

Marketing strategy on the development of consumer behaviour for Air Malta

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Abstract

The principal aim of the dissertation is to devise a marketing strategy for Air Malta, the flagship carrier airline of the Maltese Islands, to compete with prominent airlines who utilise the same air space to upsell their services. The marketing strategy is constructed upon the understanding of the competition of international airlines within the travel industry and implement factors influenced by consumer behaviour that are of incremental value to the competing businesses to run successfully. The changes in travel trends and the addition of high- traffic routes from other airlines pose competitive threats to Air Malta's current and future consumer interests. Consumer behaviour is determined on the study of individuals, groups and organizations, the demographic's response is collected through the process to select, secure services or experiences to satisfy needs and attempt to acquire further interest from prospective consumers who utilise similar services.

The research is set to understand the current market's expectations, which are taken into consideration for the airline to conduct marketing efforts with research accumulated from direct responses from airline travellers. The result provided an observation that the brand has overpriced rates and is considered as a generic airline, offering little difference to what is found elsewhere in competing airlines. As a method of data mining, the online survey provided methods of discovering the current placement of the business within the consumer's perspective, through the various respondent's responses (Servadei, 2011).

A conclusion set out from the dissertation is to evaluate the possibility of market differentiation as a step forward for the case company, and from the response given, invoke a further growth

from the uniqueness in the current experience provided (Fulmer & Goodwin, 1988). The implication of the dissertation is to supply an opportunity for Air Malta, to promote individuality from their service offerings, and to reflect on whether their current practises can be practical by marketing the right services internationally and add more to the in-flight experience.

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I would also like to thank my family and friends for their constant source of inspiration who supported a united effort needed to complete the dissertation with confidence in understanding the vast air.

With thanks and respect to their contribution.

Sincerely,

Bernard Chircop

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1. Introduction

The exploration of new destinations in the aviation sector is fuelled by tourism (Dodds, 2007), a vital component to the airline business (Button, 2009), where frequent users of the airliner transportation are for leisurely or business purposes that reel in a strong influence on external business or destination flourishing. A local airline such as Air Malta, which until recently, was the sole local airline affiliate within Malta's culture. provides a service for consumers which has presence throughout the island's culture as one which holds true to its roots as the nation's airline choice for travel. The importance of a local business such as Air Malta is vital to Malta's competitive strength (Dodds, 2007) in various market segments where the preservation of local values from companies being allowed to compete in a vigorous market which does not allow only one business to profit from a product or service . Malta has yet to produce a train system (Dobruszkes, 2010) or an underground access to nearby countries such as the Channel Tunnel, which provides France's access to the United Kingdom (Arnold, 2018). Such a limitation of transportation leads Malta to depend on two external methods of international transportation, travel by air or sea. As ships are vastly limited in terms of duration and destination choice due to lack of access (NSO, 2019), air travel is left as the most desirable and safest means of transportation for holidays or business travel, where the time saved is key (Jacobs, 2013).

The background of the marketing dissertation follows the interest on the ever-changing background of the airline industry (Wolla & Backus, 2018) and the recent restructuring of Air Malta which involved a different take on their previous business practises. The strategic to success has to be set out for an airline to survive upon to effectively compete in the vigorous

market of the travel market, thus the requirement to have a marketing strategy that matches the needed requirements to attract the target audiences from various destinations from which the airline operates to and from (Newsire, 2015).

The thorough exploration of the airline's presence shall be utilised to create the specified goals and requirements for the airline to perform better in the aviation industry. As every airline offers the means of transportation as the basic requirement through one's journey to another destination, it is necessary to devise an individualized concept that further refines their inflight product, catering to their clients' needs and focusing on what is required to create consumer retention, instead of reaching out to new markets for new sales (Al-Jader & Sentosa, 2015).

The studied topic shall utilise the structural reflection from the comparison of Emirates and Ryanair. The earlier work done by fellow graduates who have researched the field and evaluated the Air Malta's position in the airline market was observed to be a slow growth over the years (Barry, 2014), with the Maltese passenger market doubling in the last decade, it is of importance to take advantage of the increased potential to attract such clients directly to Air Malta, rather than losing such clients who end up being attracted to exterior competition who would be able to sell to such audiences (Barry, 2014).

The aviation industry, the most utilised method of transportation for international travel in Europe, is the most used method of inbound travel system to Malta (NSO, 2019). With most travellers using the Malta international Airport, the sole airport in Malta, businesses thrive on the constant flow of passengers that airline carriers bring in annually. A component for the tourism business is convenient transportation between destinations, where one gains the opportunity of feasible accessibility, essential for the upselling of tourist destinations. Cruise

ships and airlines are the main sources of international transportation, but the convenience and cost of a flights outweigh the use of a ship to travel around the world. The dissertation is to delve on the understanding of the vitality of commercial airlines, the competency and difficulties they face in the 21st century (Cento, 2009) and how they survive on an annual basis. The chosen airline will be Air Malta for the purpose of understanding a Maltese business in the travel industry. Airline competition, with Ryanair and Emirates as the competitive referrals, is a challenge if trends are not implemented as the larger brands form an oligopoly from their large status in the industry, distancing the ability for smaller airlines to compete and succeed in such a vigorous market of unprecedented changes (He, 2020). The comparison between the selected airlines will underline the pressure Air Malta faces against such competitors, and the effects of low-cost airlines to their pricing and quality of service that use different styles of marketing efforts to sell and retain their client portfolio (Air Malta, 2012).

The relation to the tourism industry stems from tourists travelling to another destination with services provided by respective airlines, whether it is solely to get from one destination to another, or in the formation of packages done to offer the full experience which would a hassle-free experience to enjoy. An airline's commercial flight consists of influential factors (Paul & Cristobal, 2017) that are dependent on the consumer's choice of service such as:

- The price (Influenced by an estimated budget, timing & importance of occasion)
- The duration of flights (Journey duration and efficiency)
- The quality of service (From First Class to Economy Class offered)
- The benefits (Rewards, recognition & Acknowledgement)
- Classification (Flight points gained from frequent flying)

The airline industry involves processes that are constantly suiting according to what is considered the necessary consumption for consumers (North, McCuan, Mohammed, Irving, & Turner, 2019), which involves a different approach to the market every few years, rather than having one business model function without change. Through such change, airlines generally cater towards what passengers are demanding, as they are a measurable source of expectations, and as other airlines such as Ryanair campaigning on cheap fares and do not mention quality, or Emirates offering the most premium option, without any mention of savings, the placement of the brand is key to showcasing its sales efforts to international audiences (Tandon, 2020).

Marketing strategies, with the digital influence of one's engagement with consumers, is vital to achieving a business model that attracts the right clients who are engaged with the business's service, matching their travel needs accurately (Gazette, 2019).

The purpose of the study is to evaluate current consumer behaviour on a business related to the tourism sector that influences the traffic of tourists coming and going through the country annually. The chosen business was Air Malta, a local airline carrier that has gone thorough brand restructuring and is affiliated with the Maltese citizens as a relatable emblem of the country (Air Malta, 2012). allowing an understanding of consumer service in terms of retention and loyalty. The placement of consumer presence in a brand is contingent to its structure as it could influence where Air Malta can distribute development funds to train and develop stronger consumer service points and improve support for team members where required. The placement of such an understanding allows Air Malta to increase their investments into potential projects which would pro-actively predict the consumer requirements to produce better commercial performance (Sanja Steiner, 2007).

2. Literature Review

Various concepts are considered and reviewed to the formation of a marketing strategy for Air Malta. The review will help provide the insight towards the potential marketing strategy depictions and its prospective implication for deducing such a marketing strategy for the local airline from previous background of the airline. As marketing involves an investment of some sort, the financial and competitive difficulties of the airline have been taken into consideration, as such difficulties may enforce restrictions on what measures can be implemented without limitations of budgets or restrain from risking further. The use of marketing through such limitations would help provide a better means to tackle recurring issues and utilise the least resources with a budget in mind to reach the most realistic goal available to the business.

The marketing communications mix reviewed of the airline is through public relations and advertising of the airline, as the personal selling of the business internationally would prove difficult due to the global outreach covered by digital marketing already. The airline's sales promotion is used on an off-peak basis to promote the less sold flights during quieter periods or upsell the upcoming season with packages that would otherwise have to be arranged separately, which for some would be an inconvenience.

As social media has become a new promotional tool to add to the marketing mix, it has become a system of gaining influence organically or through influential people, whether they are celebrities or influencers, the use of such figures promotes the use of the airline through well-known figures to their followers who would attempt to reflect the person's purchasing habits and travel choices. As the use of media has become a system of being a closer form of

communication to its current and potential client's the updating of such platforms, stemming from Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and various others are a form of awareness to the importance of staying updated in this day and age (Ivy, 2008).

Whilst many options are available to propel the airline forward, the gap of finances and marketing mixes & the rationality of economic difficulties highly influence airlines as travellers who would cut off non-essential travel or may succumb to coronavirus infection whilst travelling. No airline has been left unchanged by the epidemic, which in turn has left even complete halts to airport operations in many countries from weeks to months in various countries (European Data Portal, 2020).

Various companies observe their markets and attempt to attract the little business coming in , as air traffic had even been lowered to 90 per cent across Europe, many airlines have reached to their respective governments to access emergency funds to stay afloat (European Data Portal, 2020).

2.1. The historical Overview of Air Malta

Categorised as a regional airline carrier, Air Malta has constantly adapted to various demands stemming from the consumer market, with brand development to propel the business further in the current market. Air Malta initiated commercial flights on the 1st of April 1974, with the formation of routes servicing to London, Birmingham, Manchester, Rome, Frankfurt, Paris and Tripoli (AirMalta, 2020).

The airline faced difficulties in the 2010's, with a restructuring plan being formed in place to turn the airline's financial situation around (European Commission, 2012). Although such a plan was placed under thorough scrutiny, the European Commission accepted, and the airline's restructuring was designed to make the airline profitable within four years. The structured took into consideration the quality, style and even rebranding of the airline to another level, as it measured to ensure a modern approach against the competing airline market in the decade (AirMalta, 2020).

