

Sensuous Symposium of the senses in the Dark Dining Experience

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Abstract

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<p>The main objectives of this study were to identify if willingness existing among the Maltese clientele base to visit dark dining experience conducted locally, moreover what are the factor considered to promote or hinder its development. Furthermore, how the hospitality industry in Malta would acknowledge this “innovative” concept and apply it.</p> <p>Qualitative and Quantitative approaches were used. Applied case study diner hold by Institute of Tourism Studies where questioners to evaluate the patrons feedback were distribute, additionally structured interviews, with Dark Dining restaurant worldwide, with local restaurants which executed the concept as one-off and with the local hospitality industry stakeholders were conducted too.</p> <p>The local clientele base demonstrates willingness to partake in Dark Dining, however the findings calls for specific age group which might be interested in, conditions under which to be conducted and considered as successful by local restaurateurs also were proposed and taken into consideration for future development.</p> <p>As from general conclusion reached, the Local Clientele base is ready to enjoy innovative dining experiences, however due to the size of the market this kind of concept for the time being is considered as successful under the conditions of pop-up.</p> <p>The recommendations which were set up, calls for awareness in the educational process by involving science, encouraging entrepreneurship among youngsters, government entities support and united future development of the Maltese Hospitality Industry.</p>		
Keywords Dark Dining, Promote or Hinder, Local Clientele base, Maltese Hospitality Industry, Pop-up		

Declaration of Authenticity



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Dining Experience

Declaration:

I hereby declare that this research study is based on the outcome of my own research. I, as the author, declare that this research study is my own composition which has not been previously produced for any other qualification. The research study was conducted under the supervision of James Attard

Monday, May 23, 2022

Date

Student's Signature

Acknowledgements:

Hereby I would like to thank my family for the constant support throughout my academic journey at Institute of Tourism Studies Malta.

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Dedicated to:

Ognyan Simeonov Dimitrov
IV.VI.MMVI

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Introduction
Chapter One

1.0 Introduction.

Research, bearing the name “Sensuous symposium of the senses in the Dark Dining Experience” was conceived to reassess the fundamental principles of activity and to adapt accordingly the Maltese population perceptions.

Primary research approach names as Background study has been implemented to deliver an overview to the one, to understand what is this “Dark Dining”?

Through-out the exploring process, the key factors distributed as a leading force to the researcher to conduct the study are listed, with indeed specification pointing out the research goals and hypothesis. Goals, also will be called gaps and objectives in this study also served to administer the aspects covered by it.

Autonomous section included to deliver indispensable information of key words and terms which will be disclosed through the research.

1.1 Background study.

The primary aim of this study, focused on gastronomy, which is a major aspect of the restaurant business, which is an integral element of the global hospitality and tourism industry. Restaurants strive to deliver innovative and unique ‘dining experiences’ such as ‘Dark Dining’. The objective of this dissertation is targeted to clearly define, analyze and convince the reader with comprehensive information on “What is this ‘Dark Dining’

Dining in the dark is a concept which ideally takes place in dark restaurants, in which the main idea levitate around that the customers do not see the food served. As from experiment point of view targeting to multiply the gastronomic pleasure by eliminating the sense of sight and increase the others power vise-versa however Charles Spence place the question in his book “The Perfect meal” *“Do our other senses really become more acute in the dark”* (Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014) ?

Retrace back in France, 1988, innovative concept was introduced by Andreas Hainke, known as *social entrepreneur and founder of “Dialogue in the Dark” (Enterprise, 1993). First started as program in 1997 (Paris) brought forward by Michel Reilhac, named “Le gout du noir” (The taste of black), linked with the art movement as an inspirational point. (Allen, 2012)

Therefore, shortly after, “ *Dialogue in the Dark*”, growth as an environment of operation adapted to restaurants, in complete darkness, proved by creating and operating the first in the world ‘dark’ restaurant *Blindekuh* (“Blind Man's Bluff”), located in Zurich (Switzerland) (Saerberg, 2007).

Notion which indeed is looking forward to refract the idea of dinning as clear

psychological need in restaurant environment but targeting far more, calculating to guide a person in one unconscious journey fulfilled with supreme sensitive pleasure. The study will reveal how the “Dark Dining” works, therefore the human brain ability to build up expectation without sight contact, exploring expedition of the surrounding environment via touching.

The amusement which recognizable fragrance would deliver and mostly regain the true power of the taste buds again and again, trying recognizable tastes in new way and last but not least to listen what the dark has to say. Furthermore using modern approaches cited from “The Perfect Meal. The multisensory science of food and dining” (Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014) Spencer states that observation and impregnations are strictly “*to reborn in this shiny gastronomical journey in the human brain*”.

Delivering value to this study, the researcher will expatiate the theoretical findings which will be, elaborated in the prevailing ‘Literature Review’ chapter on the various perspectives, how people with omission of the sense of sight and those with visual impairing disabilities, seek value from dining experiences, consequently, does ‘Dining in the Dark’ really capture how the blind experience food (Lacey, 2013)

The researcher will divulge in the exploration of the working mechanisms, fundamental for this type of psychological and social experiment, how it will be further stated in this study, a precise research was conducted in the area of physical and scientific, “How are the senses linked together and how they work to serve us?”. (Spence, 2017), emphasizing that, their standard procedures set in one structure, delivering unexpected and enjoyment experience, by totally excluding the sense of sight.

1.2 Preferred area of Research.

Willingness and pure desire was demonstrated by the researcher to explore this area in the beginning of his Bachelor degree studies in Culinary Arts (Hons) at Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) Malta, to investigate innovative and extraordinary ways of dining, which will provide not only feed in terms of physical needs as well inspired all along reading “Gastrophysics, The New Science of Eating” (Spence, 2017).

It was noticed that collections of previous academic literature already exist in this area, most of which may be able to answer some of the questions exposed. However, due to gaps existing the researcher applied the interests and knowledge gained in the field to explore by creating one of a kind ‘Dark Dining’ event in collaboration with the Institute of Tourism Studies Malta (ITS). Through this event, the researcher will be seeking the participant’s feedback on this unique dining experience. The evaluation of the data will divulge on the rationale, how Maltese consumers value this dining experience, which is emulated in major cities of the world.

Looking forward to elevate and supply the outcomes with higher degree of value, cooperation with restaurants executing on a daily bases Dark Dining events, was conducted so to understand the advantages and disadvantages which the place of happening may have, as how can be done in Malta ?

The major objectives of the researcher is aiming to attract more people into innovative ways of eating, by evaluating the data gathered during the event in form of a questioners, which will be discussed in the later part of this study, as well collecting feedback from the only two restaurants which had ever tried to put into use the concept in the real industry environment “Bahia” (located in Lija, Malta), (Michallef, 2020) and “Pallazo Castelletti” 2017 (Urpani, 2017). Comprehensively interviews were executed with restaurant managers and Head Chefs of carefully chosen restaurants to reveal what inhibit the concept to grown throughout Malta?

1.3 Main Objectives of the Research.

The main purposes of this study will be defined in the understated ‘Research Questions’

- i.** How willing is the Maltese dining clientele to participate in this innovative ‘Dark’ dining experience, compared to major European cities where the emulation of this concept is done?
- ii.** What are the considering factors, which promote or hinder the futuristic development of the ‘Dark’ dining concept in the Maltese dining scene?

Reconciling over the research objectives exposed claims to investigate the hypothesis:

How Malta’s Hospitality industry would acknowledge the Dark Dining concept?
One has to take under consideration the geographical and climate boarders in which the island of Malta exist, supplying it’s visitors with breathtaking views to the Mediterranean Sea and warn weather, as a perfect tourist destination, the learning outcomes may be used in further investigation in this area.

1.4 Definition of Key Terms.

The 'Key Terms, are used in reiteration way in this study and the researcher would like to take the opportunity to clarify their meaning in this introductory stage. Printed works with scientific or literature contend has been used as datum covering this interest.

Senses: This term will be used to specify the five basic known senses of the humans. Touching, hearing, smell, taste and taste. Each of the listed is linked with sensing organ which is responsible in sending information to the brain, helping us to explore, understand and adapt to the surrounding environment.

Gastrophysics: Described as science implementing fundamental rules extracted from physics and chemistry to sketch the basic understanding of the gastronomy and cooking. In this study mainly used in terms of understanding the senses and appreciation in the human body.

Gastronomy: Admixture word, originated from ancient Greek, meaning “stomach” and “rule”. Investigating mainly connection between culture and food, shaping cooking styles linked with specific regions. *Science of good eating (Schlosburg, 2011).

Social-psychology experiment: Defines the study of how an individual behave influenced by the presence of others and their behavior. Major objective is to investigate how and why people behavior changes influenced by the environmental factors in which is included eating in the dark.

1.5 Identifying the scope of the study.

The researcher had taken under consideration vast majority of essential information to form the scope of this study. Starting with overhaul throughout statistic gathered from National Statistic Office, Malta (NSO) (Anon., n.d.). As from geographic aspect, Malta is an island allocated centrally in the Mediterranean sea, this factor and other contributing attributes, has seen Malta as one of top European destinations with estimated 2,589,690 people visited it in 2018 due to NSO. (Anon., n.d.). Fundamental role in the local Gross Domestic Product (GDP), committing to 15 % to the national GDP. (Protection, 2021)

Considering all information allocated in the previous paragraph, and exploring anxiously, on the territory of Malta, there are 2000 individual restaurants. (Gozo, 2020). Reasonably the catering industry is considered as major part of the Tourism industry, due to the numbers shown above. Most of restaurant keeping same concept throughout year, focusing majorly over consistency and targeting exactly the same guest, when others switching the lines driven by willingness to find a recess of development. However as stated above, insignificant number of only 2 restaurants, which in other words is 0,1% of all registered establishment, having restaurant status.

With this crucial understanding, the researcher wanted to take the opportunity to clearly allocate the gap in which the study is aiming to investigate. Primary focusing in Malta as a Mediterranean hub, however by using comparative approach within other European countries, both disparate compared to each other. By using the data gathered during the study, applying it directly and indirectly, the researcher wanted to clearly identify and convince the reader what are the factors which would shape or hinder the future development of the 'Dark Dining' concept in Malta.

1.6 Overview of the study.

The substantive chapter entitled: 'Introduction' gives a clear purpose to present the culture of the research chosen as to cultivate the driving forces and fundamental circumstances which have been pure motivation for the researcher in this context. The definition of 'Key Terms' which their adaptation will be used throughout this study are also listed in this chapter, to listed in this chapter generalizes the major context and clear understanding of the research campaign.

Followed by the successive Chapter 'Literature Review', the researcher will be deliberating in ways to carefully present credible and academic information which is essential to reinforce this study essentially focusing on the elements of the Dark Dining, stating the historical overview and timeframe of the development of this concept, also heightening the approaches used in convincing the audience. Furthermore, the managing tactics and strategies implemented in building up a unique concept such as the chosen one. Likewise, the scientific perspective, as from senses point of view implemented to the concept with fundamental matter.

The third chapter entitled 'Methodology and the Research Design' will divulge in the way forward in supplying the study with much as possible academic value, bought, quantitative and qualitative research methods were used. Culinary Field Project will be conducted to collect the most relevant feedback which is closest to the industry, this factor will aid to investigate and strength the hypothesis of this 'Dark Dining' concept.

All data findings were they be in form of structured interviews, questioners and applied projects, will be analyzed and discussed in chapter four, entitled 'Research Outcomes'. By attributing both qualitative and quantitative modes of research to find ways of exploring the field, analyzed precisely following the path allocated from the literature review. Careful consideration will be taken all necessary measures from researcher point to ensure factual and ethical treatment is adhered to all the data outcomes.

In the final chapter of the study will be the 'Conclusion and Further Research Recommendations', in which all data outcomes collected in this study will be presented and supported with recommendations with direct focus to the Hospitality industry, most relevant the catering and restaurant industry, to promote the futuristic hosting and development of this concept within this industry.

Literature Review
Chapter Two

2.0 Introduction.

At the current stage of the conducted study the researcher will present detailed literature review, linked with the research questions stated in the primordial chapter of the study- named introduction. The restaurant industry has essential part in the Maltese hospitality generating an estimated expenditures to 705.1 million euro during 2018 (Baron, 2018), yet in review of the existing data, Malta's restaurant industry is still base on traditional restaurant 'dining-concepts' and to a certain extent has not introduced innovative dining concepts, such as the "Dining in the Dark" concept. Due to the fact, the following literature review will embrace and investigate this hypothesis.

The application of the literature review as a background study, the researcher will present existing data related to the "Dining in the Dark" experience, involving theoretical perspectives of it. Further along this study the researcher will explore the impact which an innovative and extraordinary dining concept would have on the restaurant industry in the Maltese Islands and the competitive influence that it may create. The Dark Dining concept itself will be fundamentally examine from historical perspective and development throughout the years in countries where this Dark dining exist, in –order to investigate and focus over the strengths and weaknesses which may hinder it's conception and development in the Maltese Islands,

To strengthen this hypothesis , the literature review, will be identifying and focusing on the elements of the scientific perspective and chain working mechanisms standing behind the sensual pleasure reached during "Dark Dining", as human visual perception from a cognitive Neuroscience perspective and the working structure of the senses under the concept conditions.

2.1 Beginning of the Dark Concept.

Dialogue in the Dark, is associated to an exhibition and social event is an experience in which blind people are presented as guides that lead the participants through variety of situations in absolute darkness.

As beginning of the This Dark concept can be retraced back to the latter part of the 1980's. Andreas Heinecke, is considered as a founder, the conception of this event took place in Frankfurt, Germany in 1988 (Museum., 2018). For some 10 consecutive years, the event went travelled around the world as traveling exhibition executed in different ways scenarios, hosted in an array of museums, festivals or special events. From April 2000, in Hamburg, Germany, Dialogue in the Dark (Dialog im Dunkeln), establish its first permanent location (Post, 2000). As fundamental objective of the concept is to present to the visitors with a learning procedure on how to relate to their other senses without sense of sight (Enterprise, 2019). According to statements listed on "Dialogue in the Dark" website, event's main objectives is to mainly focus on:

"To raise awareness about people with disability, disadvantaged and elderly people, their needs, their potential and their contributions to the society in order to foster empathy and respect that lead to an inclusive behavior'.

