer data or status' and to target the appropriate services accordingly. It is prudent to assert that market trends are periodically experiencing changes, and thus need to be updated and adequately interpreted.

According to the National Statistics Office, throughout the sub-period 2006-2010, the top five markets generating tourism to Malta for the year 2010 included the UK, Italy, Germany, Scandinavia and France respectively. Trends indicate an encouraging growth of the tourist trade from Italy, Scandinavia and France coupled with a marginal drop from Malta's traditional market – UK. The length of stay has decreased by 1.2 nights from 2006 to 2010, marked by a drop in the average age of incoming guests. Trends indicate a growth in tourist arrivals during the shoulder months, thus improving the seasonality issue. Furthermore, the influx of Low Cost

Carrier traffic, in view of their benefits, has replaced to a substantial degree, Charter traffic (Ministry for Tourism, Culture and the Environment, 2007).

As a result, Malta's tourism industry is increasingly becoming more diversified and less dependent on a number of tourism operators. According to the Malta Tourism Authority's statistics, Malta attracts distinct categories of tourists for diverse purposes. These include those visiting friends and relatives (VFR), historical and cultural tourists, individual business guests, MICE, together with language students amongst others.

The potential of developing the segment/niche enticing tourist guests who enjoy cultural experiences is strongly felt. The current trends of the hospitality industry indicate that tourists are conditioned to a marginal degree by seasonal factors. An additional encouraging factor is that incoming guests have diverse interests – culture being a pivotal factor.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Malta's potential contribution to the marketing of cultural experiences represents a relatively under researched domain. As has been highlighted, the marketing of cultural experiences, specifically within the context of the hospitality industry, has so far not been granted its prudent share of importance. Moreover, focusing on the local context in view of Malta's immense cultural assets, research demands an extensive pioneering approach. This context justifies the adoption of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. This ensures a comprehensive and insightful perspective targeting this research area.

Quantitative and qualitative research methods are initially going to be evaluated from the theoretical perspective, critically assessing the standpoints of diverse researchers. However, the latter serves merely as a constructive background to the pragmatic applications of both methods within the applied context of this research. The researcher was cautious in the questionnaires and interview design

so as to ensure that their responses are going to directly contribute to the research. At a later stage, foreseen limitations to research methodology within the context of both methods are qualified, backed by the necessary tactical approaches of how these were effectively surpassed.

3.2 Theoretical Perspectives

3.2.1 The Quantitative Approach

Quantitative research methods have the objective to quantify data and generalise outcomes derived from a sample. S. Sukamolson (n.d.) sustains that

Quantitative research is the numerical representation and manipulation of observations for the purpose of describing and explaining the phenomena that those observations reflect.

The underlying objective is to measure the frequency of particular opinions or perspectives as highlighted within the chosen sample.

Quantitative research in particular instances is backed by qualitative research approaches. This serves as a strategic venue in insightfully exploring the findings specifically aligned to the research area. Data collection follows the sampling technique, capitalising on structured techniques. The latter typically includes online questions, as well as on-street and telephone interviews. Data analysis follows the data collection stage, whereby statistical data is presented in tables so that conclusions, as regards findings, can be drawn up in comprehensive terms. At this stage, the targeted population specifically aligned to the research area is sampled via the adoption of the relevant sampling methods.

3.2.2 Applications of the Quantitative Approach

As regards quantitative research methods, the questionnaire designed is to be addressed at random to overseas guests, who throughout the forthcoming months will be visiting Malta. These guests enjoy different cultural backgrounds ranging from British, German, French, Italian, Spanish and Scandinavia who may either be first time guests or repeated ones.

The random sampling technique is strongly favoured so as to minimise the prospects of bias and to ensure a wide variety of objective responses. The choice of a questionnaire as a research tool is justified on diverse grounds. Apart from the data collected, the researcher can also observe the body language, emotions and attitudes of the respondents. The latter will provide further subtle information. Although the questionnaires are time consuming as regards their preparation, execution and interpretation, the responses attained are directly relevant to the targeted research. This approach is justified since the questionnaire is customised for a specific research objective and is addressed to the targeted respondents under evaluation.

An on-street questionnaire is strongly favoured within our research. Telephone interviews may be interpreted as an invasion of privacy and may generate profound ethical concerns. The researcher is aware that the majority of overseas guests are in Malta for only a brief stay and intend to enjoy it to the fullest. Thus, the prospect of addressing online questionnaires is strongly disfavoured by the researcher.