The airline underwent significant brand development and redesigning in 2012, costing €1.9 million, a vast investment taken to relaunch the airline's brand. with the new colours to identify the fleet and brand associated with Malta, a brand identity that signifies its local element as its roots. The addition of relatable colours and symbols provides an attractive effort to relate to the local demographic where potential consumers keep using Air Malta as they trust in the airline's quality and level of service (AirMalta, 2020). The airline unfortunately has led to losses, leading up to €223 million in accumulated losses in 2018 from previous years, with a potential sell-off of the airline to Alitalia, which fell through in 2017 due to business related matters (Malta Independent, 2017); the airline has still maintained itself and through such fall throughs, the airline has survived. In recent years, Air Malta returned a significant profit after nearly two decades from various changes in the airline, stemming from better aircraft utilisation, changes in sales strategies, and investments in IT technology, giving the airline an opportunity to compete and sell effectively. With recent figures from the previous August 2019, the airline has even registered a record of passenger carried by Air Malta in forty-five years (Air Malta, 2019).

The utilisation of the two competing airlines, Emirates & Ryanair, are placed as prominent carriers in the airline industry who have brand positioning that is of an exemplary nature to Air Malta if attributed effectively (O'Reilly, 2012). The history of the three competing airlines span over decades and each build a connection with their clients through the experience, whether it would be Ryanair with the least frills, or Emirates to the utmost luxury, the airlines utilised a connection to further sales in their past, and in the coming future (Atuma, 2016).

2.2. The significance of Air Malta to the tourism sector

The development of marketing is a continuous process within airline brands that are offering services, with the tourism reports from the annual NSO giving a positive indicator of the high increase of inbound tourists rising to 2,273,837 tourists in 2017, it is apparent that one can observe that airlines carried most of the inbound tourists, with low-cost airlines gathering higher number of inbound tourists than other airlines (NSO, 2019).

The strategizing of competitive relativity from Air Malta to the market's demands can reflect from the figures found in the NSO such as the: Purpose of visits, Frequency of visit, organisation of visits, country market, duration of visits, all factors which can develop a campaign that caters to the right profile. The aviation sector includes various businesses which make a destination the selling point, through conventional prices, packages and luxuries, code sharing the success of profit stems from the effective decisions that target the correct sales from the right people.

3. Research Methodology

The dissertation has Air Malta, an airline as the case company, taken through an analysis of the measures set in place as it is currently, and will outline what is of potential improvement to the case company wherever required. The dissertation focuses on the case company's market environment, consumer belief and candidacy in the travel industry. As there are over 5,000 airlines existing in the aviation sector, the comparison of other airlines allows the observation into external strengths that other may have, and whether such strengths could be implemented to the airline's benefit for the sake of the clients whom choose to fly with airline repeatedly in the coming future. The dissertation conclusively aims to send suggestions for the airline to refine its own characteristics and potential advantages to choose in its target market. Such research is purely based on the aim to convey the importance of marketing research into business campaigns and the need to create new methods of profit-making potential.

From the literature review and research into the context of Air Malta in terms of understanding the airline's marketing practises, it was concluded that the primary research needed to tackle the understanding of their presence, branding, changes was required to grasp the marketing insight of the case company. The primary research was taken from quantitative and qualitative research methods, both taken to narrow out the airline's and consumer's aspects of the airline business.

3.1. Qualitative research

For qualitative measures, the company interview with Air Malta personnel would involve the understanding of the airline as a regional carrier, through the observation of the discussion made with Antoine Vella, the Head of Marketing for Air Malta, whom would decidedly choose where to proceed within such a marketing environment for the airline.

As a measure of precaution against the potential dismissal of the interview, two previous interviews done on the reflection on Air Malta from a recent conference would be utilised to grasp the insights from two prominent figures employed with Air Malta plc., as the insights from such interviews are sufficient to utilise as an observation of their strategic processes to be implemented into the SWOT analysis, the competitive analysis and the decision to place forward the preferred choices of where the airline could do better.

As part of the dissertation, the quantitative research process undertaken for the analysis in the marketing strategy involves the reflection of the consumer's desires and perspective of Air Malta. In order to gain a better insight on the potential improvement of the airline's product, the surveys were conducted with earlier travellers from various demographics. As the surveys were measured from their age groups, the quantitative means of such results allow proposals to be formed from what the participant's data has concluded in terms of the highest response.

The secondary data utilised the research of reports that the studies involving the airline market and the various cultural influences taken into consideration, reflecting the similar practise done from competing airlines throughout the decades, and understanding the historical changes the

three competing airlines have gone through to shape the path ahead for success and survival in the travel industry. The comparison to Emirates and Ryanair's business structures involves the observation that each airline functions differently on how to approach their clients, allowing the understanding of marketing differentiation between them, from their sales approach, branding, fleet size, route choices, standards and various packages available. Through the observation of the external competition, the goal to understand the competing airline's offerings was met with success, as the comparison of what differentiations exists was made clear. As various airlines offer similar elements in terms of services, with Ryanair and Emirates as competitive figures of comparison, the research will be conclusively evaluating their platforms respectively to contribute to Air Malta's marketing strategy.

The qualitative research done for the dissertation was be collected from the company interview with Air Malta, as the enquiry on what marketing practises would work best through such a competitive market and underline how much change the restructuring has done from a marketing perspective. As an opportunity to be exposed to Air Malta's marketing department and director to assist on constructing a marketing strategy, the opportunity would be to develop a marketing insight on how national companies delve into understanding the airline sector competition (Spicer, 2018).

As Air Malta did not proceed to arranging the interview, previous interviews done by the airline for marketing purposes where utilised from which the response given were the exact requirements to understand their digital presence and placement in the market (Popova, 2017).

The SWOT analysis was added as an analytical tool to assess Air Malta's strength and weakness as an airline business, analysing the opportunities available to the business, as well

as, the threats the airline faces from competition. The measure undertaken from the analysis is also to evaluate the airline itself, where the following concerns would discern potential improvements such as:

- What do consumers dislike about Air Malta?
- Why do airline consumers change brand choices?
- What could Air Malta do better?
- What is Air Malta's most negative brand attributes?
- What are the biggest obstacles/challenges in Air Malta's sales approach?
- What resources do airline competitors have that Air Malta do not?

The secondary data utilised in the construction of the marketing strategy involved earlier marketing strategies for much larger airlines such as Emirates & Ryanair. The downsizing of the strategy to the Air Malta was done with the understanding of the budget associated with European carriers, smaller fleet size and the quality delivered of the airline. This has been taken into consideration to conceive a strategy that can be of an exemplary nature for a local business to reflect upon. The review of European carriers reflected on various airlines that delve through such competition in the Mediterranean market, where the European Unions' program of airline liberalisation has made it possible for any carriers to enter and compete in the market (Burghouwt, 2015), such as Ryanair and EasyJet delving into prominent airline territories where Lufthansa and Air France function in. This increase in bigger figures in the travel industry constricts smaller airlines to retain or grow in sales, as the market is being driven elsewhere (Bailey, 2019)

The competitive analysis was added to understand further the SWOT approach against competing airlines and whether their threats to Air Malta are potential opportunities where the airline can improve upon. The insights delve into their placement in the market throughout the years and also establishes their dominance in their respective paths, from the increase in fleet size, route portfolio, quality, modernisation, such changes involve a growth which can overwhelm smaller airlines if not taken seriously, such as Monarch, a prestigious airline which collapsed due to the fierce competition (Powley, 2017).

As the competitor analysis will evaluate the competing airlines utilised in the dissertation, the overview of their prominence, strengths, and weakness. This shall be utilised to form information relevant to airline business processes. The information shall then be used to improve Air Malta's efforts and to take advantage of adding further on what is being missed.

3.2. Quantitative Research

From the quantitative research, through the surveying of airline consumers, the use of a random sampling method for the dissertation derived from the concept of evaluating the varied demographics of the travelling audience that is made up of various ages and classes. As consumer belief varies from person to person, the collective understanding of the competing airlines shall be used to measure the premium influence of the services offered on each airline, and how valid are their offerings. The research survey acts as an engaging method to reflect on the consumer's choice, the results taken outline if there are definitive issues in where Air Malta can measure as acceptable results or to be taken further into consideration for reactive decisions to improve upon. The review of such data collection methods involves the exclusion of

attempting to research one demographic, as the airline that utilise their understanding of the current markets of the airlines on their entire audience and build an approach that can attempt as many passengers as they can.

The utilisation of multiple responses represents an unbiased representation of the various demographics of potential or previous airline consumers who would evaluate the survey without previous bias to purchases from Air Malta, and instead take into consideration the potential of Air Malta when chosen for booking flights in the coming future.

The research done shall get a bearing on their marketing strategies and use of articles to see what decisions can be done to lead to a successful direction. The varied demographics allow a larger branching out trends, competition control an airline's capability to perform successfully, supplying an insight to the environment the airline sits on, and how is facing the scenarios respectively.

The primary research for the dissertation was completed through the random sampling of 50 respondents through a structured survey that considers the key aspects of the airline such as the service, brand representation, competitive strength, and consumer perspective. The data was collected from surveying individuals who are airline travellers within the European Union. The airline market is dependent on the consumer's demands which are reflected from the respective airline to set up a connection to sell further, thus requiring the consumer's opinion on such matters.

The number of respondents, of 50 responses, was due to an approach of utilising organic methods of marketing to the travel audience, and due to no compulsory methods to

engage the audience with full responses, it was all up to the viewer correspondent's choice to fully complete or take part in the survey. The response was still of valid use as the increase of numbers would further refine the result of the respondents, as a vast majority of the responses (Provided in the findings).

3.3. Problem definition

The introduction of low-cost carriers in the European Union initiated in the 1990's, stemming from the continued deregulation of the air space in the European Union. As the full fruition of low-cost airlines benefitting from first-mover negotiations with airports and delving into digital sales online, consumers were now facing the consideration of paying cheaper fares for the same destination provided from regional airlines which had not been previously provoked by such broader price ranges for flights rates that disengage from allowing consumers to accept one price, but be considerate to other cheaper options (Paul & Cristobal, 2017)..