'To improve the social economic condition of people with disability, disadvantaged and elderly people'.

- states the co-founder of the concept Andreas Heinecke in interview (Enterprise, 2020).

Previous literature have identified the attributes of the inspirational path provided through the work of Heinecke and the success which the concept gained with the hosting of 150 appearances in major cities situated in 30 countries, having the participation of over 9 million visitors (Hayes, 2018).

In 1997, Paris France, saw the first attempt in creating a dark dining restaurant experience was conceived, by Michel Reilhac who named this program "Le gout du noir" (*The taste of Black*). During the summer of 1999, momentary the concept executed in a restaurant with the same name in Paris district "Montorgeuil". The development of the program growth to "Dans le Noir" (*In the Dark*) in 2003, which was established by cooperation of Edouard de Brogile and foundation of blind "Paul Guinot", which in the consecutive years become recognized as the first international chain of restaurants for the development and execution of the concept of 'Dark Dining' (Dean, 2014).

In the study conducted by Alen "The Omnivorous Mind: Our Evolving Relationship with food" (Allen, 2012) which stated that the aspiration of impermanent transmitting the involvement of sightlessness to be implemented as auxiliary approach in creating and development of this extraordinary gastronomic event.

The current debate which illustrates attention and encouragement needed for the visual impairment individuals can be identified as aim of 'Dark Dining' restaurants, in this number 'Dans le Noir' (LeTrent, 2012). It is a well-known factor that majority of established 'Dark Dining' restaurants, contribute and donate part of their incomes to beneficence organizations and charitable foundations, which are related with visual impairment. Between them are lined up 'Dine in the Dark' (DID) allocated in Bangkok (Hemmerich, 2012), and 'O.Noir', Montreal (Luster, 2014).

September 1999, In Zurich, Switzerland saw the opening of the first ever restaurant to permanently establish of the Dark Dining. Blinkdekuh" (*Blind cow*) which the Germans named after a game (Blind man's buff/bluff). Created by the Rev. Jorge Spielmann, who he himself is blind, he wanted to demonstrate the effects that dining in total darkness, would greatly enhance the emphasis of food, owning that no visuals can distract them. Rev. Spielman fundamentally stated:

"The sighted guests commented that being blindfolded made them give more emphasis to the food and listen more intently to the conversation around them. There were no visual distractions, only intense concentration." (Butler, n.d.).

The innovator, as has been previously stated in the literature, claims another hypothesis that: 'Guest who has dined blindfolded at his own home reported greater enjoyment of their meal through the senses of taste and smell' (Corey Mintz, Friday, June 12th, 2009). Although it has been commonly stated, that the Rev. Spielmann, is the innovator of the first dedicated restaurant to solely practice 'Dark-dining' with the opening of "Blindekuh", other studies have shown that concept was already in existence before the conception of "Blindekuh" (SpotCoolStuff Travel, 2014).

On the other hand, previous studies have also emphasized that back in 2001, in Cologne, Germany Axel Rudolph, established a bar called "Unsicht" which when translated to English means 'Invisible'. His objective was on development focused around 'Shedding some light' to how the senses of blind people work, in other words given, supplying the blind with an advantage compared to equivalent to them non visual impairment individuals (Long, 2014).

Research conducted by Prof Charles Spence and Prof Dr. Betina Piqueras-Fiszman (Wageningen University) in relation this field are well documented, it is also well acknowledged that they argue that experience conducted in a restaurant environment linked to the Dark Dining Concept, cannot be related closely as experience from what the blind people are having during eating and drinking. Never the less as major conflict the authors of "The perfect meal" coming forward is to investigate what is it that makes a visit to a 'Dark Dining' restaurant tempting. In order to address the questions outlined above, according to a recent study conducted by Spence "The Perfect Meal. The Multisensory Science of Food and Dining." Examine the validity of Spielmann's theories by further investigating on the hypothesis, can the food and drink really taste better by turning off the lights (Spence, 2014)?

2.2 The “Light” part of the Dark Concept.

A substantial amount of researches stemming from physics, scientific disciplines, food designers, top rated chefs and food writers, has been asserted and summarized into this chapter by means of, exploring and debating over findings related with this field, which is to be considered as fundamental for the concept, as from scientific point of view, to explain the emergence of the phenomena observed in the concept. The researcher's sole intention is to address the following questions for further discussions and apply them in his own research findings.

Evidence has shown, that people related with gastronomy who will be called ‘epicures’ often claim “ *Eye appeal is half the meal*”, however (Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014), addressed significant amount of questions to be investigated in that area, what is going to happen when the food eaten, cannot be seen any more?

On the other hand, theoretical studies have been proposed to allocate the conflict existing:

“You smell better, you are more receptive to differences in texture, consistency and temperature... it's a holistic experience” (Sautter, 2002).

had proposed, as supporting statement of that excluding the sight should vice-versa heighten the other senses. Supporting evidences done by Allen study over customer feedbacks and reviews was conducted to explore that great number of the participants addressed that their other senses were functioning better and are more perceptive when the sense of ‘sight’ has been eliminated, also known as “*heightening of the nonvisual senses*” (Allen, 2012). Allen suggested a theory based on neurological phenomenon, which is the working mechanism named “*combination-selective neurons*” which is normally responsible of receiving visual idea, overall assembled from the other senses. This factor and has been discussed and elaborated by a great number of authors within the context of literature existing, this factor it has been considered as a starting point for development of other innovative concept which could be linked with ‘Dark Dining’, for example the advancement of the ‘blindfolded tourism’ (Esrock, 2012) In sub-chapter entitled ‘*Science behind the senses*’ the theory proposed by “The Omnivorous Mind: Our Evolving Relationship with Food”. (Allen, 2012) will be discussed and explained indeed.

“The flavors are intensified when people cannot see what they are eating”

as an alternative given, a particular meal would be more amusing without the sight. (Hemmerich, 2012) Other researcher which was conducted in this field, may question and even disagree with this idea, as Corey Mintz: “*most of us eat with our eyes, enjoying a plate before we have tasted it. So the trade-off might not be even.*” (Corey Mintz, Friday, June 12th, 2009).

It can be seen that (Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014), supporting the previous claim asked:

“The key question here concerns how the absence of one sense (in particular vision, what many consider the most important or dominant sense) affects the perception of food via the others, and how our overall multisensory eating experiences are impacted as a result?”

Based on the findings stated in such academic papers, the researcher would expose two challenging feelings responsible for shaping thoughts of food when the sense of sight is excluded. Firstly, the sight indicator influence the sensorial prediction concerning food, indeed flavor and taste (Deliza, 1996) (Simmons, 2005) (Spence, 2010a).

Spence investigated this phenomena by exploration work conducted in laboratory, named '*visual flavor*' (Spence, 2010b). He conducted an experiment whereby white wine was dyed in red colorant, this totally confused the participants, some of which wine sommeliers owing to it's visual appearance, creating expectations that it was produced from red based fruit such as strawberries or cherries. This theory in other words suggests that the expectations (Hurling, 2003), as well judging the taste, (Wilson, 1967) (Spence, 2011) and entire consumption, all together are decisive due to what we see. (Linné, 2002) (Wansink, 2005) In contradicting statement (Spence, 2010a) argue that eliminating a conspicuous sense, which the sight is considered as so, serving us before and during the process of eating, reflect the consumption in way, likely to decrease the dining experience at all. To amplify this factor, Spence conclude that:

"No matter whether we realize it or not, sensory expectation and anticipation constitute a good part of the pleasure of meal" (Allen, 2012) (Spence, 2010a)

2.3 Conditions Carving the Meal in the Dark.

In this section of the Literature review, the researcher will discussing in-detail the exact workings of the 'Dining in the Dark' concept, also taking a comparative mode in defining the difference contrast's between a 'dark' dining concept and regular/ normal restaurant dining concept will be applied. Claims previously studied and investigated will be presented, complimented with comments and interview from blind servers, aiming to maximally precise introduce the reader to the veritable part of 'Dark Dining Concept'

The literature review shows that the 'Dark Dining' establishment could be linked together within various categories, firstly, studies have shown that majority dark dining restaurant employ blind or visually impaired people as waiters and guides which are ideal candidates in accordance to the concept, following the claim by Dean 2014, discussing the cooperation process allocated in the creation of "Dans le Noir" with foundation of blind people. A more comprehensive description can be found in literature describing project 'Blind-Leicht' (Blind-Light), created in Zurich to open employment opportunities for blind people (Leung, 2008).

In regards to the different comparative approach stated, the analysis the following restaurants will be examined and deliberated:

- 'Pod křídlem noci'(Under the wing of night), Prague, Czech and
- 'Noir dining in the dark' Saigon, Vietnam renowned for innovative ways to enhance the experience and from other hand
- 'Blackout dining in the dark', Las Vegas, United States of America using the

advantage of the technologies and

- 'Tenebris'- Sofia, Bulgaria which could be considered as trying to keep the concept closer to how was invented.

The literature review shows that established as to be named "Dark Dining" restaurant certain criteria must be adhered to. The most fundamental of which is that of the time the restaurant dining area has to be kept in complete darkness as Spence illustrate it as "*entire darkness in which even a hand in front of the face would be invisible*" (Spence, 2014), with all potential origin of light disqualified (SpotCoolStuff Travel, 2014). On other hand, in some other certain venues this is achieved by the application of blindfold to the customers (Luster, 2014).

In 'Pod křídlem noci' a innovative approach was restarted for first time in relation this concept, by using two different dining room scenarios, which is amplified to introduce this experience by quote from 'Pod křídlem noci' restaurant manager Vladimir Weiss: "*Study the menu in the "world of light" before entering the "world of darkness."*" (Leung, 2008).

Both of these dining areas manned by visually impaired waiters and guides, who are there to assist and cater to the demands during the experience. The quote "*World of light*" cited at the starting of the experience, whereby the guests are ushered and are seated. An introduction is done to prepare the guest for the upcoming dining experience. At that stage, guest are required to select from the menu the food options which they would like to try, which mainly consists of the choices that are found in all restaurants around the world meat, fish, vegetarian or mystery menu, rather from specific items as in normal restaurants (Spence, 2014). To conclude the first stage of introduction the diners are required to state if they have any dietary requirements or food allergies. At this point guest are instructed to put away and not use equipment that has a source of light such as mobile phones, tablets, cameras, recording devices and luminous watches, which may be considered as threat to the concept.

In 'Tenebris' Sofia this approach is conducted in the reception area of the establishment which is based on an interview basis, shortly before entering the restaurant. At the 'Noir' in Saigon the introduction approach is done by using interactive games to introduce the guests to the fundamental idea. The perspective of this approach will be detailed explained and discussed when indeed results of the study about 'senses' presented.

A key factor for the successful execution of this concept relates to the important role of the waiting staff to which play a very critical part for the success of the concept. 'Tenebris', 'Pod křídlem noci' and "Noir" linked by the fact that they employ visual impaired waiting staff (Gospodinov, 2021) (Leung, 2008). The role of the guiding staff is essential for all guests. Once preparatory and introduction states are completed the guest arranged in row, one behind the other, with right hand placed on the shoulder of the person in front them. In this way they are lead to their table. Compared to 'BLACKOUT' this is done by non-visual impaired people, equipped with night vision

goggles. From comment stated by customer reviews, this approach was not well understood yet the restaurant won “Diners’ Choice Award 2018” and “Certificate of Excellence 2019” by trip advisor (Lal, 2019). (Leung, 2008).

In review by Wency Leung, Prague Press, 2008, of the existing readings about the field of investigation that at all those establishment where the dining experience is executed under the circumstances of dark, the diners can be concluded as a group, as she put it “*relying on the mercy of the staff*” (Leung, 2008).

Once more the literature heightens the importance and crucial role which the wait staff plays, during the dinning procedure, each individual waiter responsible for the table would give assistance to the diner if needed. When food and drinks arrives to the table, different approaches are implemented and undertaken, which is more suited to the individual diner.

Prior research suggest the importance of the tableware, cutlery and glasses which are utilized in the presenting of the dishes to the customers. This factor was investigated by (Spence, 2014). Spence, supported by the studies conducted by Allen (Allen, 2012) which also suggest that the shape of cutting and serving the food is not the only thing to distinguish from regular restaurant. Chefs are to create dishes, relying on sophisticated blend of flavors, textures, temperatures (Robathan, 2006). Some authors have also suggested that in many case the names of the dishes served, do not provide the consumer with a ‘true’ description on what is the food, way of cooking, (Spence, 2014) argue that the wording had a critical importance for guest perception, especially when sight is excluded as exploring tool, nevertheless he confess that the descriptions are “mystifying”, which from other hand support the statement that the “*‘Dark Dining’ seem to supply with novel and innovative experience, considering the fact that few people have tried to ear in complete darkness ever before*” by (Spence, 2014).

Looking at ‘Pod křídlem noci’ report done by (Leung, 2008) she argues with Spence, concluding that the food could be forgotten, however the experience itself cannot.

“The food itself at Pod křídlem noci would likely be unremarkable in an ordinary setting. But even though darkness might not elevate one's senses, it definitely elevates the simple task of eating into an entirely new experience.” (Leung, 2008) .

Following her statement, (Yang, 2007), conducted a research heightening the importance of the tableware. He stated that if a soup is served under the conditions of the dark dining concept, the bowl should be a special one, including elements such as handles or as better known as ‘ears’, whereby the vessel can be grabbed in order to the contents to be drank, instead of guest trying navigating a spoon with hot liquid in complete darkness to reach his/her mouth. Further analysis and discussion related with tableware, the usage and allocating drinking glasses and cutlery on the table will be presented in the sub sequential chapter(s) from the gathered during the observation of the primary data existing, related with the study.