3.2.3 The Qualitative Approach

The objectives underpinning qualitative research aids in gaining a profound understanding of the respondents' motivations and underlying reasons linked to the research area.

Qualitative research is aimed at gaining a deep understanding of a specific organisation or event (...) It generates data about human groups in social settings.

(CSULB, n.d.)

Moreover, obstacles are insightfully assessed, generating ideas and a relevant hypothesis. A further objective of the qualitative researching approach is to identify mainstream trends shaping respondents' thoughts and opinions together with their authentic feelings generated by the research topic under review.

Further, both unstructured and semi-structured techniques can be tactfully adopted for data collection purposes. Researchers adopting the qualitative approach can opt for either in-depth interviews or alternatively for group discussions. The choice primarily depends on the depth and complexity of the research area. Throughout the outcomes stage, qualitative researchers are knowledgeable that findings are

not deemed conclusive. This implies that generalisations cannot be made. Moreover, the results can be profitably adopted to execute smarter future decision-makings aligned to the research area under review. Thus, from a critical perspective, this research serves as a strategic means in fulfilling a practical objective.

3.3 Research Variables

The intervention of “cultural experiences” qualified as the independent variable, likewise serves as the underlying theme for this research. The dependent variables, which are pivotal to the results or outcomes of the research objectives, include the marketing strategy, the choice of criteria adopted in the selection of cultural experiences, together with guest profile characteristics in relation to cultural experiences. These have featured both in the objectives and research questions as highlighted in the preceding section.

The relationship between the independent and dependent variables is prudently appreciated in the assessment that whenever cultural experiences are granted a

priority within Malta's hospitality marketing strategy, these would definitely boost inbound tourism towards Malta. However, the effectiveness of a marketing strategy within this context depends on the choice of criteria directly linked to the "essence" of cultural experiences. Within this context, one has to keep in full view that particular cultural experiences tend to be more impactful to overseas guests than to the locals. Further, cultural experiences need to be aligned with the guest profile characteristics so as to ensure that overseas guests are not only satisfied, but also delighted. The latter ensures that guest experiences generated within the Maltese Archipelago are transformed into a life-long memory.

Within the context of the research, the qualitative approach is sustained by an interview carried out with Mr. Dominic Micallef. Thanks to consecutive years of experience within the hospitality industry, Mr. Micallef's insights and contributions are deemed invaluable. An unstructured interview is thus appropriate on the grounds of the likelihood that Mr. Micallef highlights insightful issues directly inspired by the Maltese and International hospitality sector. The generated feedback potentially serves exploratory and investigative purposes and subsequently augments the value of the research.

3.4 Questionnaire Design and Execution – Limitations

The research was carried out during the shoulder months of November, December and January. It was taken place at the main focal areas of Valletta, Sliema and Bugibba that attract the majority of tourists on the island. Questionnaires were handed out to 100 visitors. The researcher was fully aware that not all participants fully understand the notion of culture experiences in view of their distinct social backgrounds. Consequently, they may easily misinterpret the issue. Moreover, since the guests are on holiday, they may feel an intrusion of privacy in answering the questionnaire. In this regard, the researcher elicited concise answers targeting a respectable number of questions. Further, the questionnaire was presented to the guest, not at the point of his/her arrival, but at a mature stage of his/her vacation. Thus, the guest is granted sufficient time in critically reflecting on the immediate cultural experiences.

Some respondents failed to answer the questionnaire. The researcher initially briefed the respondents on the research objectives. Moreover, full confidentiality was ensured in the process. A likewise procedure was adopted by other respondents who merely compiled part of the questionnaire. This procedure proved to be highly costly in terms of time. It likewise exerted substantial pressure,

keeping in view that the researcher was simultaneously engaged in the pursuit of academic studies.

The design of the questionnaire entices respondents. In this regard, a set of factual to opinion based questions were presented, including tick boxes to text responses. The number of questions set in the questionnaire represents another critical aspect. The researcher was aware that lengthy questionnaires are more likely to result in superficial responses. Alternatively, whenever respondents face a few questions, the approach is going to elicit limited responses. Care was taken regarding the number of questions set, as well as in identifying any superfluous answers by the adoption of subtle questions.