Prestigious airlines such as Emirates, delve into quality-based experiences that do not mind charging more to their clients as the clients' intention to travel is to be comfortable and pampered upon throughout their journey with Emirates, thus accepting whatever charges required to receive a service of excellence irrelevant of global crisis (Emirates, Setting a New Standard: 1992, 2020).

The balance of running an airline, while keeping profits over ever-increasing costs (fuel, service demand, economic drag, recession risk) are what airlines depend upon to run successfully. The service-based airline business is utilising consumers as its source of income, generated from the upselling of routes which would generally be the most used in the markets

the airline is serviced upon. The challenge brought by low-cost carriers to regional carriers is the pricing range established for prospective travellers, which would lead to consumers to evaluate their current travel methods and pick a much more cost-effective flight option that did not involve spending as much to get to their destination.

The marketing strategy will have to take into consideration both perspectives that reflect the airline and its clientele, outlining the points at which the airline has done well in supporting their standards and what is not being met. The following perspectives are derived from the consumer, and the airline's approach:

The consumer's perspective:

- The choice of one brand over the other.
- The commodity of added luxury in travel.
- Horrible experience leaves me wondering if paying a bit more gives me better comfort.

The airline's perspective:

- To balance fuel costs and consumer pricing.
- How much are passengers willing to pay?
- Which routes can sell the most?
- Will Air Malta profit from such changes?

Within realistic terms, the clients who travel the most are influenced by pricing, and whether the most desired option in travel is a budget friendly option that low-cost airlines advertise, it leaves Air Malta in a position where it would have to further refine its services to solidify its presence as the desired choice for flying. The exploration of consumer understanding is the

platform for consumer orientated businesses in the tourism sector, and with the placement of transparent goals that construct a presence for the airline other than ticket sales (Hudson, 2020)s.

The brand is dependent on the consumer's direction and utilises routes which are not utilised by low cost carriers, as business destinations have high landing charges and as low cost carriers depend on landing and lying shortly, the delaying and queuing in popular airports is not a feasible option for operations to exists as ticket sales do not reel in the needed income such as regional airlines or transatlantic airlines to utilise the same airports as Air Malta in Europe (Jefferson, 2017).

3.4. Research objectives

The intention to form a marketing strategy will help the airline's structure without compromising its brand standards, as it measures the genuine source of satisfaction clients have been content with and then taken further. The airline's culture shall be respected within the strategy, with the intention to form a sales effort that can be of benefit when applied with the previous methods or potentially add further to Air Malta's current hybrid business model (Galea, 2017).

The concept from the qualitative and quantitative research is to grasp an understanding of the airline consumer market presented and to deduce if Air Malta can satisfy and deliver to such clients at a profitable outcome. The reality of the large operational costs that arise with such airlines and trying to break even with the sales of tickets and services is apparent. The

development of a marketing strategy involves the study of consumer behaviour as the intention to sell a product with the right traits of what consumers interpret as the acceptable requirements needed to initiate interest in booking a flight with Air Malta.

The scope of the dissertation, from a managerial perspective, is to identify the consumer's behaviour in the tourism sector, with relation to the understanding of consumer demographics to understand which countries are of measurable success to the airline's routes (RMIT University, 2020). The demographic segmentation from the marketing strategy is to propel Air Malta to target its consumers more accurately, with the grasp of competing against airlines which dominate the business in the European Union. The inclusion of such airlines implements the acknowledgment of reflecting on their methods on approaching their clients retrospectively

The categorization of consumers, with the sign of consumer appeal of one's product or service, is key to the process of a business that depends upon its clients to generate enough revenue through flight sales to maintain its basic operations. Fares are influenced by revenue making processes from the airline; and whenever the end value of the flight is deemed acceptable in direct proportion to the fee of the fare, the fairness and quality of an airline is placed into light. Such scrutiny in comparison to larger brands in the market then would lead to the final decision in booking flights with the airline or instead proceeding with other choices who would provide a better package or cost less (Galea, 2017).

3.5. Research Questions

The decision to develop a marketing campaign is with the intention to adapt to the current market's demands and accept potential changes in trends from the evaluation of consumers. Airlines have different sales styles made by various markets, to either change their sales efforts or enter the market, with a component which has been thought of by competing brands or constructed to disrupt the current norms of expectations in such a market.

The research questions developed for the dissertation were:

- What methods can a European carrier compete with against renowned carriers?
- What methods can Air Malta compete against prominent carriers within the current business structure?
- What factors may affect a consumer's purchasing decision of a flight?

The primary research was built upon designing a survey that questions airline consumers who have a reflection on the travel services they deem acceptable and the expected standards found to be measurable throughout their journey from one destination to the other.

The SWOT analysis utilised in the dissertation is to allow the airline, or any prospective business, to answer the following questions:

- "What advantages does Air Malta have?"
- "What does the Air Malta do better than its competitors?"

- “What unique or low-cost resources are available to Air Malta that are not available to its rivals?”
- “What are the Unique Selling Propositions (UPS) associated with Air Malta?”

The choice of the SWOT analysis is to build on what can be done well, and to address whatever is lacking within the business, and minimum whatever risks presented to the business and to further evaluate the greatest advantage of changes for success.

3.6. Research limitations

The complication of being unable to complete a direct interview with Air Malta did impeded from allowing genuine questions which have could been asked to gather more information on their marketing approach in the travel industry, while also being exposed to a reputable business well-known with the country for decades. As this involved the scheduling with two prominent figures with the airline, it may have been a discrepancy in scheduling such a time, and after consideration to awaiting a response to arranging an interview, the secondary plan was taken to utilising previous interviews done by the airline to convey the message required to design the strategy effectively.

An issue found was that no previous marketing studies on airlines were found in The Institute of Tourism Studies’ log of previous dissertations, and little in other private institutions and universities as the research was not found to be publicised or easily accessed for public means. This led to a lack of earlier research studies on the topic. Whether such earlier works could be shared in affiliation with other institutions to diversify such knowledge at the student’s

convenience is yet to be determined. The airline has not divulged much of its previous business practises online, other than the generic facts found on the company website (AirMalta, 2020), with most readings found were on the financial difficulties it has faced in the previous thirty years which in turns besmirches the historical reputation of the airline.

A complication of the research survey was to gather interest from organic marketing of the survey online on various platforms such as Facebook & LinkedIn, as users were not obligated to participate and instilled out of their initiative to participate. Paid or sponsored campaigns would have been of great support to the marketing research, to add further clarification and much more accurate statistics on the consumers response to various matters, although the work presented is a potential example of what can be achieved from the research. The use of such surveys can be utilised for referral purposes for potential marketing strategies that choose to immerse into a consumer-focused approach. With the accumulation of the information and data collected from the consumer behaviour surveys, the average consumer did not view Air Malta as making the required sales effort to compete effectively and differentiate from what other airlines can offer.

4. Air Malta's SWOT analysis

The diagnosis of the environment presented from Air Malta throughout its lifespan as an airline involves the application of consumer interest from the Maltese islands, as the airline's base of operations was and currently is only based in Malta. The research findings will reflect on the consumer's response & the SWOT Analysis, which will be undertaking the influence of the internal and external factors of the airline market for Air Malta by segmenting its strengths,

weaknesses, opportunities & threats presented. Such analysis is presented in the SWOT analysis structure below:

The SWOT analysis of Air Malta:	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand reputation • Malta as a major base of operations • Development of consumer loyalty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive industry • Vulnerable to global crisis • Difficult to occupy global market • Financial conditions • Few advertising
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market share expansion • Website presence and modern technology • Competition Committee • Affiliation with renowned brands • Innovative premium services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising fuel costs • Competitors with local bases • External market forces • Internal factors • Price conscious market

The strengths of the airline are its local brand reputation, which is held within the Maltese Islands, the local roots of where the airline flourishes. The airline has taken to developing its customer awareness and tries to encompass retention with the recent restructuring in 2012, new measures were taken to define the booking platform. The introduction of travelling lighter rather than having the sole package is an expectation that is covered nowadays as clients seek variety and ease of travel without having to either stress themselves with too many frills or spend excess on unneeded travel commodities (Air Malta, 2012).

The opportunities thought out on the airline are that its size and potential to diversify into the Mediterranean market, where it can delve into utilising mother methods such as increasing media awareness of the airline, and the potential growth of influence by being affiliated with renowned brands internationally. The potential innovation of the premium services could lead to the catering of clients of higher tastes and bigger budgets at hand to indulge services of convenience and comfort for their ease of travel. As the pandemic has brought the increased safety and exclusivity of travel, the emphasis of the frills of the service being an increased addition to the general travel could be an opportunity to divert from the concept of just a trip to arrive to a destination and to take the form of an experience whilst travelling.

The weaknesses presented to the airline is that although the airlines local base of operations is one of the first for the country, as it is not the sole provider of airline operations as competing airlines are within the same market to break sales as Air Malta does annually. AS the airline has not branched out with a global growth of base operations internationally, the potential to break into other markets would prove to be difficult as other's have built such prominence., leading to a much more difficult chance to enter the market previously occupied by airlines that are already satisfy the perspective's country target audience.

The threats presented for Air Malta as a local company and as an international competitor is the placing of competitors setting up bases within the same country where their sole base runs, with the Malta Air coming into fruition in thew recent years coming to mind. The vulnerability of the airline in global crisis is clear, with the pandemic annihilating the potential for growth when clients have cancelled flights and are looking for refunds without the intention to delay their trips and risk more. The increased loss of such situations would contribute to much more

restrictive financial situations which could lead to potential redundancies or layoffs from the business when in difficulty. As the airline has a system of dependable employees, with pilots in mind, the treatment of such scenarios is highly fragile with the risk of damaging the complete operation of the business if the employment of the direct contributors to the business cease to continue.

Although the critique of the airline is made aware, it is the acknowledgement of the case company's strong and weak points in the market, and irreflective of the business's part as a large or a small contributor, its reflection on its placement in the market is of influence to devise a path which is set on what they can achieve, rather than making generic goals that would otherwise be impossible to achieve with smaller airliner carriers.