2.4 Aspects of the Dark Dining.

As previously stated in the literature, darkness has been claimed to dispose the ability of amending, the way in which we associate, perceive and communicate with others, who could be allocated even next to us (César Vega, 2012). The authors of 'The Kitchen as Laboratory' also claimed that the method of destitution the sense of sight, provided by 'Dining in the Dark' experience, aim in testing diners conception of daily routine tasks as intimate and pleasure, considered part of social dining. Therefore they conclude:

"The utter darkness effects how we interact with those around us" (Mielby, 2012).

To better illustrate this factor, the authors of "The perfect Meal" describes the environment exposure, where sometimes guests are seated over long benches and encouraged to talk with strangers (Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014) (Charles Spence, 2014).

Due to the fact, there is no "space" for intimate dialogues but often replaced by descriptions aimed to solve problems like 'where is the cutlery' and what should be done with spilled glass of liquid.

From a different perspective Kate Newman addressing the challenge of speaking in the dark. She describes as filled with confusion experience, where diners are equally labored in speaking and in listening.

"How do you know whether those sitting at your table are really paying attention to your witty repartee if you can't see them? And how can you be sure that prying ears aren't listening in?" (Newman, 2003).

Linked from her as an issue of the concept, tossing mutters and grunts at some point throughout the conversation as a sign of attendance, appears to be the reason why diners reject to repeat the 'Dining in the Dark' experience even in the comfort of their homes. An alternative perspective illustrates this condition as a successful approach taken from Chen Long, owner of 'Whale inside Dark', Beijing, where Chinese people, are considered to be a shy daters, took the advantage of "Dining in Dark" to further reduce self-consciousness. (Yang, 2007) In the light of reported hypothesis described in the previous subchapter, focusing over the importance of the staff to enhance the experience, done by (Leung, 2008), (Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014) concluded that, trust, is what build the environment of synergy, as fundamental part of creating dining in the dark.

2.5 Popular or Not, what is the present outlook of Dark Dining restaurant?

This sub-chapter reviews the literature related to the progression of the concept. As authoritative fragment defining the growth of 'Dark Dining' restaurants is indicated the belief of 'experience economy' described by Philip Kotler paper back in 1974 than reworked by (Pine, 1998) (Pine, 1999) emphasizing that customers will be inspired to pay more for experience, including a culinary experience as such this. Definition of the reinforcement of this claim is provided by (Mielby, 2007), presenting the experience as event in which well trained and skilled chefs from one side and guest, from the other side, are both ready to accomplish the adventure of the concept. Due to this fact, (Spence, 2014) concluded as remarkable sign of the concept the sell of multisensory enjoyment.

(Mielby, 2012) Emphasized that from selling perspective, "Dark Dining" restaurants can be defined as localities where the experience is paramount. Nevertheless, other researchers claimed that the major aim is seeking to excite and provoke the guest senses, which is in total incision that as less changes made in the working mechanism of the sense, as inversely proportionally the final result will increase in context of holistic experience (Crill, 2007) (Goldstein, 2005). On the other hand, it is also argued that among some diners a tendency was discovered that the experience became a major force for future visits instead the food, which they reported in their studies.

In brief, the literature pertaining to the popularity or not of the Dark concept restaurants today one should take under consideration the existing evidences that some activities which somehow started as a 'dining-in-the-dark' experience, have outgrown to large variety of enjoyed actions under the conditions of the dark. Examples were found in literature of (Newman, 2003) (Yang, 2007) and (Guterman, 2006), where events such as 'A Dark Sunset' by John Metcalfe which was a dark performing of music, 'Dark Talks' done in London, yet 'dating in the dark' explained as novel approach of dating, finally an event with collective nature done by Dana Salisbury who is owner of 'Dark' restaurant, involving blindfolded eating, dancing even theatrical elements and music. She stated:

"Why in the dark? Because it awakens the senses and presents new pleasures" (Allen, 2012).

She also introduced the concept of 'Hand-Fed Dark Dining' which major objectives and advantages related with sensual stimulations are discussed by (Spence, 2017) as an aspect of the new science of eating. This section points out some problems allocated in the research field, how should the concept be evaluated to one can conclude is it popular now a day or no. The researcher would take the advantage of the current statement/data and try to investigate this question, which results will be presented in the research outcomes.

2.6 Science behind the senses.

The scientific rational is vital and crucial factor in the understanding the working mechanisms embodied in the human body senses This factor will amplified with the endorsement of existing literature in relation the latest researches in the field of the senses, divulging how collectively they function, what is the purpose of each and every one of them? This scientific perspective will be applied to increase and enhance the value of the findings

Firstly and foremostly the researcher would like to introduce the meaning of the word sense:

“sense (of something) *an understanding about something; an ability to judge something*” (Anon., n.d.) Therefore all descriptions provided regarding the senses are emphasizing scientific, anatomical and physical mechanisms of working, terms and explanation related with the topic of this study.

Taste/ Gustation:

Aspect which illustrates the taste as a sense can be identified as sensual or sensory system, part of the nervous system, responsible in delivering taste and flavor. (Trivedi, June 2012) The elements of taste are salty, sweet, sour and bitter, recently during researches in Japan was introduced the ‘Umami’ (delicious taste). On other hand to elaborate the topic, (Spence, 2017), distinguish a difference between taste and flavor, giving examples of some, often mistaken proposing “meaty, fruity, herbal, burned, smoked, earthy” as flavors bur not taste.

Moreover the taste coming after provoke of the taste buds, located over the tongue, complex procedures involving nerves, receptors which would help one to describe temperature, taste, flavor and even pain. Responsible to perform this complex operation is the cortex part of the human brain carrying the same name as taste in science language- gustatory. (Witt, 2019)

Smell / Olfaction.

Previous studies have shown that smell can be classified as special sense, defining it as one from anatomy perspective, relying on its own separate, sensory organ. (Webster, 2021) The mechanism of operation serve to allocate large amount of fragrances, reaching the detecting nervous system known as receptors, allocated in the nasal cavity. One of the main missions of this system is detecting of tastes. (Wolfe, et al., 2012) (de March, et al., 2015)

Information processing is happening in the brain part, called “olfactory bulb”, in which where the odour start to interact with the brain nervous, delivering sense of smell, as well related with emotion and memory. (Schacter, et al., 2011)

i. Smell related with taste:

A complex group of actions, is required in case to fully complete processing the information of smell, involving multiple parts of other senses as taste and hearing. (Shepherd, 2014). Other researcher described it as a function, named “*Restonasal Smell*”, which carry the responsibility of recognizing and distinguishing flavors, coming from food and drinks, linked as key factor of sensing flavors. (Yuri Masaoka, 2010) In concluding the links between the two senses and their representative organs, the tongue is capable in recognizing five different types of tastes, therefore the nose has the capacity to observe among “hundreds of substances” reports Masaoka in his ‘Neuroscience Letters’ (Yuri Masaoka, 2010)

ii. Smell related with hearing:

Scientific research suggest that smell and sound find a common ground allocated in the “olfactory tubercle” (OT) which is explored and presented as multisensory spot find in the human brain. (Daniel W. Wesson, 2010). The theory is supported with science term “Smound” in other words describing a phenomena, that sound may affects the way humans comprehend sound. (Peeples, 2010) The hypothesis is explored and supported by (Spence, 2017):

“We demonstrated that if we boosted the sound of the crunch when people bit into a potato crisp we could enhance their perception of its crunchiness and freshness”.

Hearing / Audition :

The aspect hearing, in science coined ‘audition’ is ability of distinguishing sounds. The sound therefore is described as vibration, forming waves of energy reaching the senses allocated in the ear, so hearing is capability of identifying vibrations. (Plack, 2014) Researches explain indeed that the waves would form nerve impulses treated by the brain.

i. Hearing and Touching relation:

In literature was reported a common feature between the two senses, discussing the sensitivity which the organs, rely on to detect the movement done by molecules, everywhere around outside the organ responsible for the respectful sense. To conclude in other words, a term “Mechanosensation” represent transformation of mechanical motivation into nerve signals. The phenomena can be found allocated over the skin responding to touch and in the ear so for hearing and balance. (Kung, 2005) (Anthony W. Peng, 2011)

Touch / Tactition :

Studies have emphasized that touch is a feeling carried out through “somatosensory system” (Walter, n.d.). Therefore, this system is subdivision of the “sensory nervous system” which mechanisms of work were already discussed. Touching sense is responsible for sending signals to the brain when the body touches various surfaces. (O. Franzen, 1996) The previous ones are divided into hot and cold, dry and wet, smooth and rough and others.

Other researchers emphasize the primary importance of the skin, as organ which nerves and sensors sends the signals to the brain in any case of physical contact, with critical importance during infancy. (Ferber, et al., 2008)

Sight / Vision :

Review of the literature shows that “visual” is called the system responsible for our sense of sight, based on procedure which processes the information received in the form of light signals and stimuli through the eyes. (OpenStax, 2016)

Carl Sherman claimed that relying on vision, perceptions comes :

“These signals carry the basic components of light, color, and shape—the sensation of vision. Interpreting this barrage of unstructured data as meaningful images—the people, places, and things that we recognize and react to as the visible world—requires a complex mental process called perception” (Sherman, 2019).

Although the researcher had already emphasized over “What is this ‘Dark Dining experience?’, that the sense of sight is excluded, definition of sight was provided with the idea of possible further development of this science. In “Research outcomes” it will be related to research projects developed by researchers in various fields, developing theories that could influence the overall experience through manipulation of vision before the actual dining and conclusions could be made as recommendations for further development in this area of multisensory pleasure.

2.6.1 Influenced under the ‘dark’ conditions, senses are overwhelming?

In this part of the literature review the researcher would discuss the existing literature which is in relation to the ‘senses’. Different opinions will be presented, emphasizing over different theories, supported by scientific experiments and different approaches handed to investigate is it true or false that the human senses become more accurate and sharper under the conditions in which they are working during an experience, in scenario such as ‘Dining in the Dark’.

As previously mentioned in paragraph 2.1 of this chapter whereby the researcher would like to explain the importance which the study of “Cognitive Neuroscience” explained vastly by (Allen, 2012) in his book “The Omnivorous Mind” have to contribute with this study.

Cognitive neuroscience refer to science which explore the biological actions and so conditions also named mental actions obtaining intelligence based on senses and experience. In case of what is to be discussed further down, the explanation is related with knowledge, perception, memory and evaluation (Kandel, 2012). When the neuroscience itself respond for the nervous system, to which the senses belong (Ayd, 2000). The academic aspects of the neuroscience are vast and intricate, in-order for this aspect to have relevance with this study, the researcher would like to emphasize over one particular element the ‘Synaesthesia’ neuroscience. Therefore regarding the concept and the working mechanisms used to deceive the senses, in-depth explanation

will be exposed and related to the discoveries in the literature hereunder.

“Synaesthesia is a rare phenomenon in which a sensory stimulus in one modality can trigger sensory experience in other modalities. For example, hearing a word (the 'inducer') might cause a synaesthete to see a particular colour (the 'concurrent'). Although there are many forms of synaesthesia involving different combinations of sensory inducer and concurrent, the most common consists of specific colours being elicited by written or spoken digits, letters or words.” (Mattingley, 2002).

In other words given, sound may misleads, therefore touch by working over different surfaces, flavor and taste, all falling on a common denominator when it comes to building notions.

“Removing vision certainly does allow one to concentrate more on the taste and aroma of food and drink.” (Marx, 2003) (Wiesmann, 2006).

Research data existing over this claim, should be taken under consideration, reporting that human beings experience limitations in concentration ability, therefore the sense of vision contribute prevail over the “neural resources”. In fact, it is scientifically proven that beyond half of the resources in the brain responsible for processing information are participating in preparation of what the individual is seeing (Gallace, 2012). Concluding that other senses are not that often choice of trust from the people, (Spence, 2014) reports the following:

“Indeed, more often than not, it is what we see that ultimately determines what we perceive. This turns out to be true even when the other senses may be sending our brain a different message”

To get a better perspective of what happens to the senses, a research team conducts an experiment in a laboratory. The purpose of this scientific work is to investigate the claim proposed by (Marx, 2003) and (Wiesmann, 2006), focusing over different factors shaping the food as aroma, taste, flavor and texture, related with the process of eating and consuming drinks. Do the mentioned factors become more severe, forceful and acute by excluding the sense of vision?

So far, even though the limited evidences discovered through experimentations, described in the literature, argues against this believe (Dobryakova, 1939) (Jamieson, 1981) (Scheibehenne, 2010). In addition (Jamieson, 1981) proves by another experiment that the taste verges were decreased (which in other words should increase the susceptibility of tasting better), with closed eyes compared as to open.

“My taste buds were tricked on a couple of occasions – for example, I was absolutely convinced I was eating chicken for my main until I found a small bone and realized it was fish.” (Robathan, 2006)

Another case of investigation reporting similar results, without taking under account the conditions of eating, either in the dark or no (Scheibehenne, 2010). Even though was reported higher rate of attention paid for taste in the dark. However as limitation of the

study is reported that non rating of flavor concentration was conduct to explore, were the participants had been effected when the light was off.

Nevertheless, it was concluded that this environment created much more difficult to eat, which lead to drastically limited attention paid of how much actually was consumed.

This factor has been supported, by 'Dark Dining' restaurant manager who in interview reports that 10% of all visitors would be able to briefly describe of what their meal was consisted.

Following this line, another factor is to be addressed, which from literature is concluded as one defining 'Dark Dining' as unique experience, however revised from different points of view is stated as disagreeable. Namely, the uncertainty caused by darkness and what is actually consumed ? (Yeomans, 2008) On other hand, relying on the claim that the element of 'surprise' is considered an advantage, defined as unique by chefs who are working in 'Dark Dining' establishments, created what was mentioned in the previous parts of the study "Chef Choice", "Surprising Menu" , "White Menu". To illustrate the reaction of consumers decided to go for surprise, an interview section is quoted:

"Q: What sorts of foods do we experience differently when we can't see them?"