3.5 Interview Limitations

The interview already highlighted has been conducted with Mr. Dominic Micallef. In view of his professional commitment, sufficient time had to be allocated to his convenience. Although, Mr. Dominic Micallef had a welcoming personality, he adopted a formal approach throughout the interview, possibly due to his highly

sensitive position within the hospitality industry. Moreover, the researcher realised that Mr. Micallef gave added importance to certain questions and although he provided a detailed response, this may not have been fully relevant to the research area.

3.6 Conclusions

The research methods expressed from both theoretical and practical dimensions, together with their respective limitations, provide insightful perspectives. It is prudent to evaluate the research outcomes of the questionnaire and the interview in the forthcoming chapter. An interesting factor concerns the identification of both common and distinct responses attained through quantitative and qualitative research methods. These reflect the colourful blend of perspectives on the part of respondents, aligned to their subjective interpretation of the cultural experiences within the context of the Maltese hospitality industry.

The quality of a research project depends not merely on the design and execution of the methodology, but likewise on the interpretation of the research outcomes. Sufficient care is granted in ensuring a respectable degree of objectivity in the process. This is deemed indispensable in constructing a broad platform, along

which the recommendations paving the way forward in the marketing of cultural experiences.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The marketing of cultural experiences within the Maltese hospitality industry is going to be assessed in terms of the feedback generated via the questionnaires. These were targeted to overseas guests, who happen to be in Malta during the months of November, December and January. The interview outcomes conducted with Mr. Dominic Micallef are evaluated at a later stage. A comparative evaluation of the findings of the questionnaires and the interview are presented, so as to ensure a comprehensive approach to the research area under review. As already highlighted, since this area is still relatively under-researched and there is a high potential as regards the further marketing of cultural experiences, it was deemed imperative on the part of the researcher to adopt a pioneering approach.

4.2 Questionnaire Outcomes

4.2.1 Nationality

After the information from the questionnaire was compiled, a descriptive and critical assessment was carried out. As regards the markets which generate incoming guests to the Maltese island, the UK followed by Italy tops the list with 43% and 20% respectively. These are followed at a distance by Germany and Scandinavia registering 13% and 11% respectively. Guests generated from France represented 8%, while 5% of the guests are Spanish. From a critical standpoint, since the questionnaire was administered throughout the winter months of November, December and January, this may have impacted the outcomes. This is particularly the case with the British, Germans and Scandinavians, who visit Malta to enjoy its moderate climate.