4.1. Competitive analysis of Ryanair & Emirates

Due to the airline's international experience and their leading positions in the airline industry (Hudson, 2020), with Emirates even having a global influence, they can influence and dominate the airline passenger market. With the intention to explain and understand the strong points of both competing airlines, one must analyse both airline in detail with a perspective on their most relevant features. As consumers are affected by many factors that are unique to their thought process, whether it is catering to their need or to a situation, the psychological, personal and social factors warp and form a path to a purchasing choice deemed of equal value to the budget and standards placed for the desired purchase.

4.2. Ryanair

Ryanair's beginnings did not start earlier from Air Malta's time, with the Irish airline's roots starting at 1985. As its focus to supply low rates as its selling point, competing airlines such as British Airways and Aer Lingus, both competing airlines in British air space, were forced to lower flight rates to attract the demand Ryanair was receiving. The pressure for airlines who had previously managed their sales through class-based prices to reduce their rates was evident, and even until today, Ryanair's rates still remain unbeaten to this day, primarily due to the competing airlines finding it impossible to retain the business on lower-priced flights (Jefferson, 2017).

The Irish airline has also increased routes into Ukraine, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Jordan and Turkey in 2018, showing further growth into entering new markets even after thirty years being in business.

The airline currently stands as Europe's largest airline group and market leading European low-cost airline, leading to a reach far larger than what Air Malta offers. The airline is not content with what it solely has, but instead continues to seek areas of improvement and make recommendations from the available possibilities. Such growth and expansion purely depend on the low-cost operation functioning effectively, whilst achieving the requiring operating efficiency in order to satisfy its clientele (Ryanair, 2019).

4.3. Emirates

Emirates initiated just a year before Ryanair, with the airline bringing in a level of standards within in-flight entertainment, with the example of adding video systems in all seats, throughout each cabin class of its fleet, and telecommunication on the Airbus fleet in each class (Emirates, Setting a New Standard: 1992, 2020). The introduction of reshaping the consumer experience with the vast additions of routes led to an airline having a vast increase in its route portfolio, with many choices becoming available to their clients (Bangladesh Monitor, 2020).

Emirates is not known for the offerings of cheap flights, although the airline ensures exclusivity, privacy, luxury, and providing an experience resembling hotel stays on flights, justifying the exuberant pricing, scaling to near €12,000 per first-class flights. The bridging of such prices does not hinder its business, and the airline still was collectively named as the world's best airline in 2016 (Emirates, Setting a New Standard: 1992, 2020). The airline has also created a partnership with Air Malta as code share partners, which led to both airlines to increasing and refining their destination network.

As each airline gains an advantage from having access to having certain routes from various destinations, the code sharing partnership helps airlines reaches new destinations or even ease the costs of airlines to branch out, and although Air Malta may not be the largest fleet, it maintains a strategic placement in the travel market to be of service to others who would otherwise be losing the profits from the business and leisure of the Maltese Islands (MaltaIndependent, 2005).

The competitive outlook from such airlines is to offer flights to destination not usually served by the known airline, which would lead to also the development of consumer loyalty to gather a diverse choice of flights at one's disposal and allowing passengers on frequent flyer programs to earn points on routes that could not be previously served by the airlines (Emirates, Codeshares, 2020).

The airline promotes and has a diverse culture, as it has many subsidizers and more than 50 parent companies (Emirates, 2020). The prime aim of Emirates as in unison with its employees is to deliver the unique and superior customer services. As the airline delves into career development and employee training, employees are their key assets and they provide many benefits to the employees including the pension benefits, fringe benefits, bonuses and many much more (Emirates, 2020). The salaries given to their employees are merit based pay as well as the pure performance-based pay. Therefore, through such an incentive, their employees are also loyal to the airline (Group, 2011).

4.4. The exploration of consumer perception

It comes to no surprise that airlines shift rates and packages according to what the consumer demands, with influential airlines even placing their mark on the acceptable rate by shifting the market's rates. The fact remains that airlines, with enough backing of funds to invest in new strategies, will cater to the demands as according to the client requirements so as to close in on the sales effort from such consumers. As the market involves a scope of views from consumers, the survey viewed the consumer's perspective of the presence of the airline to local and

international clientele. The perception was grasped to utilise the aftersales response of airline travellers whose opinion is valid for client-related reasons, which is a vision that is not publicized as the end-user experience is not

As a market, the aviation industry offers little grace for smaller brands to grow into the market without large investments and a broader market appeal, which Air Malta does not offer as well as other airlines do due to the factoring in of a smaller corporate structure that is solely based in Malta and not functioning in other countries as of yet (Maja Sestendrup, 2017). Thus, the intention to explore what can attract the closer markets to the local base in Malta is vital to reaching closer audiences which are realistic to the airline's business goals to attracting the right tourists (NSO, 2019).

Competitive observations of Ryanair and Emirates from the consumer audience differ in terms of their size due to the financial power both airlines have to back their businesses for ventures to satisfy their clients, although the scrutiny of their quality and efficiency in service is evaluated so as to compare the value given over the price paid from consumers (Leff, 2019). The placement of better online tools could divert from the consumer's decision to purchase flights solely based on the schedule and price, which in turn can upsell other products available from Air Malta, and even consider premium options, as various passengers accept to do so when booking with Emirates.

4.5. Potential strengths against other carriers

A strategy devised against low cost carriers could be the regulation of consumer satisfaction through Air Malta's services, which is an advantageous tool against low-cost carriers, which suffer to satisfy such clientele. Such a measure is to be placed under scrutiny with the survey and outweigh whether the airline does well and where it has not met expectations, which shall be researched further in the dissertation.

As Gulf carriers such as Emirates are expanding their capacity over routes previously serviced by European carriers, airlines such as Air Malta, are losing market share and continue facing operational losses (Vella, 2020) and the ability to set prices and control a part of the market where it is established on local or close grounds. Airlines such as Ryanair increase their footing through the purchase of routes which are generally not the main destination of a traveller, yet close to it, which clients accept the choice of travel due to the cheaper rate involved. Air Malta does well to retain its placement into the market as a feasible choice to book from as it offers flights to destinations which are not covered by the routes from Ryanair, and Emirates had to code share to even get a grasp of such routes.

The airline's small size can lead to polishing their effort on their audience and contain their consistency to deliver with the audience they currently serve, as it can lead to creating a reputable platform for interested countries or business affiliates that would be considerate to affiliating themselves with an airline of concrete stability and measurable success (Cento, 2009).

4.6. The strategic potential of Air Malta

Air Malta has various challenges to go over before being financially successful through other methods, and such low-cost airlines are bringing in less profits from short-haul flights, they depend on the implementation of other attributes that come with flights such as: luggage allowance, meals, seating, complimentary entertainment, which upon analysis of various airlines, such as Emirates and Ryanair, all have different methods of giving and taking from their passengers. This differentiation can work to one's advantage if they distribute the more likeable option passengers would be happy to pay.

The analysis of current marketing strategies done with the hotels in Malta offering reduced rates for clientele can ensure consumer interest through various channel of tourism businesses. The choice of destinations offered by the airline also influence the likelihood of choice when passengers are booking their reservations online through third party companies or directly through Air Malta. As the airline carrier approaches seasonal periods, the boosted frequency of routes to & from: Paris Charles De Gaulle, Hamburg, Kiev, London Heathrow, Lyon, Munich and Tunis increase consumer interest in travelling to such destinations. As the cost of direct booking flights with Air Malta involves lesser time wasted, it may be an addition of convenience as low-cost carriers may be unable to offer key airport destinations, as they choose cheaper airports due to competition rates.

An effort done by Air Malta was to rebrand itself, providing a fresh intake on its logo and livery, thus polishing its effort to remain current and in competition with the leading brands such as Emirates & Ryanair. The competing airline have different traits, although both are capable in holding a vast control on their respective consumer segments. The brand recognition that both airlines have been practical examples of brand prestige, where at times airlines do

raise prices or change the quality of their services according to their requirements, rather than the demands of the consumers that utilise the service.

The affiliation with the Malta Tourism Authority to develop a strategy regarding route network expansions can allow the opportunity to garner business with fresh markets who would be willing to boost the nation's capability as a top tourist destination through the year, boosting the sales factor without the influence of the seasonal sales.

5. Analysis and Discussion of the results

The dissertation shall now take an approach to provide what the local airline's representative state in terms of performance and airline placement in the travel market, and through the survey findings, the types of consumers are what the airline can depend upon for the higher likelihood of returning to the same service and perform to satisfy better. Air Malta would do well with increasing the brand loyalty proposition with their travellers as they seek benefits when deciding to solely go with one airline for their travels, rather than shifting from one airline to the other when flying on every occasion.

5.1. Interview findings

The company interview designed to enquire on Air Malta's practise directly was attempted by emailing the marketing director of the operations, although no response or acceptance (With records of communications provided in appendices) was given for my request to interview them. Instead, the research done on previous interviews with the case company were found online, which were utilised to grasp Air Malta's placement in the market. The first interview reviewed was with regards to the digital presence of Air Malta, which was an opportunity to observe Air Malta being presented in international conferences, thus branching into networking events with competing airlines and prospering to network with other carriers (Popova, 2017).

Olga Popova's enquiries into the business digital presence, an important component in today's business models, led to (Wuggetze, 2019) Mr. Vella stating that the digital priorities of Air Malta aim to get flexibility, agility, personalization, offering and providing a product that the client wants and needs. Olga then delved into understanding what has been implemented into Air Malta in the recent years after the restructuring. Antoine Vella took to explain the redefined reward system, with booking of events and an example of a small game giving a new concept of gaining new loyalty from clients who are happy to return to the airline to book more.

In the interview, Mr. Vella mentioned the use of Key Performance Indicators, a performing tool that allows the evaluation of the success of an organization from the activities it engages in (Velimirovic, 2011). As Key Performance Indicators are being implemented in various sectors (Velimirovic, 2011), it is of no doubt that Air Malta seeks to use the similar methods to invoke success from its performance and placement of services within the travel market, as

it inclines to the effort of making smart practises out of its previous business processes (Popova, 2017).