Dana (Salisbury): Meat seems to be the biggest challenge; people have a lot of trouble distinguishing between different kinds. That one is always a shocker, to hand someone fish and have them interpret it as meat. But you must understand that this is not only about food. This is about all the senses. So there are performances by artists throughout the meal between courses." (Guterman, 2006).

Further investigation in the field shows that the lack of information could lead to total confusion, describing odorus that were not present at all (Piqueras-Fiszman, 2011). Scientists prove that when, after eating, the consumer cannot pinpoint exactly what he has eaten, he is still working in the direction of creating thoughts and assumptions of what the food actually was (Cohen, 2011). Moreover, revealing that believes may not match with the reality tends to be critical moment of the whole experience.

"Soup, roasted potatoes and meat. Veal? Chicken? Bread, and butter, which we spread messily. Some pudding for dessert. Vanilla? I can't remember. It tasted like vanilla but it might have been chocolate. Maybe it wasn't pudding but it seemed that way. None of the food tasted very good. Bland, bad texture. Indiscernible tastes and textures." (Lane, 2010).

According to (Marx, 2003) and (Wiesmann, 2006) the holistic experience of the dark restaurants may also depend on whether during the dinner itself, the guest keeps his eyes closed or on the contrary. For instance, studies emphasized on that, when the eyes are kept closed during 'dine in the dark' higher level of awareness is demonstrated and vice versa, even in complete darkness, with open eyes leads to more intense work processes of the brain and eyes which cause distraction. In other words in conclusion could be argued that eyes closed, can be defined as a beneficial effect on overall sensory perception.

Summarizing literature findings of (Marx, 2003) and (Wiesmann, 2006) , (Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014) claimed that:

“... That said, at present there would appear to be little empirical support for the popular and widespread claim that dining in the dark actually makes food and drink taste better or that it increases a diner’s sensitivity to tastes and/or flavours.”

2.6.2 ‘Dining in the dark’- represent how the blind experience food or no?

The book “The Perfect Meal” by (Spence, 2014) (Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014) reports: *“This is the empathic claim. However, we would argue that it is unlikely to be true. Why?”*

As discussed in previous chapters indeed claims supporting that non-visual impaired people would rely on an existing database of brain-sealed food and its appearance. In other words, once the food is detected by the other senses, in this case they are not working to help but to create a vague picture of what food looks like (Simon Lacey, 2013). The literature also emphasizes that the brain would work so hard that due to the previous fact, it would even recapture existing knowledge of cooking methods and preferences (Simmons, 2005).

“This multisensory mental image might well then serve as an input and in some sense feed the cognitive process of eating.” (Wolpin, 1983) (Spence, 2011) (Spence, 2013).

Furthermore investigating the claim, of which vast amount of researches exist, exploring the fact that does the blind people have the ability to recognize any tastes and / or aromas, flavors better than others? Such an answer to this question, despite the set of studies and their results, is contradictory. Firstly, some researchers had emphasized that admirable abilities due to smell and taste recognition, (Cuevas, December 2009), therefore other researchers report failure in this endeavour. (Rosenbluth, 2000) In this order, a compromise conclusion is made, that people with visual impairment do not have the ability to give an advantage in recognizing tastes, aromas and flavors other than those of the sighted (Smith, September 1993) (Wakefield, 2004).

Along with evidences that the thresholds of sensitivity are no different from those of the sighted participants in the study, however, a phenomenon in which the blind demonstrate superiority in determining and classifying odours and tastes over most people is observed. Science in this sense provides evidence that people without visual impairment, can demonstrate the same capabilities, also called “super tasters” mainly related with wine experts (Hughson, 2001) (Lehrer, 2009).

To conclude (Spence, 2014) argue that the feeling that dinner in the dark gives to its visitors is actually different from what people with visual impairments and blindness experience.

2.7 Conclusion.

Undoubtedly, the reviewed literature and hypotheses on the subject show that 'Dining in the Dark' maintain reputation as an experience that stimulates enjoyment on a multisensory level, as extraordinary one. However to experience better food, in particular in terms of taste, when visual sensitivity is eliminated, is something not to be expected to happen. (Rosenblum, 2011)

The visual perception has earned its status as fundamental, modulating a person's perceptions of food and drink, in regard, formulated as such, largely influencing how one actually experience them. (Spence, 2014) In fact, removing the most important sense-providing sensory information has a negative effect on assignation and enjoying food and even arousing a state of anxiety. Aspects such as curiosity and the element of surprise should be seen as moving the concept forward instead of the taste of the food being better in any case.

(Mielby, 2012) Illustrates:

"The second course was a salad, and almost every bite was a surprise"

In response to the previous statement, the authors present the results of a study conducted on a personal basis between people involved in scientific experiments around the concept and people just visited out of curiosity that among all who have ever attended this type of experience would be difficult to find those who wish to repeat (Alleyne, 2006) (Liddle, 2006) (Spence, 2012).

Although initially 'Dark Dining' can evoke sensations of being innovative and intriguing, research tends to cast a perhaps conflicting insight, which tends to give an unfavorable feeling of a perfect dinner in the dark.

Methodology
Chapter Three

3.1 Introduction.

In this part of the study, the methods of investigation are explain, how they have been applied in the collection of different types of informative data that has been amassed, by means of the 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' approaches of data collection. To address and reinforce the subject matter of this study, the researcher also used case study dinner to investigate hypotheses established by existing studies which have been previously conducted.

Triangulation was considered as the most appropriate and holistic approach needed to validate the primary data information collected using different methods, as will described in detail further down in this chapter. In other words given, the triangular approach is used to illustrate "science", "evidence" and "practice", with the advantage of applying and combining multiple ways of collecting information in the specific study, examining the phenomenon of 'Dark Dining'.

"Triangulation is a technique to analyze results of the same study using different methods of data collection. It is used for three main purposes: to enhance validity, to create a more in-depth picture of a research problem, and to interrogate different ways of understanding a research problem." (Nightingale, 2009)

3.2 Methods of Investigation.

i. *Applied research analysis*

The characteristic of this technique defines that it works to resolve a problem, associated with practical utilization. The reason of using this approach was to evaluate and test hypotheses and statements discussed in the previous chapter. Evaluation type of applied research was used, analyzing the already existing statements discovered throughout researches and data collections, by executing a culinary project to investigate whether the statements about the concept are true or false.

After a discussion with representatives of the Institute of Tourism Studies(ITS) academic board, marketing department and lecturers, all involved in different ways in conjunction with this scholastic program, the institute permitted the researcher to conduct the first "Dark dining" event hosted within ITS, on December 11th, 2020 in one of the institute's training restaurant "The Runway".

This implementation of the applied research mode will serve as a guide through which, at the end of the experimental event, questionnaires were distributed to participants who had been informed in advance that dinner would be part of the researcher's dissertation and the questionnaires would serve to address the following facets:

ii. Quantitative research method:

A questionnaire was distributed among the participants of the event, aiming to establish what is the participant's perception of this novel concept? To review the hypotheses and to evaluate the validity of the information collected through the questionnaire. The results of this survey would aid to detect any shortcoming that may arouse and identify future recommendations, which will also serve as point of guidance for the futuristic implementation of this concept for the Maltese dining scene. This approach would allow the researcher to collect data in systematical manner and analyze in the same fashion.

iii. Qualitative research method:

On the other hand, the qualitative method would provide the researcher with the opportunity to analyze the different perspectives and ideas existing around 'dining-in-the-dark' also evaluating the experiences. Desiring to gather as many and varied points of view as possible, the researcher conducted structured interviews with three main categories of restaurants which are located in different hemispheres of the world. These categories will be with restaurants, some of which have already conducted this concept, and others which are well renowned, but as yet have not conducted a 'Dark Dining' event. These will enable the researcher to analyze and assess the strengths and weakness of the concept and its attributes or the elements that hinder this event.

-First group of interviews:

Identified during preliminary study, restaurants working with the "Dining in the Dark" concept, located in different parts of the world, using different work techniques, with different goals and ideologies. In these interviews, the views of the creators of these restaurants were heard, in others managers and chefs were also involved.

-Second group of interviews:

The only two restaurants located in Malta whom have already conducted this concept were interviewed. Namely, 'Bahia' Lija and 'Palazzo Castelletti' Rabat. These establishments were asked for comments and opinions on the organisational experiences, in relation to any difficulties, obstacles, which they may have encountered and most of all, the perception among the market and the comments of the people after the actual dinner.

-Third group of interviews:

After researching the local market using innovative methods for the purpose such as recommendations of restaurants on various dining applications and guides. Thanks to the standard of service and food quality, the researcher chose 6 local establishments. All of which are rated as "high-end" restaurants and some of which have been awarded the acclaimed Michelin Star. In the interviews conducted with these restaurants, the researcher investigated the opinions of managers and chefs regarding the 'Dark Dining' heighten their perception of introducing this concept on the local dining scene.

3.3 Concerns of Ethics.

After establishing and explaining all ways of gathering information through interviews and questionnaires, checked and certified by the supervisor and the academic board of the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), the researcher successfully implemented pre-prepared and structured interviews strictly following all measures to maintain the code of ethics. Each of the above interviews was audio recorded and the confidentiality of the information provided by the owners, managers and / or chefs of the various types of restaurants mentioned in the previous paragraph was guaranteed by a declaration form signed by the participants. Paying attention to the area in which the study was conducted, strict confidentiality was used in the storage, processing and displaying of data.

In the due course of the study, information that the researcher would like to qualify as sensitive to access in the literature was reached. Due to this fact, attention is drawn to the following:

- Each participant reserves the right to deny the researcher the right to use the information provided during the interview.

- Specifically related to information on techniques and tactics of concept development in different regions of the world and in particular in large and well-developed economic cities, complete confidentiality is guaranteed, the information does not reach competing restaurants.

- All information gathered through the methods set out in this chapter of the study should be discussed and made available for verification and inspection only to the supervisor if necessary.

The above measures were implemented to insure the preservation of all personal data and sensitive data, interests of the participants. Based on this factor, in the next chapter entitled " Research Findings & Data Analysis " the researcher ensures that the presentation and analyzes the informative data will be stated with the adhering to all ethical considerations, as percribed in this chapter.

Analysis of the Research Outcomes
Chapter Four

4.0 Introduction.

In this chapter, the researcher will be presenting and discussing all the findings, analyzing the data collected by means of quantitative and qualitative research modes as stated in the aforementioned chapter, in the same chronological order processed during the study.

Due to the ambiguity of the subject matter, the researcher wishes to clarify in-context, what exactly is a 'data analysis' as defined by Marshall and Rossman "describe data analysis as a messy, ambiguous, and time-consuming, but a creative and fascinating process through which a mass of collected data is being brought to order, structure and meaning." (Rossman, 2006).

4.1 Event Questionnaires Outcomes.

As mentioned in the previous chapter 'Research Methods', an event was held under the guidance of the academic staff of Institute of Tourism Studies Malta, where the researcher had the opportunity to conduct a dark dining experience in one of the institute's training restaurants. A questionnaire was distributed after the event, aiming to finding justification to the research questions. The use of this data as first-hand knowledge was considered a fundamental factor by the researcher, which will be collaborated with perceiving data findings and existing data which has been identified in the "Literature review" chapter.

Overall, 18 participants took part in the survey, out of which 17 questionnaires were admissible. One questionnaire was deemed unsubstantiated due to the fact that one of the participants refused to follow the rules and conditions on which the dinner was to take place. Even though the customers were informed in advance and at the beginning of the dinner what will be awaiting them.

The collated data from the questionnaire will be comprehensively discuss and graphically portrayed, giving a better understanding of the research findings. A copy of the questionnaire distributed will be listed in the Appendices section of this dissertation.

The first question was addressed in establishing the level of knowledge with regards to the 'Dark dining' concept amongst the guests participating in this event gauging the level of understating what 'Dark Dining' concept entails. This demonstrated that more than half (9) of the participants were already familiar with the concept of Dark Dining to a certain extent, while the rest (8) of the participants had no form of familiarization with this concept.

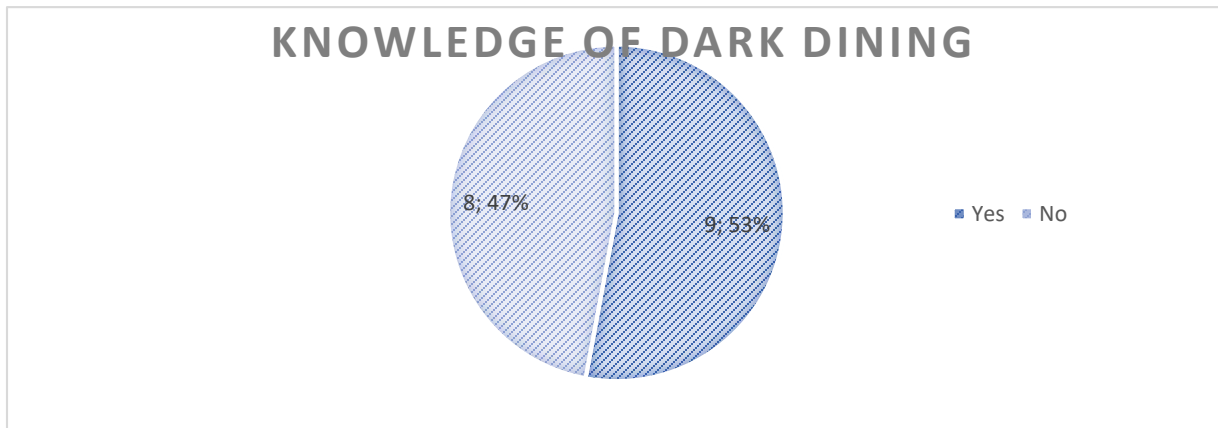


Figure 4.1 Have you ever heard of Dark Dining Before?

The second question divulges on the respondent's perception on recommending this dining experience to others. Overall 16 of the participants (94%) stated that they would recommend the experience. While only 1 (6%) stated that will not recommend this dining experience.