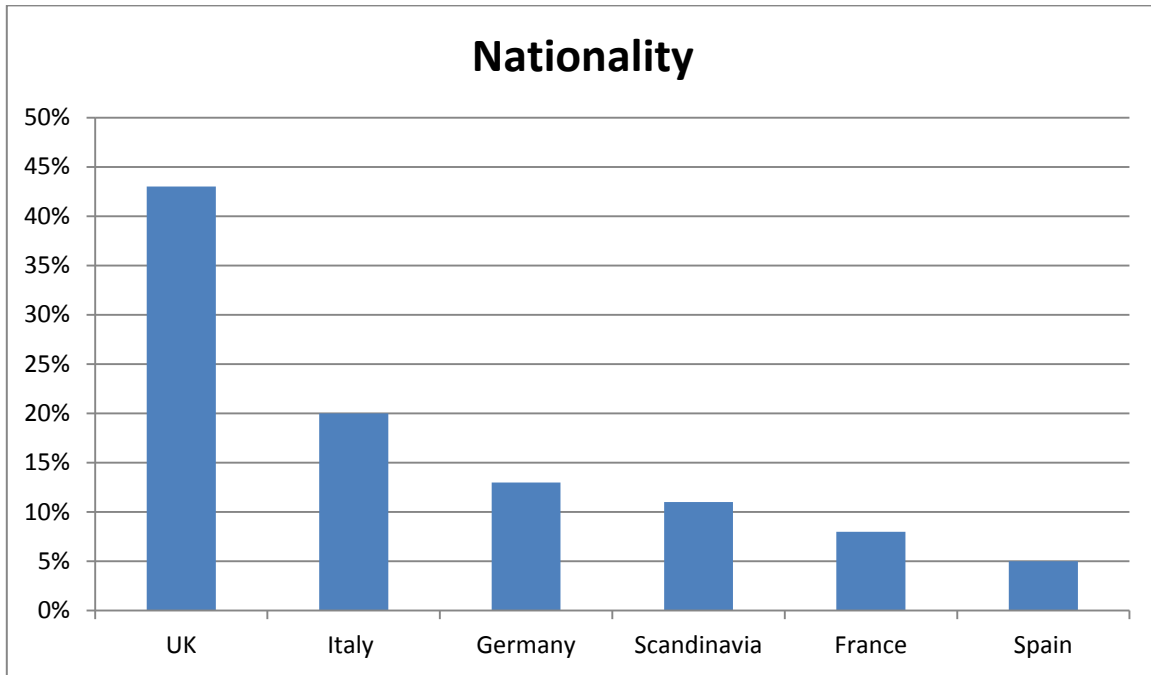


Figure 1 - Nationality

4.2.2 Age

As regards an assessment of guests in terms of age groups visiting Malta, 25% fall within the 41-50 category. This is due to diverse reasons, including the enjoyment of higher income, economic stability, and lower family commitments. These are closely followed by the 61-70 age group standing at 20%. They tend to be retired and thus have more time to dedicate themselves to travel pursuits. An interesting

fact is that the age categories 21-30, 31-40 and 51-60 each targeted 15%. The low and high end age categories being 15-20 and 71+ both targeted 5%. In the latter segments, this is due to health related factors and in view of financial constraints due to a low pension. The 15-20 age group is still dependent on parents or guardians. Travelling abroad represents a secondary priority at this stage.

4.2.3 Occupation

As regards the occupation category of guests, the retired category standing at 35% topped the chart, followed by individual businessmen together with those represented under MICE being 40%. A further 10% of the guests indicated that they are currently unemployed, and they are not sensitive to elements of seasonality. 18% of the incoming guests represent the professional background and visit Malta so as to switch from their routine. Categories representing the self-employed, students, skilled manual employees and labourers each targeted 7%.

4.2.4 Information Sources

As regards information sources which entice prospective guests to visit the Maltese island, electronic website sources are highly favoured targeting 35%. Website accessibility is economically viable, and the majority of prospective guests are e-Literate. Destination reviews, which are mainly accessed by electronic means, stand at a profound 30%. Throughout the past years, website sources surpassed word of mouth publicity, which lies at 20%. On the other hand, travel agents have decreased as an influential source to 10%. Other sources including videos and souvenirs account for 5% of the information sources. Although, electronic sources are ways in which a destination can market itself, it is only by personally experiencing the place can the guest truly gain a much better understanding of the destination and its culture. Nevertheless, by means of destination reviews one may offer both positive and negative feedback after having visited a destination. The reviews are available for all to read at any time and any day. Such an approach is highly influential to potential guests.

4.2.5 Number of Visits

At this stage, the guests were probed whether it was their first time visiting the Maltese island. In fact, 35% of the guests indicated that they had already visited Malta beforehand, while a further 10% of this segment asserted that they repeatedly visit Malta. The remaining 65% indicated that this represents their initial visit to Malta. Moreover, some of them also expressed their desire to re-visit the island in the future. However, they failed to qualify the underlying reasons regarding this option. Evidently, Malta attracts repeat guests. However, there has definitely been a higher influx of first time visitors. From a critical perspective, this may signify that Malta is attracting new markets. In spite of

4.2.6 Perceptions of Malta

A set of contrasting responses emerged as regards the images which surface when overseas guests refer to or think of Malta. These perceptions include - a Mediterranean island, a business centre, an island of history and archaeology, a party island, English language schools, the hospitality of the people, together with a diving destination.

The image of Malta as a Mediterranean island had frequently been pinpointed by British, German and Scandinavian guests, who perceive Malta as a detachment from their familiar culture and climate. Furthermore, the image of Malta as a business centre is entertained primarily by business guests due to Malta's role as a commercial hub. The image of Malta linked to history and archaeology is evident in the mind set of culturally sensitive groups, who have a passion in immersing themselves in the unique cultural diversity of distinct host destinations. This image is mainly marked by the British market, followed by the Germans.

The younger age groups who are somewhat venturesome perceive Malta in terms of the party island image and English language schools. This perspective is particularly entertained by Spanish, Scandinavians, French and Italian guests. Malta as a diving destination is progressively increasing by the majority of nationalities. The strong image of Malta perceived in terms of the hospitality of the people, surfaces in the mind-set of the majority of repeat visitors. This reflects that hospitality is a deep-rooted tradition. It transpires that the image of Malta as a unique and deep-rooted cultural heritage destination is highly appreciated by certain guest segments. Nevertheless, these segments do not represent the majority.