In the second interview with Tony Calleja, the enquiry into the competitive stance was discussed with Maja Sestendrup to reflect on how Air Malta deals with the main challenges. As Mr. Calleja outlined the greatest challenge is survival for such an airline. The acknowledgement of large competitors, price wars and grasping the attention of customers is most vital. Mr. Calleja explained the reality that even though Air Malta is delivering, it is still difficult for the airline, as other successful airline carriers are still leading in route choice and promotional offers. The mention of low-cost carriers placing various promotion in the markets has placed pressure on the airline to retain its prices on short haul and long haul flights, which lead to a difficulty in forecasting loads for Air Malta, as passengers have become hesitant to book immediately, whilst awaiting for cheaper prices from such offer placements elsewhere (Maja Sestendrup, 2017).

The interviews led to the reflection of Air Malta building further upon its performance and its awareness to the competition. The airline chooses to measure its performance to become more flexible and agile to price changes and promotions that may be seasonal or unique, leading to the airline to creating a proactive strategy that is being implemented to coincide with such vigorous change (Maja Sestendrup, 2017).

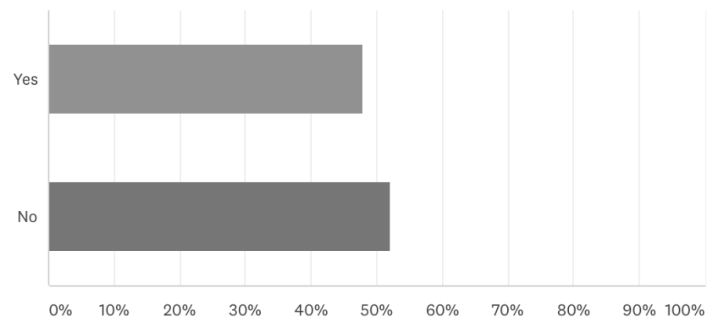
5.2. Survey findings

With the understanding of sampling the general audience of airline consumers, the survey was distributed to people of various demographics, who utilised airlines, and would have likely gone through the Malta International Airport for their travels, which involves a market where Air Malta sells and operates in. The use of the surveys outlines a few preferences that are highly influential in one's choice to book a flight such as: luggage restrictions, booking time, inflight benefits (Such as complimentary food, beverages & Wi-Fi), level of luxury, and the prospective opinion on booking the flight for transatlantic trips or generally use short distance for personal reasons.

The survey's results were derived from 51 responses, which added to a basic reflection on the mass's response on to purchasing decisions that are influenced by simple methods such as the purchasing process, rates, reliability, competitive stance and service quality. The respective results discuss further the result presented and the discussion on the value of such consumer insights.

Would you avoid using Air Malta due to its rates?

Answered: 50 Skipped: 0

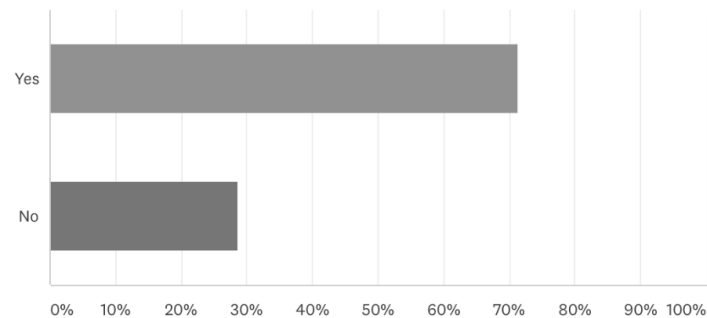


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	48.00% 24
No	52.00% 26
TOTAL	50

The response from the surveys outlined that various consumers were not deterred from choosing Air Malta, although by a small margin of four per cent from the response. Although consumers are willing to choose the airline out of prejudice from its rates, it is by a small fraction, leading to the potential decision for consumers to reflect on competing rates whenever they are booking their flights.

Would you book with Air Malta with an app?

Answered: 49 Skipped: 1



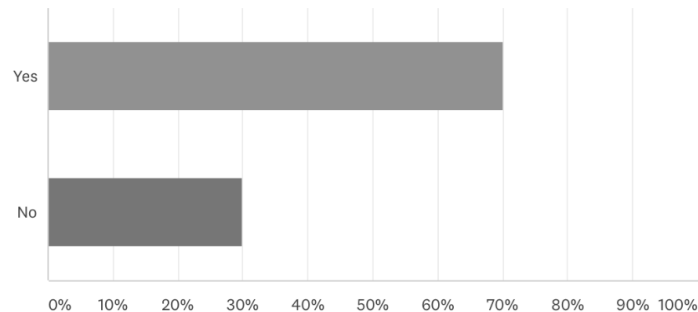
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	71.43% 35
No	28.57% 14
TOTAL	49

The surveying of the potential use of an app (Software designed for single purposes and would have quick functions) for the airline outlined the potential capability the business would have from mobile and tablet users who would look to book with the airline through conventional means. With 70 per cent of the participants desiring the use of an app for booking with the airline, an exclusive app catered to Air Malta travellers would evoke a premium approach to diverting the potential sales from third-party websites or booking engines, and instead concentrate on selling directly to Air Malta through their own app. Such an approach would be for the means of convenience, servicing tailored needs, reward acknowledgement of continued use and also travellers would be accommodated quicker through a designated app catering to them, rather than being part of a market shared by others online.

With previous experience in marketing in small projects and utilising social media as an advertising effort for companies, the addition of apps and providing more practical means of using Air Malta's loyalty program would be an efficient method to implement the business's current model at the consumer's convenience.

Does the in-flight service (For example: host service, free wi-fi, free movies, merchandise) make a difference in the travel experience?

Answered: 50 Skipped: 0

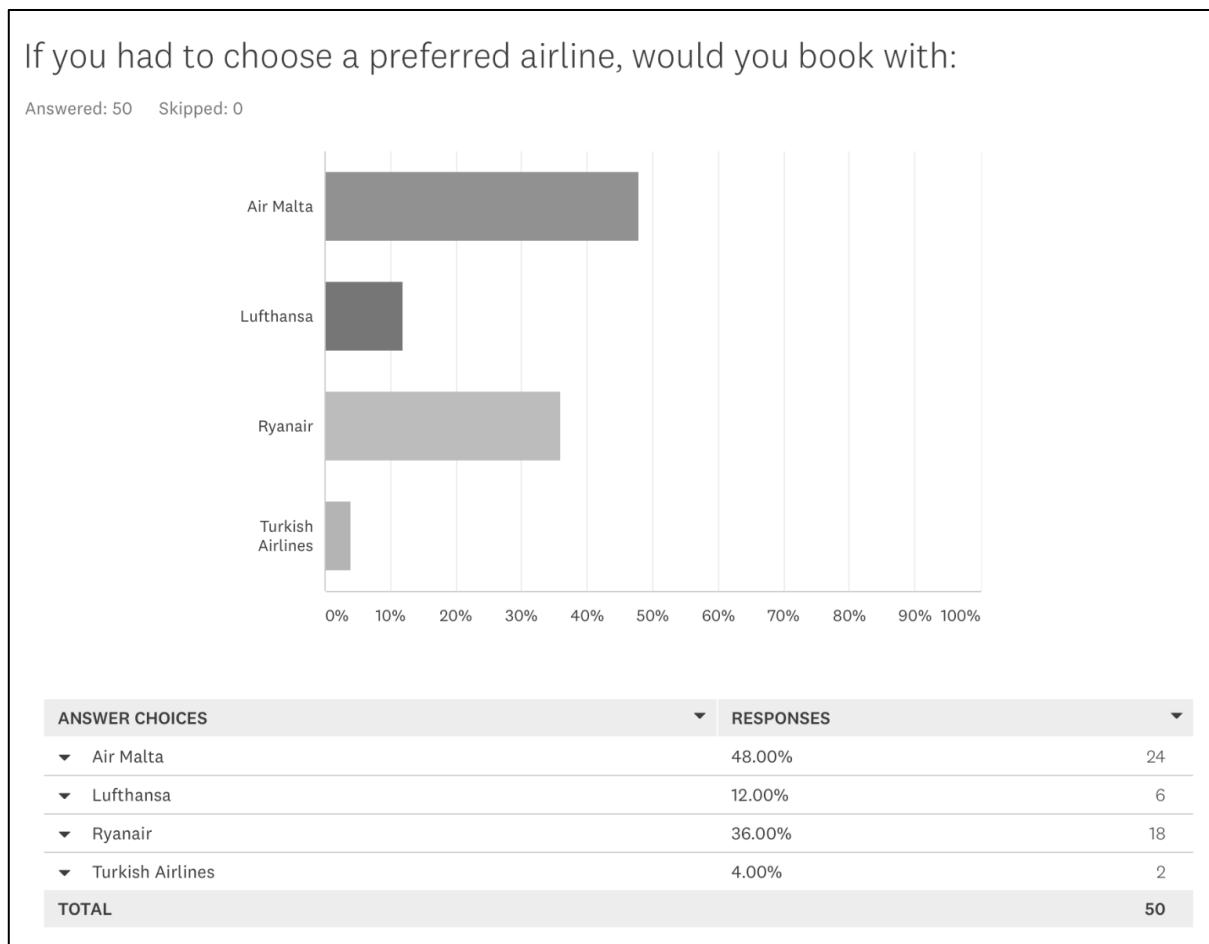


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	70.00% 35
No	30.00% 15
TOTAL	50

The responses received from the survey outline a 70 per cent of the participants agreed on the in-flight experience being of importance to their travels.

As the flight service leaves an imprint on the experience provided from the airline, the customers are left with a performance-based judgement and reflect on their ideal environment whenever travelling. Through the competitive analysis of the 3 competing airlines, Air Malta stands to be an airline of service-based experience over financial savings for their travels, similar to Emirates whom excel at such inflight services globally. As consumers are paying money, it is evident that they expect some form of service for their payment, and the travel generally involves hours on airline carriers, consumers are left with whatever the airline provides them to be content with to satisfy their needs whilst travelling ,which in turn may lead to positive or negative referrals to other potential travellers, who may tend to try that experience. Such consumer preferences through this channel are vital to Air Malta's growth. With the reflection from the 2019 Airline International Destination Satisfaction study, it was made well aware that a cheap ticket is not the single most important choice travellers consider

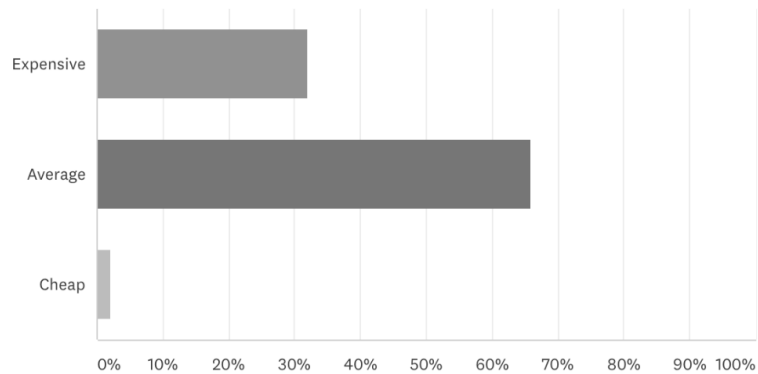
when booking flights, but rather; the exceptional customer service, satisfying food when available, convenient schedules and an airline's reputation were more important than providing such low fares.