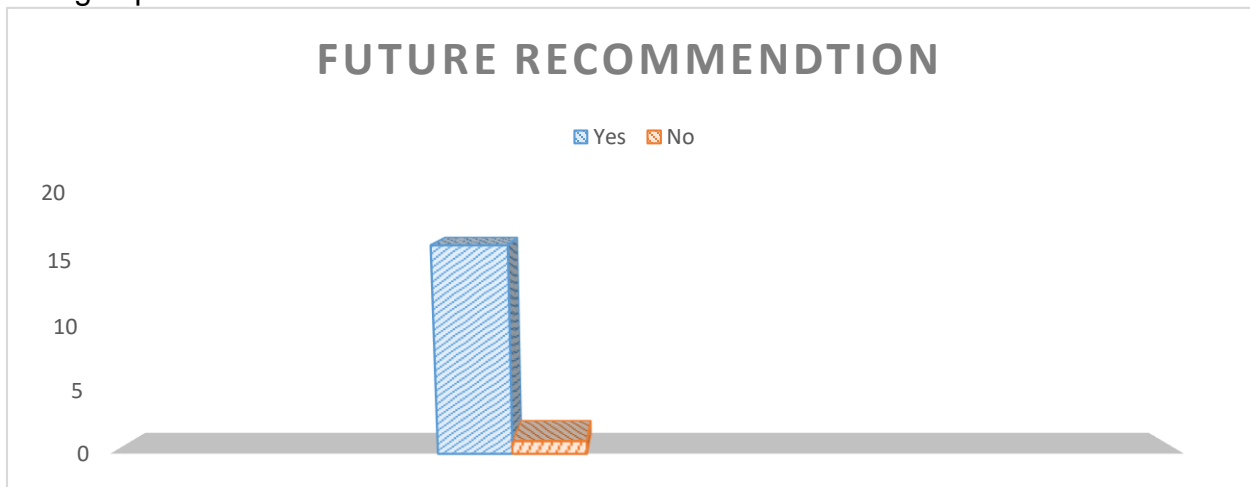


Figure 4.2 Respondent's perception of recommending the experience to others.

The following question (3) aimed to address the respondents frequency of participation with regards to the Dark dining concept is to prove that 100% of the patrons voted with Yes, 17 of them would put themselves again in the dark dining experience. Which by the literature is described as "*curiosity which pushes the concept to develop*" according to "Kitchen as a Laboratory" by (Mielby, 2012).

Out of a total of 18 participants, 7 participants (41%) claimed that would partake, on an annual basis. 5 participants (29%) acknowledged that they will participate to this

concept on a quarterly basis, 2 participants (12%) stated that they are willing to partake on a weekly basis, 1 participant (6%) basis. Only 2 participants (12%) stated their reluctance in future participation to this concept.

According to empirical research findings conducted by numerous author's (Alleyne, 2006) (Liddle, 2006) (Spence, 2012), in relation to subject matter, which have been stated in the literature review, their findings have established that it would be difficult to find someone who would like to have dinner in the dark again. Ironically the data collated from case study questionnaire contradict these findings to a certain extent.

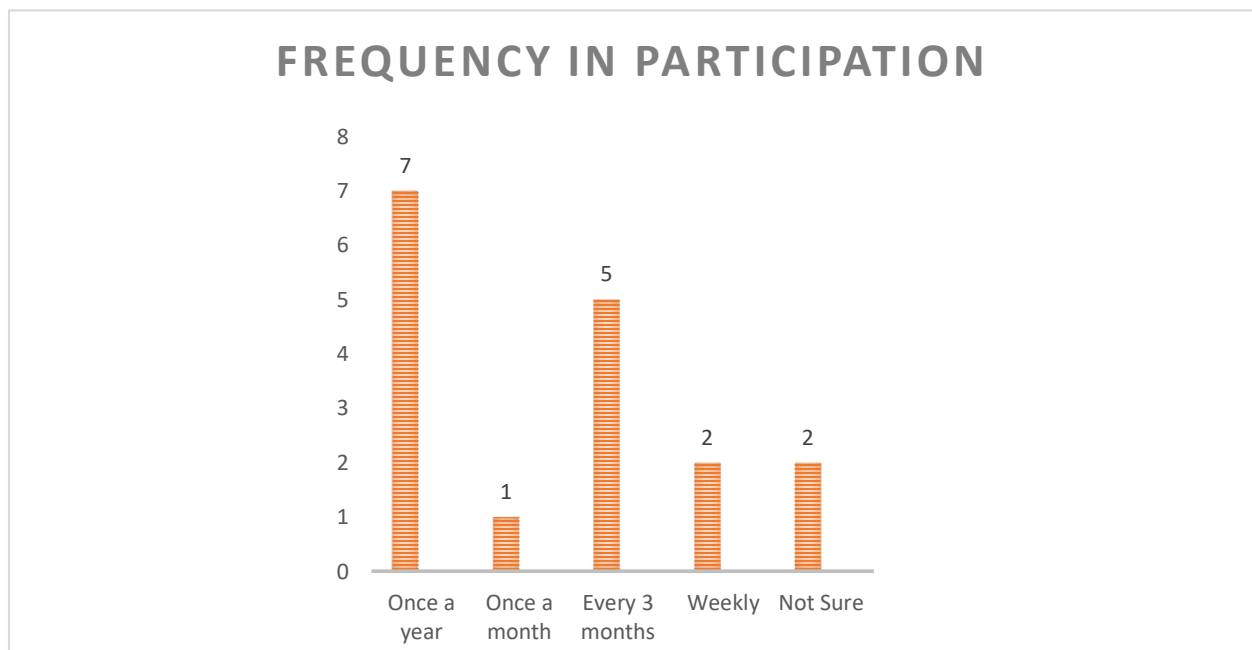


Figure 4.3 Frequency in participating in 'Dark Dining' concept is this in on a permanent basis in Malta.

(Question 4), observed the overall level of perception and satisfaction, in relation to the 'Dark Dining' experiences. As discussed in "Literature Review" **"2.3 Conditions carving the meal in the dark"** according to Spence:

"'Dark Dining' seem to supply with novel and innovative experience...." (Spence, 2012).

12 (71%) supported the claim of innovative way of dining where else 5 (29%) claimed that this dining experience, could be linked as social-psychology experiment, contradicting with Mielby's claim naming it so, in "Kitchen as a Laboratory" in relation of executing daily routine tasks under utter dark conditions.

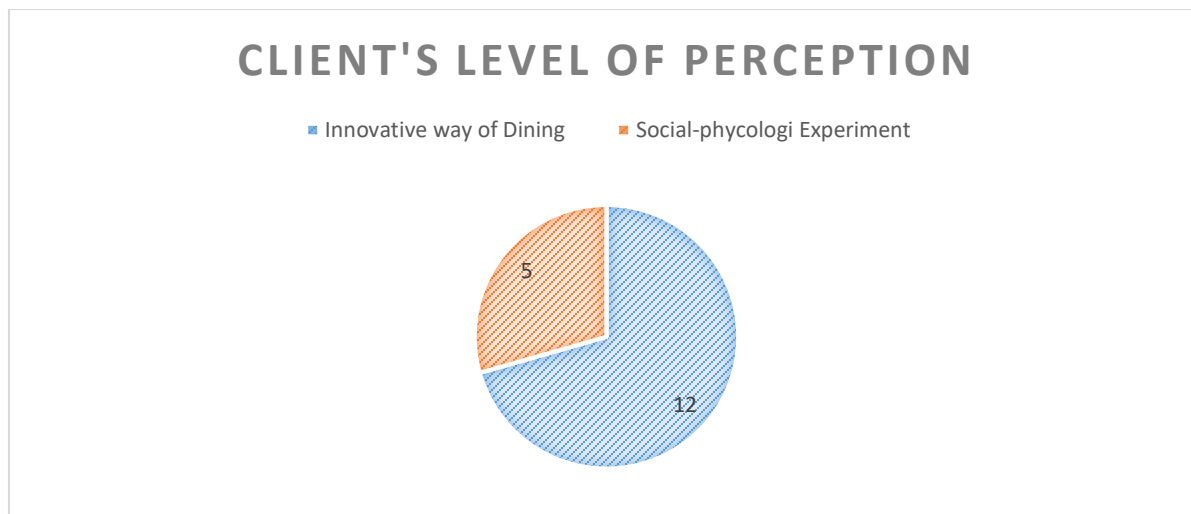


Figure 4.4 Defining client's perception in relation to the Dark Dining experience.

Furthermore customers were asked to rate the overall Dark dining experience on scale 1-6, 6 equals excellent, 1 standing for very bad. As illustrated on the graph, 1 (6%) named it good, 5 (29%) as very good, majority of 11 (65%) rated it excellent. This data serves to support **fig.4.3**, and the assertions refuted above.



Figure 4.5 How the experience was evaluated by the clientele?

The following data analysis related with the neurocognitive work of the brain and the senses in the human body involved in the experience are presented below. This phenomenon was previously explained in the chapter entitled 'Literature review' paragraph **2.6.1 'Influenced under the dark conditions, senses are overwhelming'** (Allen, 2012) Furthermore, the researcher wanted to investigate, *Did the senses managed to work well together in the dark?*

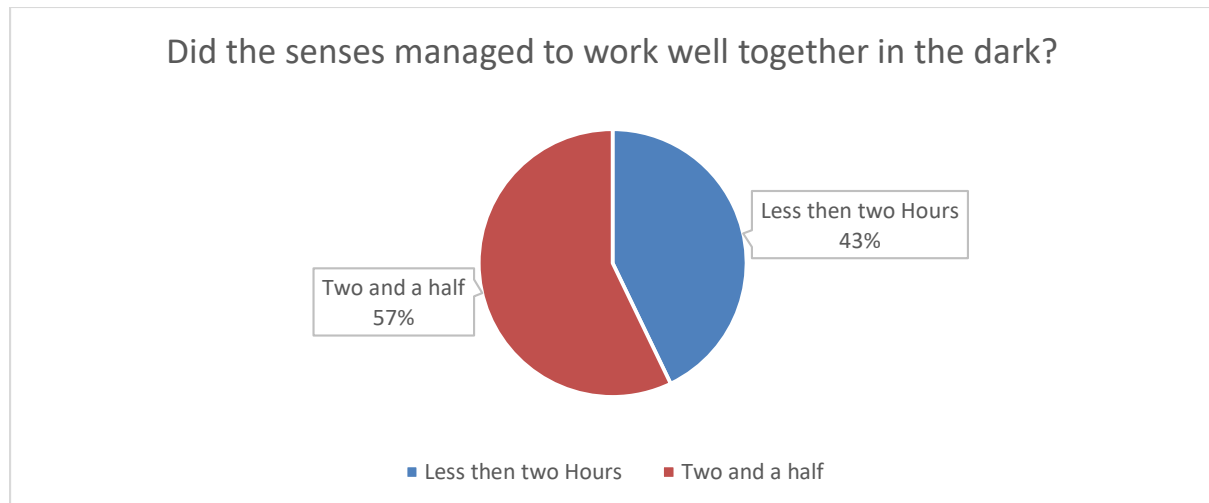


Figure 4.6 Illustrates people's feedback how they felt their senses to work in the dark.

Indeed 12 (71%) of 17 people voted yes. However 5 (29%) answered no, the element of darkness hindered their sensory perception and supported that did not detected the other senses to be helpful during the event. However the graph stays on a contrary according to (Allen, 2012) (Spence, 2010a) concluded as from their studies that if one can realize it or no but the visual sensory expectations are actually constituting a significant part of the pleasure of eating and therefore the taste even by a simple look. This factor is clearly amplified by the findings of Sautter stating that: "You smell better, you are more receptive to differences in texture, consistency and temperature... it's a holistic experience" (Sautter, 2002) and are matching with peoples feedback.

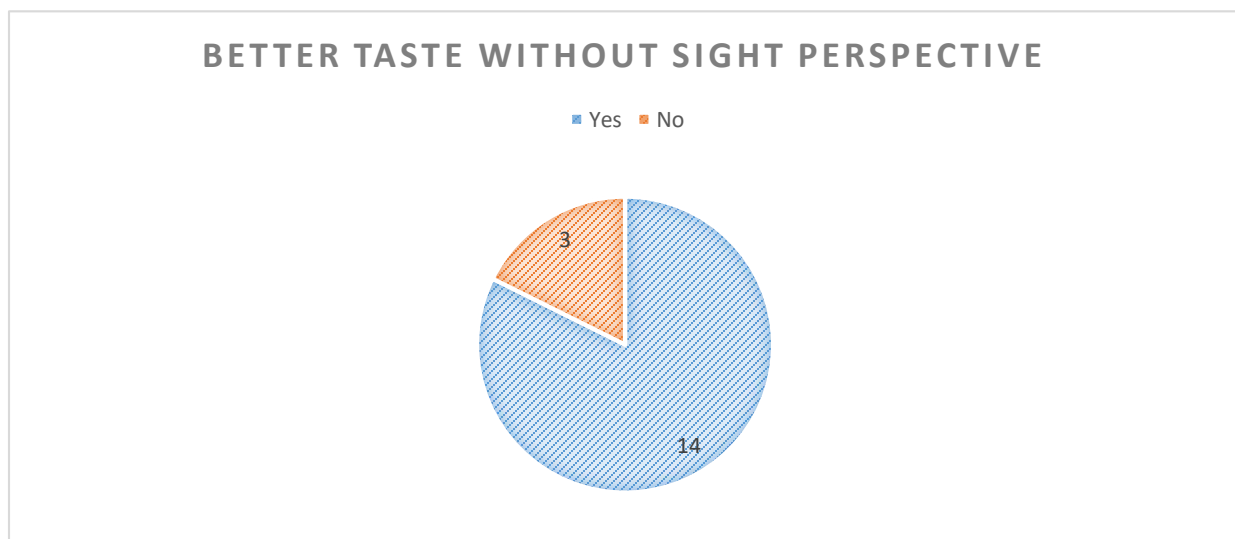
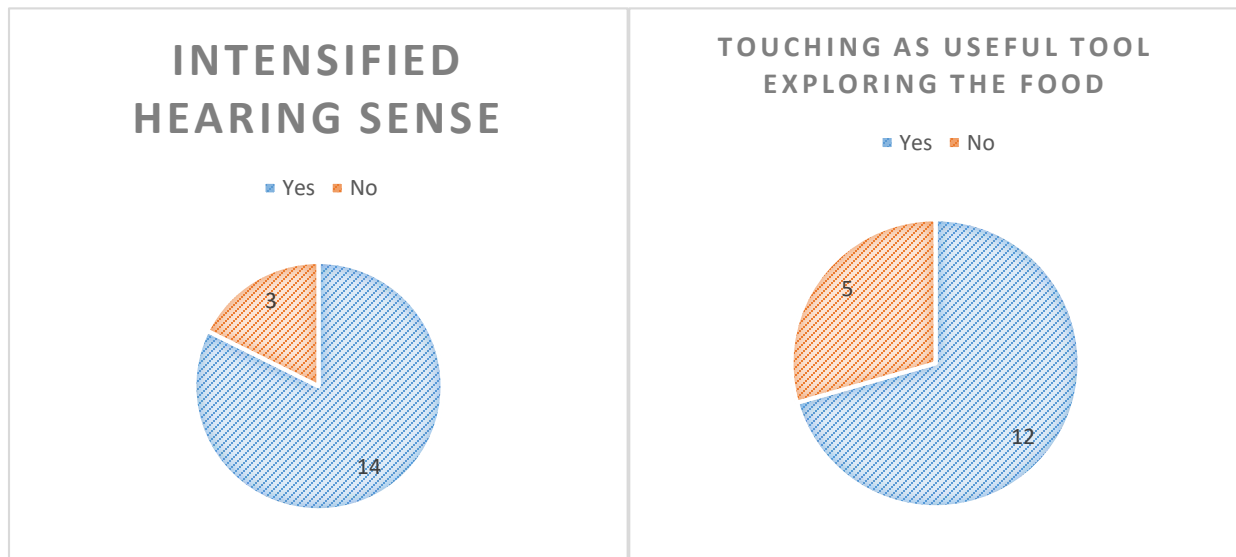