Appendix 2 identifies the reasons that entice tourists to visit Malta. The data suggests that the main reason is centred round culture and heritage. Evidently, this data differs, to some extent, to the research obtained as regards tourists' perceptions of Malta. Nevertheless, it is vital to keep in mind that such data is representative of the February and March period that include additional cultural event, which the researcher did not incorporate those months within the research.

4.2.7 Cultural Factors attracting Guests

At this stage the respondents were asked what they found particularly interesting about Malta. The responses were somewhat varied. The island's history represented 15% of the guest segment. 10% revealed their preference for the Maltese language stressing the cultural interblending of Semitic, Romance together with Anglo-Saxon elements that were overheard in the conversations among the Maltese. A further 30% of incoming guests targeted the local people and their respective culture. Culture is a common denominator element interlinking all these three highlighted groups.

Elements of culture which specifically entice guests include the local traditions, the Maltese architecture and the rubble walls together with the distinguishing landmarks in rural Malta. These include the Maltese wells, farmhouses and windmills. Furthermore, Malta's scenery entices 5% of the guests in particular seascapes. Many guests earnestly commented on the pressing need for effective environmental management strategies to be urgently implemented.

It transpires that 25% of the guests appreciated activities currently taking place in Malta. Some of these are specifically linked to culture, ranging from religious feasts, carnival, staged historical events, Notte Bianca, Birgu Fest, and Qormi Fest. The guests asserted the Malta bus sightseeing tours are a contributing factor in the appreciation of cultural events. However, other guests indicated a preference for non-cultural activities linked to pursuits such as sports, leisure and entertainment. As regards *other aspects*, 15% of the guests indicated that the services which are of a reasonable standard are relatively cheap in comparison to other EU countries and that the general lifestyle in Malta is relaxed and enjoyable.

4.2.8 Feedback on Holiday Experience

The guests were approached to describe their holiday experience. In general, guests described their holiday experience in Malta as being satisfactory (45%) and delightful (30%). These contrast with 10% of the guests who indicated that their holiday experience was unsatisfactory. An equal number of respondents chose 'partially satisfactory'. 15% of the guests indicated that they have just arrived in Malta and they are not in a position to comment. Finally, 5% of the guests failed to comment.

4.2.9 Memorable Cultural Activities

As regards activities held in Malta which the guests found to be memorable, 35% of the guests indicated that all the activities and events in which they participated to distinct degrees proved to be memorable. This is probably because they granted them a unique flavour of the Maltese identity. The range of activities embrace sightseeing tours, visits to archaeological temples, historical sites, partying within the Paceville/St. Julians area, and the occasional dining out particularly within restaurants offering typical Maltese dishes.

Other activities include day trip cruising to Gozo and Comino being Malta's sister islands, the sightseeing bus trips, the Mdina and the Malta Experience, the Valletta International Baroque Festival in January together with informal activities such as meeting the locals. Such activities allow guests to be part of Malta's culture, even for a brief while, whilst enriching guests' knowledge of Malta's unique heritage. This in turn creates a more realistic image in the mind of the guests, enabling them to gain more of a fruitful cultural experience.

4.2.10 Experiencing Malta's Culture through Activities

When the respondents were probed whether and to what extent the above mentioned activities granted them a feeling of the Maltese culture, 55% replied in the affirmative, while a further 25% indicated that this was to some extent. A further 10% of the interviewees indicated in the negative, while 10% of the respondents indicated that their experience has so far been brief and thus cannot respond. Evidently, high potential exists in furthering and advancing guests' cultural experiences through the activities offered. In order for Malta to create a successful brand image, it must send out the right and authentic message in terms

of its identity. On similar lines, allowing guests to gain an authentic and memorable cultural experience through such activities likewise strengthens the island's image as a cultural tourist destination.

4.2.11 Appreciation for Malta's Culture

The next question was concerned with whether the holiday experience in Malta raised a deeper appreciation for the Maltese culture. It is noteworthy to highlight that while 65% of the guests replied in the affirmative, 55% within this same segment indicated that they appreciated Malta's culture only to a reasonable degree as the majority felt that they were not fully immersed or fully exposed to Malta's deep-rooted culture. Furthermore, 10% of the respondents indicated that their holiday in Malta proved to give a direct cultural experience, particularly in view of Malta's unique culture. In contrast, 25% indicated in the negative. The latter respondents were business guests, leisure seekers, or on holiday in Malta visiting friends and family. The remainder 10% indicated that even though their initial objectives in visiting the island were not directly linked to cultural appreciation, they nevertheless gained a feeling of the Maltese culture to a marginal extent.