In the survey the inclusion of two other competing airlines, Lufthansa and Turkish Airlines, were added as the well-used airlines to grasp what consumers reflect upon when reviewing the airline of choice when booking. Airlines build a reputation from their brand status, and through the response collected, Air Malta was chosen as the preferred airline. As clients based their flight decisions based on previous experiences or may form new choices from the given influences, the airline still stood as the preferred choice amongst the participants.

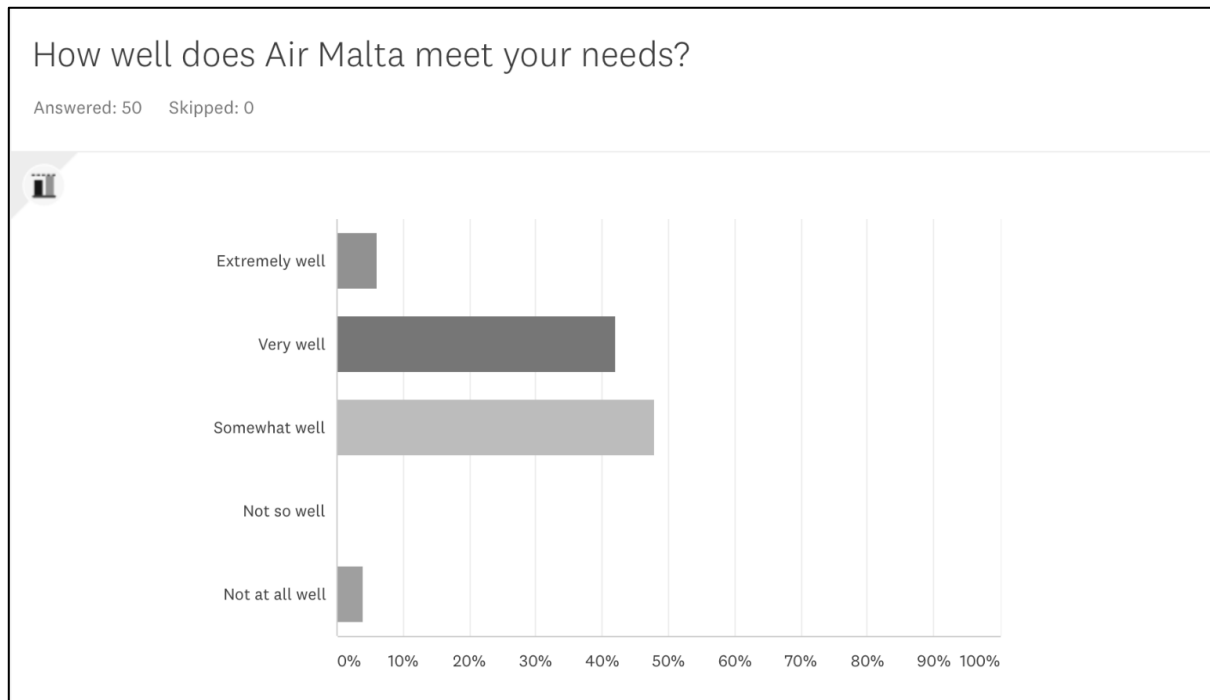
Are Air Malta's rates competitive?

Answered: 50 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Expensive	32.00%	16
▼ Average	66.00%	33
▼ Cheap	2.00%	1
TOTAL		50

The evaluation of rates from the consumer's response was vital to understand where the airline stands to be competitive in the market and whether it can easily lose its sales efforts in comparison to low-cost carriers, who coin in such methods to attract clients who may decide to book, based on their budgets for their travels.

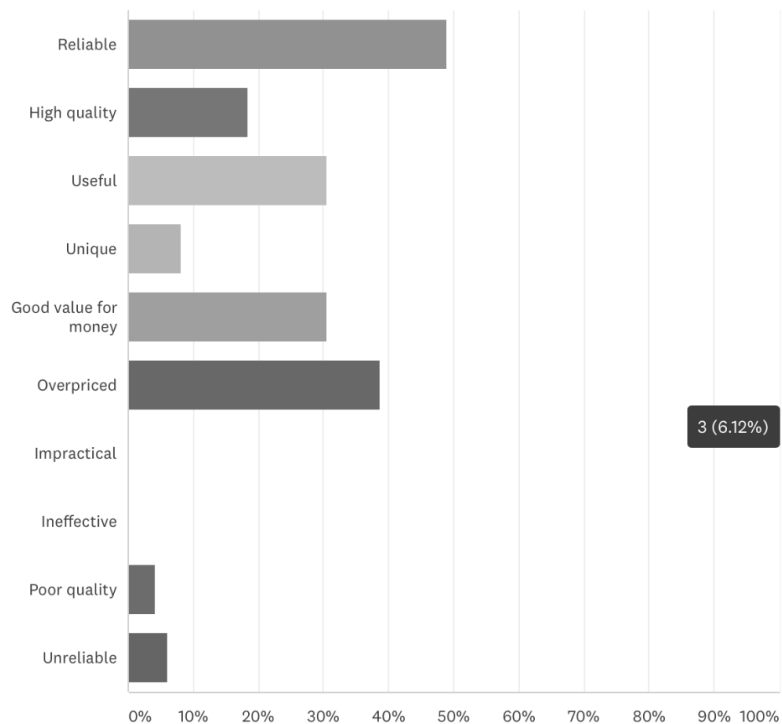


As the measure to define where the airline stands with its clients' needs, the approach to question if their clients' need is met was to justify such expectations are being met, and whether the passengers review of their trips notes if their requirements were met from the airline.

Such a response where the needs of clients were met somewhat well is required to understand the greater scope of what needs are met from the clients, and whether frequent flyers who would be the most reliable form of clients. As a majority of participants complimented the reliability of the service, the airline has met expectations, though not as well as one would expect in the quality. Such a result would determine that the service provided was not meeting the quality-based expectations or even exceeding their demands whilst traveling the airline and the projection of an experience that can do is incremental to achieving customer retention where the consumer is being catered to throughout their whole flight experience.

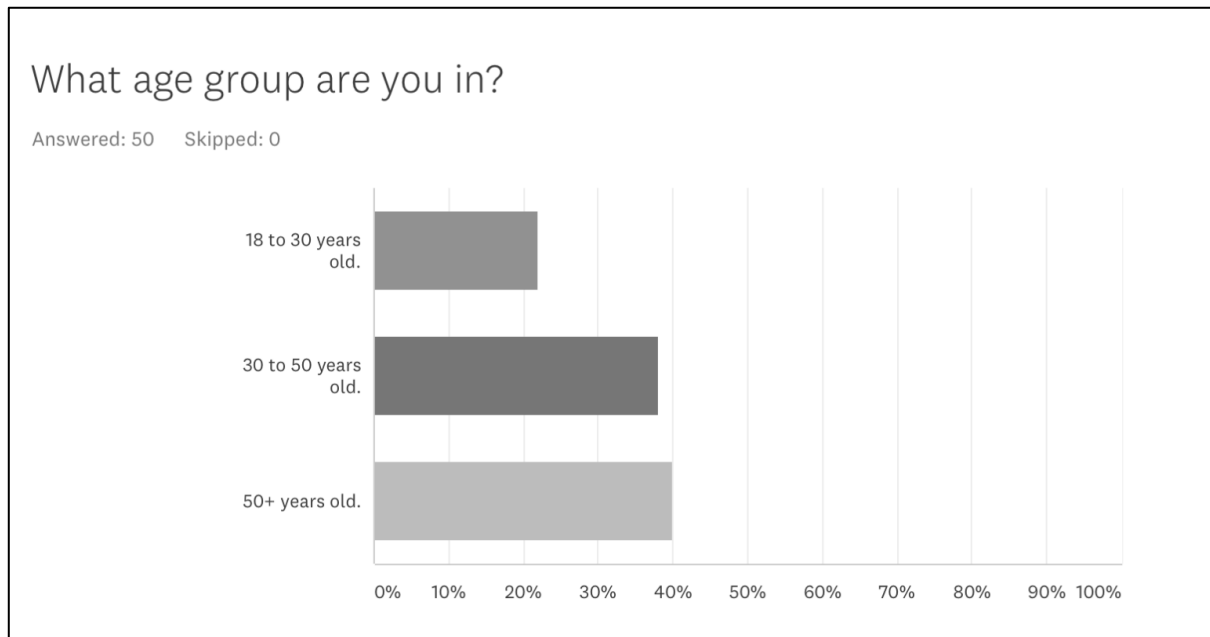
Which of the following words would you use to describe Air Malta? Select all that apply.