Figure 4.7 Illustrate did the loss of sight perspective helped the customers through the diner to perceive the tastes better?

Furthermore against the research findings of Allen and Spence, smell was detected to enhance the flavors by 14(76%), supporting that the taste sense was more intensive and strong under the conditions of Dining in the Dark which was also proposed by Hemmerich as it follows: *“The flavors are intensified when people cannot see what they are eating”* (Hemmerich, 2012).



Figures 4.8 a, b - Working chain of the senses, related one to another.

Relying on the knowledge gained during the initial studies, which have been identified in the literature review chapter, the author has dedicated a set number of questions of the questionnaire to identify the effects of food consumption in the ‘dark dining’ experience.

“The dark made the food taste better since there were no expectations”?

12(71%) gave positive answer, where else 5 (29%) participants negatively said no.

This data is somewhat contradictory to the age old proverb coined by Apicius, the 1st Century Roman gourmand “we first eat with our eyes” (Delwiche, 2012). Research findings of (Allen, 2012) (Spence, 2010a) stated that non-visual contact is more likely to ‘trick’ the taste buds, rather than awake higher level of sensitivity on the taste buds, furthermore the primary data contradicts the last.

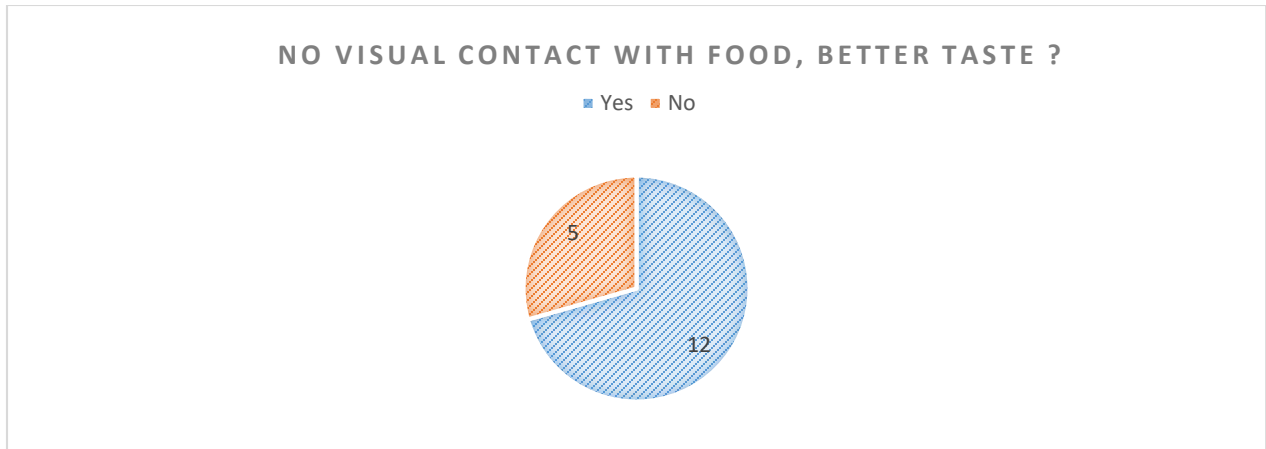


Figure 4.9 presents how people perceive food without seeing it.

With the same rate was answered that menu options were complimenting one another, however the whole mass present at the event voted that the food reached their expectations in terms of taste. It was important to look for answers to even more bizarre questions, such as what temperature was your food at? To clarify the researcher placed the number of people voted according to the course served if the temperature was appropriate for the dish and way was presented, 5 people responded that the food was warm throughout the experience as figure 4.10 shows.

Figures 4.10, 4.11, 4.12, 4,13 all serves as evidence to reinforce the empirical findings by Spence(2012) based on “ Visual Flavor” that dark environment tend to trigger the senses in different way from what usually people understand, tasks like counting, evaluating temperatures, textures, colors, memorizing position of glasses, even eating with cutlery tent to be a hard tasks even for professionals in this area as evidences of the study shows.

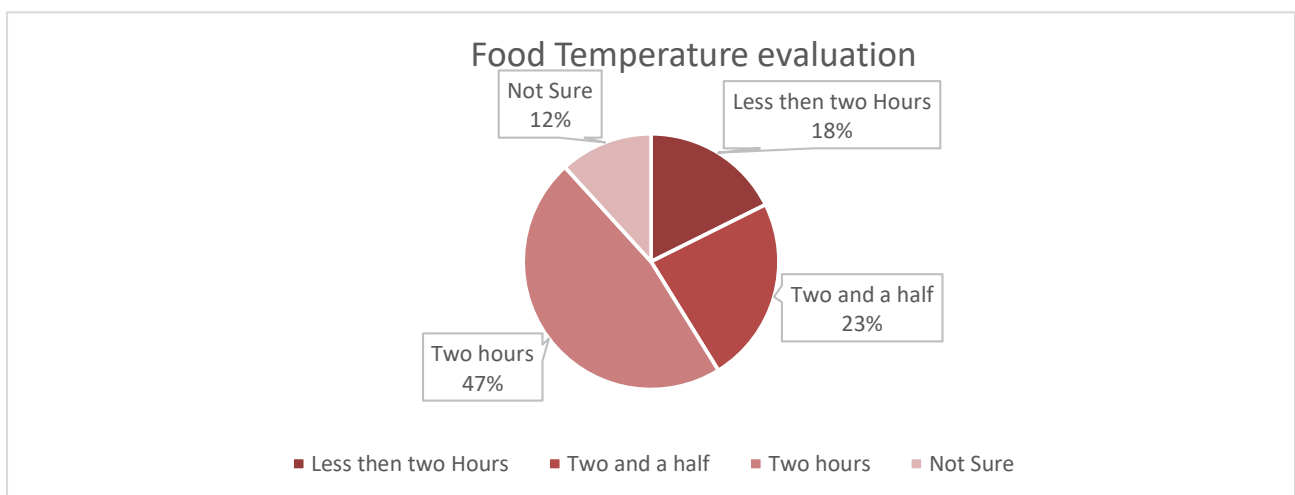


Figure 4.10 How the customers evaluated the temperature of the food served?

During this dinner classic set up with fork to the left whereby spoons and knives to the right was implemented, after each course they were changed with new which were placed in the same fashion. Furthermore figure 4.11 refutes the claim of Leung made in the Prague press that the diners '*relying on the mercy of the staff*' when it comes to eating with cutlery in dark (Leung, 2008) .

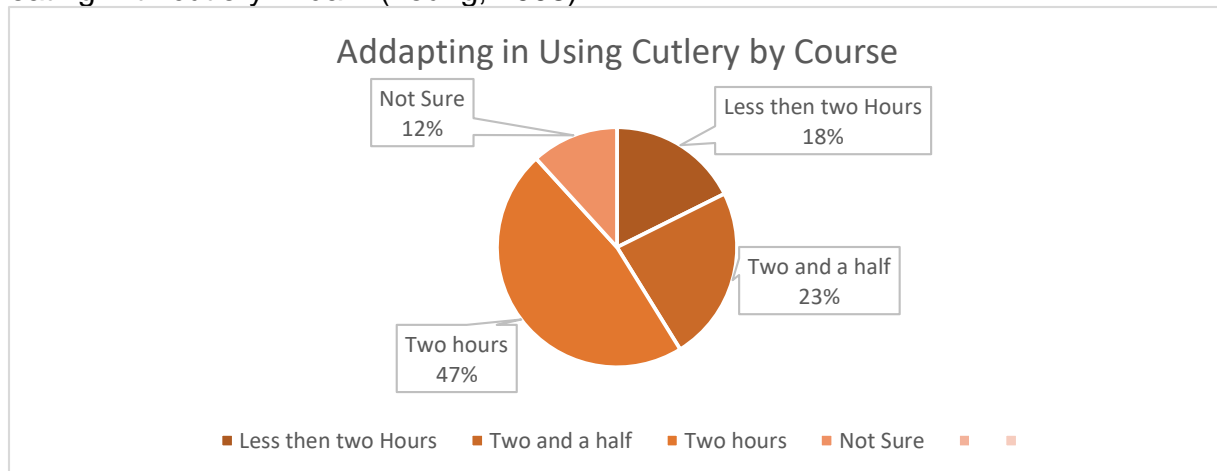


Figure 4.11 *The different times, defined by courses when the customers adapted in using the cutlery.*

Time orientation and meal count also supports Spence, as here and the last figure shows highest rate of disagreement between participants.

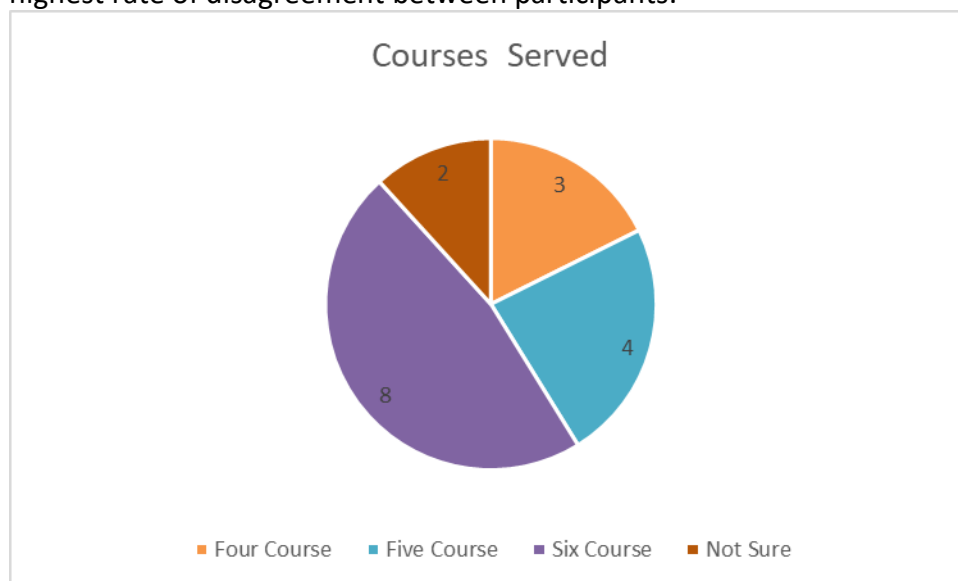


Figure 4.12 *How many courses were served?*

The phenomena of losing track of time, Time orientation and meal count also supports Spence, as here and the last figure shows highest rate of disagreement between participants, factors discussed in **2.4 Aspects of the Dark Dining**.

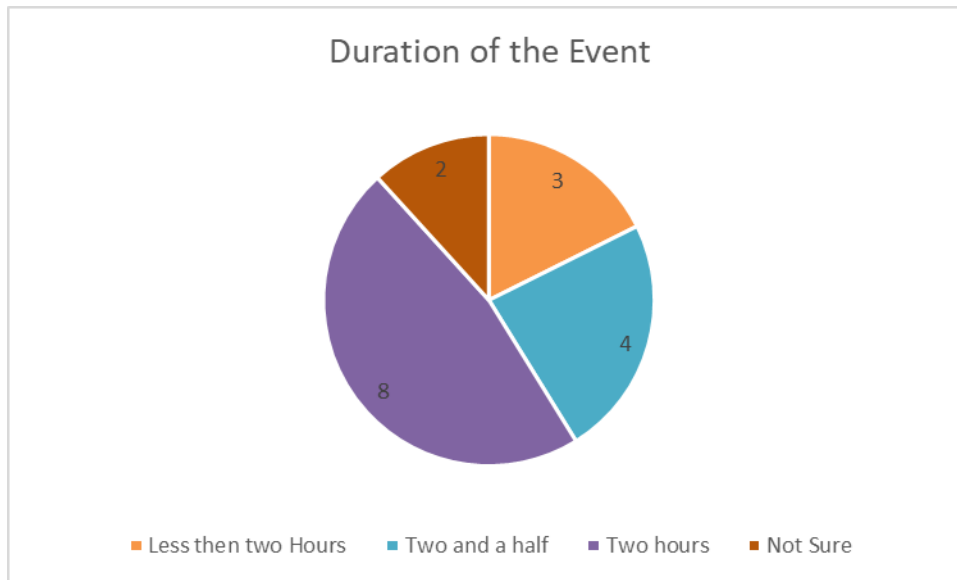


Figure 4.13
How long was the event from moment of sitting till distributing the questioners?