4.2.12 Participation in Specific Cultural Activities

Question 12 probed whether the guests participated in particular cultural activities during their stay in Malta. The researcher became aware that the research period under review marked the lowest drop regarding cultural activities staged locally. The majority of cultural activities are organised during the late Spring/Summer period. It is interesting to observe that 34% of the guests enjoyed dining at traditional local restaurants, followed by 22% who enjoyed cultural excursions to archaeological sites in both Malta and Gozo. Staged historical events particularly those taking place in Valletta, Mdina and Rabat (Gozo), including the Valletta International Baroque Festival enticed 20% of the guests. They serve as a reenactment of Malta's deep-rooted, historical and cultural legacy. The underlying benefit of staged historical events is that they take place on a year round basis, thus attracting guests during all seasons.

Within the period under review, local religious feasts being linked to the Christmas festive season attracted 10%. Public feasts, in particular New Year's Eve and Republic day, attracted 5% since the former is a universal event and the latter is politically oriented. Malta has lately promoted particular cultural activities including Notte Bianca and Birgu Fest. However, these fall outside the calendar period of

the time frame under consideration. A further 10% of the guests enjoyed alternative cultural activities including the Valletta and Mdina Experience. The guests gave no consideration to carnival and the traditional *Regatta*, since they are celebrated outside the time frame parameters. It transpires that culture has distinct dimensions and implications, and is assessed by guests from different perceptions.

4.2.13 Recommendations

Question 13 assessed whether Malta should be recommended to family members and friends. An overwhelming 60% of the respondents ticked in the affirmative, in contrast to 10% who indicated in the negative. 30% of the respondents qualified that they are still undecided on this issue. The diverse reasons include that their stay in Malta was relatively brief, and that they had not experienced Malta's culture in sufficient depth. Question 14 is a follow-up of the preceding question. The criteria for recommending Malta to friends and relatives range from its unique beauty and culture and that of being a micro state. Alternative criteria embrace its Mediterranean climate and flavor, the people's hospitality, together with the quaintness of the villages.

4.3 Interview Outcomes

An interview was carried out with Mr. Dominic Micallef employed at the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) within the sector of culture and history. Mr. Micallef was highly cordial, and the approach adopted throughout the interview was interactive. In view of his deep rooted experience within the department, he proved to be highly resourceful and inspiring adopting a pragmatic approach so as to justify his perspectives.

As a take-off to the interview, Mr. Micallef thoroughly explained the goals and tasks of the Culture and History segment at the MTA, which are directed towards promoting Malta's history and culture overseas. Mr. Micallef pointed out that the department carries out various means of promotions and has direct contact with foreign NGO's. Furthermore, Mr. Micallef added that approximately 40% of tourists visit Malta for cultural and historical purposes. This would be considered as a very high figure in comparison to the additional segments. He further commented that there is a lack of hotels in the South of Malta. It may be suggested that allowing for the development of hotels in the South may reduce congestion and overcrowding in certain focal tourist areas. Moreover, this may further the tourists' appreciation for Malta's natural beauty and culture.

Mr. Micallef stated that the MTA supports a number of festivals which take place on the island, particularly those within the shoulder months. He gave particular emphasis to the Valletta Baroque Festival as heavy promotions are carried out for this January festival which attracts hundreds of tourists. Moreover, Mr. Micallef expressed the importance given to UK and German tourists who are inclined towards culture. In addition, the MTA is highly knowledgeable of the importance and necessity in continuously promoting through electronic sources. Moreover, an iPhone application that serves as a culture guide of Malta has been designed and developed by the MTA.

4.4 Critical Perspectives

After reviewing the responses of the questionnaire and the interview, a number of common and interesting aspects surfaced. Some feedback which was apparent in the interview was not highlighted in the questionnaire. The perspectives of guests represent an outsider's world view, which at times could result after the guests' first glance at Malta during their brief holiday. The professional insights of the interviewee reflect the professional's line of thinking targeting a vital sector being

the bread and butter of the Maltese. The interview presented the efforts of the service providers, while the questionnaires indicated the viewpoints of the service receivers. It transpired throughout the interview that Malta has to persistently capitalise on its strategic assets.