Answered: 49 Skipped: 1

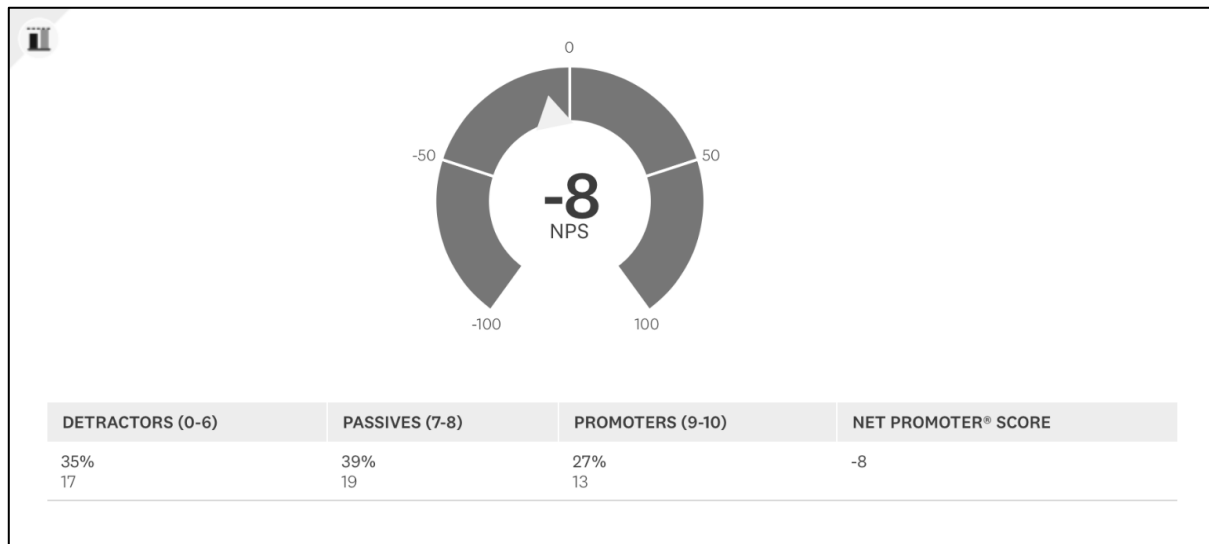


The use of various phrases associated with quality measurements were implemented into the survey questions, which allowed the participants to freely choose what words could best describe the airline. As the result provided a positive indication that the airline is reliable as the highest score, the results show that the airline's performance in delivering to its clients has been met and it does not fail to satisfy their clients whenever they are booking with Air Malta.

The notable result was that the airline was deemed overpriced, a factor which takes into consideration that the influence of low-cost carriers may have an advantage here over regional carriers, whose prices may not be as flexible and low as what low-cost carriers can freely offer on an annual basis.



The age groups of the participants were added for the understanding of which age group of airline travellers were most travelling, and the result came to be 40 per cent from airline travellers were over fifty years of age. As older demographics would relish in having an experience that provides comfort, ease, and convenience, the potential step to devise strategies that are not solely age-centric, but rather may involve factors such as: thoughtful products, simple designs, user-friendly interface, clear features, easy-to-handle controls. These simple measure would involves an experience that is based on the emphasis to service each target audience and with such a high amount of aged traveller, it would be of positive integration in catering to such a target audience (Evans, 2013).



The net promote score is utilised for the measurement of customer experience and predicts a potential for business growth. The lowest of scores in the net promotion metric are the detractors, who are unhappy customers who can damage the brand and impeded growth through potential negative word-of-mouth. The passive responses are individuals who are satisfied but are unenthusiastic customers who are vulnerable to complete offerings which offer a better package or savings. The promoter response would be loyal enthusiasts who would keep buying from the same brand and also refer to others, fuelling potential growth to the airline's benefit (Satmetrix, 2020).

The result above is based on the net promoter measure from the survey resulted in a negative likelihood that consumers would recommend the airline's products or services to others. The placement of such a result allows a component that can add to the present and future business metric of Air Malta, as the airline points to the right direction in unison with its target audience. As the result defined a lack of promoters from the survey, the net promoter score, a management tool designed to gauge the potential of Air Malta's consumer relationships, the response resulted in a negative eight per cent figure.

As Air Malta has retained certain qualities that stamp its status as an airline choice of quality, rather than succumbing to the market demand of low-cost flights, it would do well to evaluate the key options that quality airlines such as Emirates have used to be of use to the airline and to refine a service that is measured as more than just acceptable, but to exceed expectations.

6. Conclusion

The apparent issues found through the SWOT analysis was that the airline's footing in the market is small in comparison to the larger airlines competing, which have established themselves as much more successful brands that have larger roots in the aviation business. Such a consumer perception that brands, with prominence, placed further considerations for Air Malta to be shelved as a potential purchasing choice when in comparison to prominent airlines. As the airline can learn from the weakness of being smaller than bigger airlines, the reflection of the successful paths by other prominent airlines could be done, such as the market share expansion of the airline, updating its website presence, and modernising its in-flight technology to today's standards. The affiliation of brands as mentioned in the research, is of benefit to getting Air Malta's placement into international markets through the opening of bases in other countries, where sufficient investments have been made to ensure a safe backing.

The research undertaken resulted in the consumers not believing the brand is being as innovative as it could be when compared to other airlines. Various concepts such as pricing, entertainment or quality are measures that are influential to one's choice in airlines. For future measures, the marketing strategy would require a campaign to delve into the brand's standing

point as a European carrier that assures it takes its consumers opinion seriously and it evaluates the consumer's mindset. A well-suited brand that resonates with its returning clients is required to attract the correct retention of clients.

The consideration of the studies was taken further to be reviewed with the potential affiliation of the airline with a much larger brand to increase their commercial presence, such as the joint venture between the Maltese Government and Ryanair to invest in a Maltese start-up airline named "Malta Air", which would allow Ryanair to grow its sizeable presence in Malta (Ryanair, 2019).

Air Malta has established itself as a regional airline in the Mediterranean market, the core emphasis of being required upon communication, sustainability measures, service, reliability and costs. The airline has resumed functioning in such a vigorous market (Air Malta, 2020) where Emirates and Ryanair have survived the pandemic and with Ryanair continuing to dominate a vast majority of Europe's routes due to fleet size and financial power, leading one to estimate that monopoly of such size can push smaller businesses to move out of the airlines sector due to the competitive pressure and larger methods of traveller support. Through the pandemic, Emirates even became the first airline in the world to provide global cover which covers medical expenses of passengers flying in any class, who may become infected with Covid-19 whilst travelling with them (Emirates, Free global cover for COVID-19, 2020).

The conclusion of the analysis and research of understanding the consumers and the competing airlines has led to the following insights to consult for potential options to improve upon:

- The designing of a mobile & tablet friendly app for booking solely with Air Malta.

- To review the inflight experience, as a measure to refine further.
- To research further what are their client's needs.

These measures would then have to be based on the financial capabilities Air Malta so as to invest further into developing itself. Consumers are also individuals who are influenced by the media coverage of global situations, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, which may hinder the further progression of the travel market in terms of safety and travel restrictions (WHO, 2020).

6.1. Recommendations

The introduction of public forums from consumers to airlines intends to allow the opportunity for consumers to contribute to the airline's quality and prestige. Although the negative net promoter score is not cited as the most supportive intention, it would contribute to the narrowing down of general issues found by airline consumers whilst travelling with Air Malta and such an outcome can allow further investments to tackle the issue effectively.

The inclusion of brands who contribute can also allow franchises to support the airline from brand affiliation. A known example was of Lego developing a flighty safety video for Turkish Airlines, with the motive behind to upsell a movie release, a brand effort whilst also delivering the basic requirements of the airline's safety measure to its passengers as the flight departs shortly after. The joint effort allowed both companies to coin in on brand affiliation to earn profits off potential viewers of the advertisement, while also provide a casual approach to advertising to the masses for creativity and merchandising opportunities (Nudd, 2018).

A recurring issue found throughout the research and results with consumers was that the airline's footing in the market is small when compared to the competing airline carriers. Research for airlines with a larger footprint in their global presence was vaster than what is available on the regional carrier, allowing a limited scope on what can be observed and measured. Such competing airlines have established themselves as much more successful brands that have built vaster networks and contain large financial reserves against financial & global crisis (Spagnol, 2020). It would be recommended that the airline could gain further status to be applicable for potential sponsorships, financial backings, or increase their global reputation.

The research undertaken to understand the airline traveller perspective resulted in a response from consumers that believe the brand is not being as innovative as it could be when compared to other airlines. Various concepts such as pricing, entertainment or quality (measures that are influential to one's choice in airlines) have not been the most positive from the surveys, and it would be recommended to divide the measures taken by the airline to become financially successful again and also aim to satisfy their clients, as consumers would not care to look at the financial issues of the airline, but trust the reliability and quality are met whenever travelling with such an airline.

The explanation of airlines justifying their prices is all done by effective marketing and whether clients will evaluate this, is all on how it is all sponsored by the airline's ability to foster the correct brand image that defines itself with the valued support it provides to its loyal consumers throughout such times.

6.2. Final Limitations

The dissertation's structure and research were carried out prior to the Covid-19 pandemic influencing the aviation sector, with particular note to the change in business processes in airlines to retain whatever they have, rather than reach new paths due to the reduction in sales globally. The placement of the study would otherwise help understand how the functionality of the strategizing of a business can take uncertain turns which are different to the previous business practises utilised to garner sales.

The surveys based in the studies had also finalised an understanding of the sector's basis of competition on the forefront of any airline carrier, whilst the current changes of the pandemic have forced various business with furlough measures, layoff, liquidation, reduction in fleet size, and even Emirates suspending operation of flights to various destinations, with Malta being in the list of the destinations in March 2020 (International Finance, 2020).

The evolution of marketing practises have taken a turn on which would involve retaining the key components of businesses, with travel-based businesses forced to shed any practises deemed irrelevant within the current pandemic to deliver the basic components of their service or reduce mass tourism in favour of fewer clients and higher prices. With such prices, a reassurance of what is being sold has improved to cater safety and exclusivity to the case company's business, that being now more incremental than ever, and such changes were presented in less than a year and is an foreseeable challenge that, until the case numbers lower or settle, the restrictions and limitations in place for how the airline can function fully, shall be a challenge the airline will have to face and tackle for the coming months, and any potential crisis with similar repercussions.

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Appendices

i. Interview Transcripts(s)

1st Interview transcript:

Interview with Antoine Vella (Head of Digital Hub & Marketing at Air Malta Plc.)

Olga Popova: “I am here at the Hamburg Aviation Conference with Antoine Vella from Air Malta. Could you please briefly describe your responsibilities at air Malta?”

Antoine Vella: “Okay, so I am basically responsible for all direct sales channels including the digital, so that’s all the websites, E-Commerce auxiliaries. I am also responsible for the sales office the outsourcing agreement with the call centre and staff travel as well.”