4.2 Qualitative Research Outcomes.

To critically analyze the case study findings, also reinforcing the validity of the data findings stated in the literature review chapter to this context, the researcher conducted a number of structured interviews with restaurant owner, managers, chefs as well as culinary consultants, who execute the 'dark dining' concept on a daily basis around the world. Interviews were also conducted with personnel of Maltese restaurants who have conducted a 'one off' dark dining experience in their establishments. Additionally, interviews were also conducted with 6 renowned restaurants of the Maltese dining scene in order to see the potentiality of How Malta's Hospitality industry would acknowledge and embrace the Dark Dining concept on a more frequent basis.

4.2-1 Global Restaurants working with "Dining in the Dark" concept.

A total of eight request were sent to restaurants worldwide to participate in the study from the perspective of restaurants operating with 'dark dining' on a daily basis. However, only four restaurants acknowledge their participation. The global location of these restaurants were, one was located in Eastern Europe, in particular Bulgaria, furthermore it will be named as "Europe", two in Cambodia and one in Bangkok, Thailand, all of which are owned by the same proprietor and below are mentioned as "Asia". Hereby the outcomes are presented and compared to the literature existing.

In the course of the study, the local scene in Malta was taken into consideration to answer the objectives of the study, however the investigator starts with this aspect from the global represents. The adaptation to the local market (where cuisine and choice of food to be served would not be taken into consideration due to location, perception, culture, and traditional cuisine, table habits, race, religion, and population). Both localities have their own approach when one first takes into consideration the local market, however all of them had successfully agreed with the secondary data existing, informing that people are willing to pay more, contribute more and participate in experiences rather than just dining out, previously discussed in literature review paragraph **2.5 Popular or Not, what is the present outlook of Dark Dining restaurant?**.

Furthermore reinventing and enhancing anyhow the concept actually is considered the way forward how they secured more customers to come back and argue with Spence statements that one would find difficulties to attract twice one person to this concept. *"...compared with other restaurant where they do not put much effort on the kitchen side, this restaurant tried to execute dishes with highest possible to the standards of the market expertise since the senses are so overwhelmed"*: statement done by both sides which stands to agree with previous studies by Pine, Spence, Meilby that not only the innovation but also the culinary expertise is essential to deliver a holistic multisensory experience which will awake further demand (Spence, 2012).

Asia and Europe, both deliver the experience as it was created firstly and work with visually impaired personnel and/or fully blind people as servers. In depth it was claimed that using night goggles from the waiting staff, is actually ruining the concept and creates a feeling of 'amusement park' the owners stated solidly, on the other hand blind people are helpful to build up a stronger relation and to enhance the whole experience by a layer of intimacy and secure in the dark which argues directly with report made in Prague Press done by Leung who explaining the experience as a helpless state in which the guest relies on the mercy of the waiter: *"relying on the mercy of the staff"* (Leung, 2008).

According to the previous, both can be linked as establishments which keeps the fundamental idea of the concept and adapt or change in terms of experience, however, taking into consideration that „Dans le Noir” is considered by the literature as pioneer restaurant in the area of 'Dark Dining'. (Dean, 2014) where tables with common seating resembling a bench on which strangers sit and eat in the dark, the restaurant in Europe stated that the scene is narrow minded to be adapted for this specific set up and it would be challenging for the waiters per se to reach a person seating on the far side, to totally refute the claim, Asia not only does not follow the example of the first mentioned but even the device of the salon is rearranged regularly depending on how many guests expect the restaurant on a given day and it happens on a daily basis. He claims to be the first restaurant in the world to develop this methodology and apply it in practice too

In the following paragraph the researcher would take the opportunity to present a statistic about clientele base both the restaurants in Asia and Europe. Both shared that the majority of the clientele is based on tourist, reason being "Trip advisor" where both are award winning in traveler's choice every year. A strict record of visitors was imposed to be presented during the interviews, however in Asia high demand is demonstrated from Chinese tourist where else in Europe no specific country can be stated to its clientele, but stated that 70% are foreigners. However an age record comes to show that people from the ages 18 till 85 actively enjoying the experience, which is in total incision with what the Maltese local market suggested as targeted group.

Never the less negative comments exist too, the "Europe" representative explained that he had forecasted that 3% would not like the experience whatever and however hard they try, surprisingly between 0,2 to 0,3% are the ones with comments that they do not like and understand the holistic experience which then were tracked to be part of this concept against their will or within misconception. The same case accrued when the researcher was studying the Maltese market, similar situation was registered in the Asian restaurants too. Due to the previous fact and according to the outcomes, more than 25% of the people in both places are coming back, maybe not in the same configuration but out of table by four, next time they will be bringing with them another 4.

Within the concluding part of the actual interviews with restaurant working with dining in the dark as well as this section, the researcher addressed a question which was then readapted to the local market interviews and then evaluated as one. Here by the answer will be presented and by willingness to provide the reader with high value also the objective will be revisited:

“i.How willing is the Maltese dining clientele to participate in this innovative ‘Dark’ dining experience, compared to major European cities where the emulation of this concept is done?”

Furthermore, their opinion about future development of the concept together with the outcomes of the interviews will serve to build up a relevant conclusion in the following chapter of this dissertation. Representatives of both restaurants shared in the interview as a conclusion that they do not think that the concept belongs to the Fads (*Fads are objects or behaviors that achieve short-lived popularity but fade away*) group but on the contrary, based on the fact that since its conception back in 1997 the dark dining concept is still consistent in attracting a substantial number of clients, rendering business viable the concept has a future.

4.2-2 Maltese Restaurants Host 'Dark Dining' Experience.

The following paragraph will discuss the information gathered by the researcher in relation to structured interviews conducted with Maltese restaurants which hosted a 'Dining in the Dark' event. The two restaurants which were mentioned previously demonstrated high level of willingness to participate in this research, furthermore the finding presented helped the researched to build even stronger position supported by facts and evidences kept in form of records, questioners and verbal feedback regarding the objectives of this study.

Both restaurants clearly stated during the interviews that the idea to try the concept locally came throughout research conducted themselves to deliver innovative ways of dining to the Maltese restaurant clientele. "Bahia" the desire to showcase extraordinary dining experience was the primary intention which was well understood as discussed further and brought forward demand for future development which lead to more than one pop up event.

Media approach was used to amplify the event, by means of TV interviews or social media advertisement, however both stated that the event was sold 'in a minutes' which is totally contrary to all the claims made throughout the interviews in the current section that the local scene is limited in terms of understanding of this concept which was stated from both places as a hindering key point in regards of it development.

Furthermore, the researcher would like to emphasize that outcomes of the two local restaurants together with the applied project done at ITS as part of this study are that majority of visitors of Dark Dining are Maltese and / or people living in Malta and demonstrated that would revisit, more likely on pop-up scenario.

When discussing choice of set up of the restaurants or the actual dining areas 2 different approaches were undertaken, 'Bahia' did the event in their venue, which comprises 3 rooms with the usage of blindfolds from other hand at 'Palazzo Castelletti' used their basement, where full natural darkness was achieved and waiting staff used night vision goggles to navigate in the darkness. Both methods are deemed suitable for the concept as previously discussed in Literature review chapter, **2.3 "Conditions carving the meal in the Dark"** (Lal, 2019). (Leung, 2008).

However according to "Asia" and 'Europe' point of view in the previous subchapter, ideally the venue should be completely dark, with visually impaired people which may lead to the question How suitable are the findings according to the opinion of restaurants conducting the Dark Dining Experience on a daily bases in complete darkness? Which fundamental believe is that to deliver realistic experience dark is essential not to hinder the other senses

When the restaurant environment was discussed a different scenarios were encountered in terms of what previous studies have shown in the techniques used when it comes to audition and its level during actual dinner in the dark. According to Gallace, who explains:

“...the human brain has limited capacity, therefore removing half of the process involved in what individual see would unload the brain process and would allow the senses to sharpen in other directions such as hearing, which is why silence is essential” (Gallace, 2012)

In both local restaurants scenario the use of music was transmitted during the course of the event. According to the cited study listed in the literature review, this factor would lead to the distraction of the experience because might cause distraction in the brain and ruin the concentration. This factor was countered by the ‘Bahia’ event where guest’s reported that the music was not a distraction overall, which was also reinforced by some restaurant owners. This therefore suggests that the presence of music relaxes and predisposes by eliminating the feeling of fear from the darkness. Which technique is more appropriate, the researcher is not in a position to give a conclusion at this stage, however one may take into consideration the age group, location and table habits of the place where events were hosted.

“The concept in my own opinion should be kept as simple as possible to avoid confusions”

Was once mentioned in the interviews of “Europe” and “Asia” contradictory to what the local scene tried to do with music involved into the concept and going against the claim in the secondary data existing.

In the concluding part of the interview, the researcher indicated the objectives of the study to the interviewees. Once the concept has been defined as innovative and all data shows that the Maltese are interested in it, either by how quickly the vacancies have been sold or by defining that they would recommend or visit again, the closing question was at it follows:

*“Do you think that the concept falling into the column as innovative has a future in Malta?
Why?. “*

The matter of opinion to this question greatly differs despite the similarities that both restaurant shared when conducting this experience. “Palazzo Castaleti” is of the opinion, that the local scene can be described as narrow-minded and conservative, while “Bahia”, in turn, is of the opinion that the Maltese dining scene is too small for permanent dark dining restaurant to reap financial dividends. Contrary to this statement the palazzo's representative is of a totally different opinion stating that the concept could find ways to develop if embraced by Michelin-starred restaurants on the island as the cost element is present here indeed major standing under hindering reasons, however

the mentioned could afford it and therefore with this action to promote it.

“Bahia” also stated that the problem is not that the concept is not good, the fact is that there is no interest of it in the local dining due to the narrow-minded elements of the local dining clientele. Never the less “Bahia” and “Palazzo Castaleti” suggested that if target group is estimated to include Millennials and Gen Z , dark dining could be successful as a pop-up event.

Based on research identified in the literature which states, “that this is a concept that is visited with intensity once or twice a year, even though considered as experience” (Mielby, 2012) even restaurant with 20 seats would be impossible, Spence also reaffirms this stating that an individual is highly unlikely to visit more than once ‘dining in the dark’ experience (Charles Spence, 2014) however the questioners outcomes are arguing with the last, furthermore the data from worldwide restaurants shows significant predominance of tourist compared to locals regardless of the demand discussed to be detected locally in this chapter.

4.2-3“How Malta’s Hospitality industry would acknowledge the Dark Dining concept ?”

In this section the researcher will present the data findings of the Third Group interviews which aims, and objectives have been listed in section 3.3 ‘Methods of investigation’ listed in chapter 3 ‘Methodology. A total of 10 interview requests were sent to restaurants to participate in this study, however only 6 establishments acknowledged their participation. The choice of criteria for identify the participation of these restaurants was based mainly on the restaurants guest ratings and the awards that each establishment has gained locally and internationally. The researcher rationale to this factor is that these restaurants offer exceptional dining experience to their clientele, also due to the fact that these establishments employ highly skilled and innovative culinary professionals, whom have vast working experience both locally and abroad.

With aim to build a clear idea of the point of view of the representatives of Malta’s hospitality industry, the researcher started the interviews with revealing knowledge on the topic of ‘dark dining’. Five out of six restaurants were aware of the existing of ‘Dining in the dark’ concept and the conditions under which is executed. Despite a thorough initial study of the subject at the local level, the researcher found

that one of the restaurants chosen in this sub-chapter had done 'Dark dining' however as a private event and the opinion of the representative served in favor of the objective stated in the heading of this sub-chapter.

The local scene is unanimous on the question asked:

"What are your thoughts about the concept"

All the restaurants gave vast answers with their points of view including the size of the local market, the perception of this type of experiences among the local clientele, the cost of implementation, the time needed to prepare as well. Furthermore the researcher would like to address the claim of made by Marx and Wiesman stating "the other senses would elevate rather than the missing sight would ruin the whole experience"

however the local scene concluded solidly that disagree. **Invalid source specified.** Both chefs and managers are being highly sensitive when asked to eliminate the sight sense, arguing that their dishes as a final product are pure art and no valid point is detected in regards of hiding art behind blindfolds.

"Do you think that the Maltese public is ready to visit this type of restaurant operating the concept on a daily bases rather than pop-up?"

Would locals visit dark dining restaurant ?

According to findings in sections 4.1 and 4.2-2 of the current chapter, people are willing to visit such type of restaurant, regardless of frequency per year, on the other hand the restaurant industry came up with different opinion which clearly identifies contrary point of view and supports more the idea behind pop-up execution rather than day to day operation. Taking into consideration experience of the people representing the local industry point of view about 'Dark Dining' with solid backgrounds, this kind of concept could be more successful in form of a pop-up event but not as a daily base operation due to the fact that the local clientele scene is limited in terms of population in numbers, suggested age group in sub-chapter 4.2-2, seasonality too, however arguing with 'Bahia' and "Pallazo Castaleti" suggestion that the people are narrow-minded.

" It might have it bloom, but it will die, who will train the staff, how it will be promoted, how it will sustain itself..... I don't think the risk is worth it.", one of the interviewed stated.

Following the example of 'Bahia' to execute it as a pop up seems to be perceived from the industry as the right way, however the majority had claimed that they would not allow themselves to do so even if they found it attractive, as they would be accused of borrowing other people's ideas.