It transpires in the questionnaires that incoming guests seek to undergo decisions of a short-term nature regarding prospective destinations, primarily influenced by economic criteria. Since 35% of the guests have already visited Malta beforehand, and 10% of these repeatedly visit Malta, this signifies that guests are enticed by the unique elements of Malta, thus granting it as a preferred destination status. Thus, it is vital for the unique qualities of Malta to be continuously promoted to tourists and explored by guests so as to secure more promising results.

The interviewed guests invested substantial time of their holiday in cultural activities. This reflects that the guests are culturally conscious, as qualified by Mr. Micallef. This is further supported by the questionnaire outcomes that 65% of the guests actually enjoyed the authentic feeling of the Maltese culture, in contrast to 25% who indicated in the negative. From a subjective perspective, the guests do not merely wish to participate in cultural activities, but furthermore to enjoy the

benefits derived from these activities. These include their inspirational, exclusive, entertaining and artistic elements.

The fact that an overwhelming majority of 60% of the guests are ready to recommend Malta on the very grounds of the authentic spirit of the island, strongly suggests that Malta's culture needs to be kept alive and nourished. The latter secures our Maltese identity, together with Malta's success in its tourism industry.

4.5 Conclusion

It is to be appreciated that the outcomes of both the questionnaire and the interview are relevant to the demands of the current hospitality industry. Since the hospitality industry is constantly undergoing through changes, the researcher has adopted a prudent approach in the interpretation of the research outcomes. The responses attained can likewise be adopted to evaluate trends as regards the positioning of cultural experiences within the hospitality industry. The perception of these cultural experiences is intended to have a long-term impact on guests.

The forthcoming chapter presents a set of suggestions targeting the administrators, the stakeholders in the hospitality industry and social groups. The adoption of this targeted approach is deemed pivotal so that the objectives of this research could be fulfilled in practice.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – THE WAY FORWARD

5.1 Introduction

Cultural experiences are inherently rich in view of their unique characteristics. The latter range from artistic and aesthetic characteristics, to educational, commercial, religious, ethical, entertainment and sport related qualities. They ensure a memorable holiday experience. As has been highlighted throughout the research, culture determines the standards of what is deemed acceptable, important, workable and ethically appropriate within a particular community. In this regard, it is prudent to assess that culture incorporates all the shared tacit traits, beliefs, knowledge, and norms together with the community's related values.

In view of its complexity, culture delves deeper into qualifying the core attitudes, behaviours and language of a community, also including the dress code and gastronomic habits. Strategists within the hospitality industry need to understand

that sufficient time and effort need to be smartly invested in the design of these cultural experiences, indispensable for the achievement of the intended outcomes.

In view of its historical legacy, the Maltese island enjoys a rich cultural environment. Thus, it is ironic that some of its cultural showcases are underrepresented or completely unrepresented within the marketing programmes addressing unique cultural experiences to overseas guests.

5.2 Recommendations

The following are a host of suggestions aligned to cultural experiences, keeping in full regard the specific realities of the Maltese context. The recommendations are addressed to Maltese administrators, stakeholders within the hospitality industry, and to the public having specialized pursuits.

5.2.1 Recommendations addressed to Maltese Administrators

- Cultural experiences need to initially be targeted to locals, and later marketed to overseas guests. Educating and empowering local citizens in supporting innovative cultural programmes is a must.
- It is deemed necessary to sponsor cultural education programmes targeting low income earners such as students and pensioners. Typical examples include offering discount tickets or services at museums and theatrical performances. This initiative has to be undertaken by administrators acting jointly with stakeholders aligned to the hospitality industry.
- Since culture relates to shared social knowledge and values, it is deemed imperative to appreciate culture as a holistic perspective within the context of that particular society. This approach further ensures that citizens, acting as ‘ambassadors’ of their country’s culture, enjoy a broader and deeper cultural interest. Thus, they can profitably act as stewards in transmitting culture to future generations.

5.2.2 Recommendations targeting Stakeholders within the Hospitality Industry

- Market research in the marketing of cultural experiences addressing the targeted guest profiles visiting Malta is imperative. This has to be appreciated, keeping in view the salient characteristics of the culture related events within the Maltese island. Knowledge of the local cultural behaviour is vital since it will help all concerned in embracing the culture experience wholeheartedly. In order for the design of the culture experience to be impactful, it has to be aligned to the interests, opinions, and activities of these guests.
- More cultural activities and events should be designed and set up during the Autumn-Winter period so as to create more of a cultural atmosphere during the shoulder months.
- Marketing strategists within the hospitality sector need to focus not merely on the practical and authentic dimensions of cultural experiences, but likewise on the meaningful benefits. For instance, ecological/rural tourism builds an appreciation for nature and its conservation. Further, historical tourism generates an appreciation for the historical archaeological legacy of the host destination.