Olga Popova: “Okay. So, what are the digital priorities for Air Malta?”

Antoine Vella: “Okay, so we've recently grown quite significantly, in terms of presence and digital. Our current priorities are to get flexibility and agility back into our hands. So that's the main focus. But from that, always looking at personalising, offering and providing products that our customers really want.”

Olga Popova: “Yeah, okay. What are the main changes for you have & what are the main changes that you have implemented into Air Malta, digital?”

Antoine Vella: “Recently we've implemented a product in conjunction with discounted where basically this is tied up to reward system where passengers booking a ticket online, they get to select an outcome of an event, in this case that read it events, like football games the events that they get the reward back that they can reuse on Airmalta.com. So, it's like a rewarding the customers but also a new way of getting loyalty. Because you're getting the passenger back to the website to purchase.”

Olga Popova: “Alright, and what do you think of the next big thing?”

Antoine Vella: ‘The next big thing is KPI’s. So, making more use of KPI’s, consuming KPI’s, separating the front end with the back end, and from the back end to the booking engine. getting control to the market, flexibility and being agile, to go back into the market as quickly as possible.”

Olga Popova: “Yeah, okay. Thank you so much for your time.”

Antoine Vella: “Thank you.”

(The interview was conducted by **Olga Popova** with **Antoine Vella** at the Hamburg Aviation Conference - Think Future 2017) (Popova, 2017)

2nd Interview transcript:

Interview with Mr. Tony Calleja (Head of Analytics at Air Malta Plc.)

Maja Sestendrup: “Welcome to the Hamburg aviation conference. I’m here (Maja Sestendrup, 2017) with Tony Calleja. You are from Air Malta and I have some questions to you, here, at the Hamburg Aviation Conference. What are the main challenges for air Malta in the current competitive environment?”

Tony Calleja: “The main challenges are survival. survival of a small fish in a big shape with big competitors and price wars, continuous price works with continuous price promotions by numerous carriers, getting the attention of customers towers your airline. It's tough being a small brand, even if it delivers.”

“Still, we’re actively unknown in many markets where we operate is also tough because most of our business is in coming into our home market and we only have one base in Malta, but we need to be customers of other markets with British German French customers coming to us and they have more choices to choose an airline to come Malta then just so that's the main challenge and with that obviously survival and long term financial stability for the carrier.”

Maja Sestendrup: “Okay, perfect, and in terms of customer behaviour, what are the main changes that Air Malta notices?”

Tony Calleja: “The biggest change I would say is the shorter time between booking and flight. I think this has come about, because of the numerous promotions that are put on the

market by us and also even more so by our competitors especially low-cost carriers. People expect promotional offers every month so they delay their purchase, especially if it's a short break holiday which they can postpone and take on another day.”

“If it is a longer-term holiday for say fortnight with their families, they will book ahead maybe 3,4 months ahead but if it's a short break 3 day stay which are increasing these three days and we can stay then the time to book is much shorter. What that means to an airline is, it's much harder to forecast your loads, to forecast your passenger volumes, and also to forecast what your revenues will be.”

Maja Sestendrup: “Okay, thank you so much.”

(The interview was conducted by **Maja Sestendrup** with **Tony Calleja** at the Hamburg Aviation Conference - Think Future 2017) (Maja Sestendrup, 2017)

ii. Survey

Air Malta Consumer Behaviour Survey Sheet

My name is Bernard Chircop. I am reading for a bachelor's degree in International Hospitality Management with The Institute of Tourism Studies, based in Malta. I am currently carrying out research on designing a marketing strategy based on consumer behaviour as part of my thesis. With the use of this online survey, I would like to gather information from individuals who travel by airline carriers and have been exposed to the travel experience.

Be assured that all answers you provide will be kept in the strictest confidentiality and will remain anonymous.

1. How likely is it that you would recommend Air Malta to a friend or colleague?

From "Not at all likely" to most "Extremely Likely"

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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2. What age group are you in?

- ☐ 18 to 30 years old.
- ☐ 30 to 50 years old.

- ☐ 50+ years old.

3. Which of the following words would best describe Air Malta?

Select all that apply.

- ☐ Reliable
- ☐ High quality.
- ☐ Useful.
- ☐ Unique.
- ☐ Good value for money.
- ☐ Overpriced.
- ☐ Impractical.
- ☐ Ineffective.
- ☐ Poor quality.
- ☐ Unreliable.

4. How well does Air Malta meet your needs?

- ☐ Extremely well.
- ☐ Very well.
- ☐ Somewhat well.
- ☐ Not so well.
- ☐ Not at all well

5. Are Air Malta's rates competitive?

- ☐ Expensive.
- ☐ Average.
- ☐ Cheap.

6. If you had to choose a preferred airline, would you book with:

- ☐ Air Malta
- ☐ Emirates
- ☐ Ryanair

7. Does the in-flight service (For example: host service, free wi-fi, free movies, merchandise) make a difference in the travel experience?

- ☐ Yes.
- ☐ No.

8. Would you book with Air Malta with an app?

- ☐ Yes.
- ☐ No.


9. Would you avoid using Air Malta due to its rates?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No.


10. In your opinion, can Malta do without local airlines?

Please comment below.

iii. Interview email communication

**Bernard Chircop**
To: antoine.d.vella@airmalta.com

Sunday, 16 December 2018 at 16:00

 To protect your privacy, some pictures in this message were not downloaded. [Download pictures](#)

Dear Mr.Vella,

My name is Bernard Chircop, student reading for the Bachelor's Degree in International Hospitality Management. I am currently building my thesis as I come to you to request for an appointment regarding marketing experience within AirMalta's marketing department and its business to compete against low- cost airlines (With Ryanair in mind).


The thesis will be emphasising on what the survival of an airline in the travel industry and what does marketing do to sustain its success and also sell it during periods which may not be too busy. A comparison shall be made between 2 airlines(Ryanair & AirMalta) exploring what is their main selling points and weaknesses. This will lead to the formation of a marketing strategy for AirMalta that may likely provide success if implemented. The thesis shall also concentrate on the pressure the local airline faces on audience demographic/ marketing /pricing /technology.

It would be my first time exploring the marketing industry in practical terms as I haven't been employed myself within the marketing industry yet due to constraint from school hours, so professional insight would be highly appreciated.

Of course I can explain better in further discussion, but please leave a response for further information.The
My contact information: +356 99919522

Thank you for the consideration and I look forward for your response.

With Regards,
Bernard Chircop

**Bernard Chircop**
To: antoine.d.vella@airmalta.com

Tuesday, 12 February 2019 at 12:55

→ You forwarded this message on 15/05/2019, 09:06.

Dear Mr. Vella,

I come again to request to form a meeting in the coming future for my thesis on a build for a marketing strategy, student reading for the Bachelor's Degree in International Hospitality Management. I am currently building my thesis on the formation of a marketing strategy that utilises the marketing experience within AirMalta's marketing department and its business to compete against low-cost airlines (With Ryanair in mind).

It would be my first time exploring the marketing industry in practical terms as I haven't been employed myself within the marketing industry yet due to constraint from school hours, so professional insight would be highly appreciated.


I am also looking to potentially start my career in marketing and would like to ask if there is a vacancy in the coming months for a marketing associate within AirMalta's marketing department.

Of course I can explain better in further discussion, but I am more than happy to speak further either through e-mail or form a call from the number below.

My contact information: (+356) 99919522

Thank you for the consideration and I look forward for your response.

With Regards,
Bernard Chircop



Bernard Chircop

To: human.resources@airmalta.com

Wednesday, 15 May 2019 at 09:06

As discussed.

With Regards,
Bernard Chircop

From: Bernard Chircop <bernard.chircop001@its.edu.mt>
Sent: Tuesday, February 12, 2019 12:55 PM
To: antoine.d.vella@airmalta.com
Subject: Thesis & Intern Enquiry

Dear Mr. Vella,

I come again to request to form a meeting in the coming future for my thesis on a build for a marketing strategy, student reading for the Bachelor's Degree in International Hospitality Management. I am currently building my thesis on the formation of a marketing strategy that utilises the marketing experience within AirMalta's marketing department and its business to compete against low-cost airlines (With Ryanair in mind).

It would be my first time exploring the marketing industry in practical terms as I haven't been employed myself within the marketing industry yet due to constraint from school hours, so professional insight would be highly appreciated.


I am also looking to potentially start my career in marketing and would like to ask if there is a vacancy in the coming months for a marketing associate within AirMalta's marketing department.

Of course I can explain better in further discussion, but I am more than happy to speak further either through e-mail or form a call from the number below.

My contact information: (+356) 99919522

Thank you for the consideration and I look forward for your response.

With Regards,
Bernard Chircop



Bernard Chircop

To: human.resources@airmalta.com

Monday, 9 September 2019 at 23:05

To whom it may concern,

I would like to request to form a meeting in the coming future for my thesis on a build for a marketing strategy, student reading for the Bachelor's Degree in International Hospitality Management. I am currently building my thesis on the formation of a marketing strategy for an airline, with Air Malta as a the example of a local airline.

It would be my first time exploring the marketing industry in practical terms as I haven't been employed myself within the marketing industry yet due to constraint from school hours, so professional insight would be highly appreciated.


I am also looking to potentially start my career in marketing and would like to ask if there is a vacancy in the coming months for a marketing associate within Air Malta's marketing department.

Of course I can explain better in further discussion, but I am more than happy to speak further either through e-mail or form a call from the number below.

My contact information: (+356) 9991 9522

Thank you for the consideration and I shall look forward for your response.

With Regards,
Bernard Chircop



Bernard Chircop

To: antoine.d.vella@airmalta.com

Friday, 28 August 2020 at 14:41

Good afternoon Mr. Vella,

I hope this message finds you well.

As I would look to just arrange an interview for my thesis on forming a marketing strategy on consumer behaviour, when would be best to arrange a quick chat? As it is a fresh experience forming such a strategy on marketing, I would appreciate the insight into the practise as an observation of the use of marketing in guiding an airline through such a competitive market.

Would such an interview related to academic work be allowed?

I hope you have a nice day and thank you for your time.

Sincerely,