- Cultural experiences need to be professionally designed on a long-term basis, particularly as regards their positioning in the guest's perspective. The underlying aim is to qualify their uniqueness.
- The cultural calendar identifies cultural festivals and events on an annual basis. Although this initiative has to be primarily undertaken by stakeholders within the hospitality industry, it requires direct collaboration with the public sector.
- Strategists need to identify both underrepresented and unrepresented cultural assets. These have to be directly incorporated within the marketing strategy of cultural experiences.

5.3 Suggestions Relevant to the Public

- The natural environment compliments the cultural context since it directly impacts the quality of cultural experiences. The interviewee Mr. Micallef has a potential role in building greater environmental awareness and conservation programmes in view of its technical knowledge. However, its

respective efforts need to be sustained by local green movements which enjoy grass root contact within the Maltese community.

- Finally, every city or town in Malta enjoys its own local culture and traditions. This ensures a unique contribution to the Maltese culture. Dedicated local councils have undertaken the initiative to showcase their cultural agendas. Their success is evident on an annual basis. It is deemed appropriate that local councils throughout all regions of Malta undergo similar initiatives, fine-tuning their cultural programmes in view of their own distinct traditions.

5.4 Conclusion

The distinct recommendations need to be systematically implemented. On-going collaboration needs to be directly secured. This involves all stakeholders both within the parameters of the hospitality industry, as well as the public sector, the economic and legal spheres, and the public. The latter represents the pivotal base generating the local culture.

A community or a country's culture is a general snapshot regarding the behaviour of its respective citizens. However, each individual is unique and behaves

differently. Thus, one has to adopt a highly sensitive approach as regards a country's culture, keeping in full view that culture is undergoing through evolution. This has to be directly taken into full account in terms of the qualities of the cultural experience and its intended impact.

This research is not intended as a means to an end, but alternatively as an instrumental means for further future initiatives within this sphere. A community's culture is constantly experiencing all round change. This research embraces the vision that in view of Malta being an island state utterly dependent on the hospitality industry, the appreciation of the national culture and the marketing of cultural experiences at a later stage, needs to be profitably and tactfully tapped. Malta's immense cultural wealth is the most relevant export asset within the contemporary global hospitality industry.

Appendix 1 – Questionnaire for Tourists

GUEST BACKGROUND

1. Please identify your country of origin:

2. Tick the appropriate age group:

15-20

41-50

21-30

51-60

31-40

61-70

71+

3. Please identify your occupation:

Professional

Skilled manual employee

Businessman

Labourer

Self-employed

Unemployed

Student

Retired

QUESTIONS SPECIFICALLY RELATING TO YOUR HOLIDAY EXPERIENCE IN MALTA

4. In which particular month had you organised your visit to Malta?

5. Which particular information source enticed you to visit Malta?

6. Is this your first time visiting the Maltese Archipelago?

- Yes
- No

7. What is the initial image that comes to mind when you hear the word 'Malta'?

-

8. What do you find interesting in Malta?

9. *Local People*

10. *Activities* (Please Identify) -----

11. *History and Culture*

12. *Other aspects* (Please Identify) -----

9. How would you describe your holiday experience in Malta?

- *Unsatisfactory*
- *Partially satisfactory*
- *Satisfactory*
- *Delightful*

10. Please identify particular activities of your holiday experience in Malta, which you consider to be noteworthy and memorable.

11. Has your holiday experience helped you in understanding the Maltese culture?

12. During your stay in Malta, have you participated directly or indirectly in the following activities:

- *Local religious feasts*
- *Carnival*
- *Public feasts*
- *'The Regatta'*
- *Particular cultural activities*
(eg: Notte Bianca, Birgu Fest)
- *Staged historical events*
- *Cultural excursions to archaeological sites*
- *Visit to traditional local restaurants*

13. Would you recommend Malta to your family and friends?

- *Yes*
- *No*
- *Don't know*

14. On what particular criteria would you recommend Malta?

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