Based on the previous statement made by several chefs and restaurant owners, the researcher wants to address this stamen and hindering hypothesis, further as response to the following question:

„Are there any obstacles to the development of this concept in the Maltese market based on your professional opinion and experience as a chef / restaurant manager?“

Despite the unanimity that the concept would be difficult to survive on a daily bases rather than pop-up, marketing strategies and advertising were discussed. The majority confirmed that without solid marketing and advertising it would be unwise to proceed, furthermore presence via social media is considered of most importance. In support of the claim, the researcher admit that 'Dark dining' held at ITS, where Facebook was used as a marketing tool in the form of photos announcing the event, was sold-out by the end of the day.

Presenting the ideology behind the 'Dark dining' as a multi-sensory experience and promoting it to local chefs who strongly supported Charles Spence's statement:

“we first eat with our sight “ (Charles Spence, 2014).

and understand the removal of visual perception as a minus, subtracting from the quality of the food they provide to their customers, seems to be another point hindering the development of the concept.

4.3 Conclusion

In conclusion of **chapter 4 “Analysis of the Research Outcomes”** in which all the data collected during the study by the various groups involved, restaurants from 'Asia' and 'Europe' working as dark restaurants on a daily bases, 'Bahia' and 'Palazo Casttaleti' who tested the concept in one way or another and adapted it to the market as they saw fit, the chosen restaurants of Malta's culinary scene and of course, the people present as customers at the ITS-assisted dinner follows.

On some perspectives and questions discussed in the study, the mass of participants takes a firm and unanimous position, in other customers and restaurateurs differ their points of view. Restaurants in different parts of the world perceive things in one way, while the local scene has its own flair for understanding.

Generally, the concept is familiar to the majority of participants in order to conclude, in the final part of this study entitled "Conclusion, the researcher will systematically answer the questions named as main objectives.

Conclusion and Future Recommendations
Chapter Five

5.0 Introduction.

In this chapter the researcher will present the conclusive discussion of this study which are pertaining from the established research questions of this dissertation, collaborated with the presented data analysis. The recommendation for the future development of this 'Dark Dining' concept will also be addressed. Additionally, the limitations encountered during the study will also be indicated, as their influence are is considered significant to the research findings.

The conclusion aims to offer supplementary practical guidelines in relation to the field of the study which is fundamentally focused on the Maltese restaurant industry. The local dining scene has positively evolved offering its clientele a more high end dining product, which has been reinforced with the presences of Maltese restaurants in the Michelin Guide, placing Malta as a culinary destination. Invoking the last, significance theory in the Literature and all the collected results, under the aegis of methods used, the researcher concludes as follows.

5.1 Limitations of Study.

- i. Due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, some of the restaurants worldwide which are known with executing 'Dark Dining' on a daily bases, were unable to participate in interviews related with sub chapter 4.2-1 due to closure of businesses.
- ii. Limit on the number of participants in the dinner held at the ,ITS' was imposed due to the measures recommended by the Ministry of Health in December 2020. With the option for more people, the collected response would be considered more replete taking into consideration the scope of the study compared to Maltese population. Furthermore this would have reinforced the empirical finding.
- iii. The researcher, did not collected data on the specific age group of the participants in the case study dinner. This factor was discussed on a later stage. Firstly when the researched conducted the primary research with "Europe" and "Asia" , further representatives of the local restaurant's which hosted this type of dining too.
- iv. 'Dark dining' events hosted by Maltese restaurants accumulated interest among the local clientele scene according to "Bahia" and "Pallazzo Casttaleti". They were conducted through the implementation of blindfolds or night vision goggles worn by the servers, which is described in the literature as an alternative option of conducting dark dining. However in interviews with "Asia" and "Europe" evidence for interest in the concept is demonstrated when conducted with visually impaired servers/waiters.

5.2 Conclusion.

Regardless of the aforementioned limitations, the researcher wishes to expatiate on the basis of the evidenced which had been identified in the previous chapter entitled "Research Outcomes", the Maltese dining Clientele is willing and eager to understand, visit and partake in "Dark Dining" concept experience.

This factor is reinforced, that the two local establishments and the case study conducted at "ITS" were sold out within hours of being launched.

This assertion clearly demonstrates willingness and eagerness of the local dining Cliente to enjoy innovative dining concepts such as 'Dark dining' on a one-off basis.

Malta has enjoyed a steady and substantial increase in Inbound Tourism, in 2019 Malta attracted a total of 2.8 million tourist, which generated an estimated at €2.2 billion, revenue into the Maltese economy (pre Covid 19 statistics), (NSO, 2020) According to National Statistics Office (NSO), the largest cohort of these Inbound tourists were between the ages of 24-44 years old, corresponding to 47.1% of the total number of arrivals. This cohort has been identified as the mostly likely to seek more innovative dining concepts, making it a niche market for this kind of activity, which has also been substantiated by the research findings collated from the interviews of the Asia and Europe Dark dining restaurant, which categorically stated that, the majority of their client base was based on tourist.

According to Ritianne Agius in article published in TvMnews website, "Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability" declares that amongst the population of the Maltese Islands there are 1663 visually impaired people (Agius, January 4, 2021). In addition to that, The Maltese Law, chapter 210 named "Persons with Disability (Employment) Act", stands to ensure that the previously mentioned are secured with job opportunities in vast sectors of the economy (MALTA, 2021).

As discussed with restaurateurs at local level and according to the previously made statements, people with disabilities are unlikely to choose hospitality industry since they might be ensured with better work condition within other sectors.

Further to that, 'Bahia's' and "Palazzo Castalletti's" claims made during the interviews serves to reinforce the findings that the concept may find implication locally as pop-up event done with blindfolds.

Additionally the findings forming this conclusion may be evaluated once more after "Dark Dining" with only visually impaired servers is done which indisputably may affect the outcomes of the objective:

"How willing is the Maltese dining clientele to participate in this innovative 'Dark' dining experience, compared to major European cities where the emulation of this concept is done?"

Moreover, although previous researches have illuminated the working mechanism of the senses in the absence of sight, according to (Allen, 2012), as a common notion among local restaurant stakeholders, there is a degree of ambiguity regarding the blindfolding people to provide better dining experience. They unanimously stand against the effectiveness of the other senses to replace the sight one and to elevate the dining experience to another level due to a lack of scientific evidence related with culinary profession on the Maltese islands where no study to date has examined yet.

5.3 Future Recommendations.

Relying on the data accumulated throughout the primary research conducted for this study, the researcher would like to address specifically designed future recommendations aiming to elevate the Maltese dining scene by meeting the demand of the local clientele base.

In addition to that, more studies are required to completely understand the key meaning of the educational perspective, marketing and advertising also involving Government entities and constantly researching locally both the culinary and the clientele notions of innovative dining experiences such as 'Dark Dining'.

In favor of emphasizing the statements above, recommendations are addressed generously to the hospitality industry involving its providers and consumers, targeting further development and long lasting impact.

i. Science as part of the Educational Program

Science is part of culinary in various ways and this statement is proved by the literature review of this dissertation. In this regard, local culinary culture needs to evolve and become more interested in scientifically proven methods of creating experiences. In this regard recommendations related with culinary education based in Malta would aim to:

Enhance the educational process of Maltese students, at the culinary training institution. ITS should introduce modules at their degree level in innovative dining concept which will bring forward more scientific value and therefore the future culinary arts scene would be prepared with hands on knowledge and capability of executing such type of innovative dining experiences.

ii. Relying on evidences declared in the secondary data, people tend to be more satisfied and ready to pay more if in return would receive experience rather than just dining. Furthermore, the idea of going to a restaurant as a technique for lasting memories in the human brain rather than satisfying the need to consume food and beverages just for pleasure has already been developed in major cities around the world. Local restaurateurs and chef may look forward and create projects with pioneers from abroad focused at further development of the local scene.

iii. Malta's Government on behalf of **Malta Tourism Authority (MTA)**

MTA considered as the official promoter of Hospitality Industry in the Maltese Islands, should aid entities in financial backing, promotion and advertising of innovative dining concepts such as 'dark dining'. This will contribute in elevating the local dining scene to a more international standards, reinforcing Malta as a culinary destination

iv. "Demand determines supply"

As Alfred Marshal stating in "Principles of economics" (Marshal, 2012). The local clientele must openly state its desire to experience new things in the way that the findings are pointing out.

v. Marketing and Research of the Market

Additionally marketing and selling point must be fundamentally researched and involved. If one want to sell, the need of strong marketing campaign and advertising is essential, especially in digital and fast evolving world as now a days.

This recommendation was solidly supported by the local culinary scene.

vi. Hospitality Union for transparency and prosperity of the sector.

People with common interests concerning the overall development of gastronomy and cuisine on behalf of the culinary part of the hospitality industry at the local level to be gathered in an association or community.

vii. Encourage Entrepreneurship among young people in the Hospitality Industry.

More **trust** to be shown to people in the industry with expertise in their field. Furthermore concerning students in higher educational programs narrowly related with the hospitality industry to be provided with the chance of executing a project of their desire, which would target development, not only personal but at institutional level. Moreover, culinary academies abroad are providing stipends for such innovative projects to be conducted and therefore evaluated from all perspectives mention previously.

viii. The role of and NGO in 'Dark Dining'

This factor was previously assessed by the literature however "Asia" and "Europe", denied useful application of NGO's in developing 'dark dining' due to population difference and market size. However concerning (Agius, January 4, 2021), those may successfully find application in Malta by support one who may approach visually impaired people as waiting staff.

5.4 Comprehensive Conclusion.

These form of future recommendations are ambitiously intended to show the way forward for development of certain segment of the restaurant industry focused deeply in supplying experience and innovative ways of dining like “Dark Dining” was determined from its customers and previously conducted researches in this field.

This study may serve as a future plan for realization of a restaurant with such a concept operating on a daily basis only if the proposed recommendations above are taken into account, application the idea of a pop-up campaign within visually impaired and/or blind people is processed, and customer response collected to see how the local culinary scene and the local clientele develop and borrow together.

Regardless of limitations, gaps and number of questions regarding “Dark Dining” restaurant on a daily bases in Malta remain to be addressed, reinforcing the findings in this thesis and taking into consideration the future recommendations addressed to the local culinary scene, the clientele base and the training institution in this field, the researcher may conclude that such innovative dining experience may succeed for the time being conducted as pop-up event.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Menu and Questioner of Case Study Event at ITS

RUNWAY — A CULINARY JOURNEY —

Porto wine-poached pears, air dried Parma Ham, smoked goat cheese mousse, red wine reduction, chili pepper dust

Ceviche of Meager, pickled zucchini, bean sprouts, coriander and lemon infused olive oil, coconut jelly, tapioca and black sesame chips

Mustard seeds coated beef tongue, dehydrated horseradish shavings, beetroot caviar, Bulgarian style fermented apple salad

Deconstructed pumpkin pie, Gorgonzola foam, kale chips, puffed pumpkin seeds

OR

Seared duck breast, Black rice with truffle oil, textures of red and gold beetroot, red onion marmalade, wild berry coulis

Nuts and dried fruits biscuit, Bulgarian yoghurt mousse, mango puree, white chocolate and coconut crumble, cucumber and ginger sorbet



We are committed to providing you with the best dining experience possible, so we welcome your comments. Please fill out this questionnaire to give us the essential feedback required to perform better. Thank you for choosing us.

Have you ever heard about dark dining?	YES	NO
Would you recommend it to others?	YES	NO
Did the food reach your expectations in terms of taste?	YES	NO
Would you try this journey of senses again?	YES	NO
Did the loss of sight help you through the diner to perceive the tastes better?	YES	NO
Did the menu options complement each other?	YES	NO
Did your senses manage to work well together in the dark?	YES	NO
Were your senses helpful in guiding you, without having the visual sense?	YES	NO
Were the games conducted in the beginning had been useful tool to help in guiding you throughout the experience?	YES	NO
Were the assistance provided by the service staff essential for the event?	YES	NO

Your hearing sense intensified in the dark.	TRUE	FALSE
The taste sense was more intensive and stronger.	TRUE	FALSE
Touching was a major instrument used to explore the food.	TRUE	FALSE
Smell helped to enhance the flavor from the plate.	TRUE	FALSE
The other senses made up for the missing sight.	TRUE	FALSE
The dark made the food taste better since there were no expectations.	TRUE	FALSE
The experience helped me get to know my friends/family on the table in a new way.	TRUE	FALSE



**Dark Dining Theme Night by Hristiyan Ganchev.
Runway Restaurant at the Institute of Tourism Studies**

The food presented was:

HOT

WARM-ENOUGH

COLD

What was the meat served in the main Course?

GAME

POULTRY

BEEF

PORK

VENISON

OTHER

In which course did you adapt to eating with the fork in the dark?

How did you find the experience?
(1 being the least and 6 being the highest)

1

2

3

4

5

6

How would you define the dining:

INNOVATIVE WAY OF DINING ☐

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY EXPERIMENT ☐

How long was the event?

How many courses you have been served?

How often would you visit a dark dining restaurant if one exists in Malta?

As customers, what do you think stops businesses from opening a dark dining restaurant?

Any Further Comments and Recommendations are Highly Appreciative



Appendix 2 Structured Interview regarding 4.2-1

-How did you discovered Dining in the Dark and how did you manage to adjust it according to the market. Briefly describe the market.

- Why did you decide to execute such a concept?

-What would you state as a driving force behind your desire of development in this specific event?

-What type of waiting staff you are working with: blind people who are willing to work, foundations working with blind people willing to open working positions for blind people or non-visual impaired persons.

Are you working with NGO (Non-Government Organization) or government entities to support and try to intergrade the people into the workforce and making them more self-sufficient.

Do you donate part of your incomes to blind people foundations?

-What is your client base? Tourist (State from which part of the world Europe/ Asia / Americas / Middle East & Africa) Locals?

What age group, couples/ large groups, any particular field of employment -Could you specify any country of origin if you have any records of so

-How could do you group /seat the people who are visiting your restaurant .Are there any specific seating arrangements or it is per desire of the customer that is doing the booking

-Have you ever received negative comments about this dining experience and is it link to s specific element of the experiences, (overall concept, ambient , food , service etc.) about the food, if yes, why and what type?

-Do you keep a DATA BASE records of people visiting restaurants? Are they more concluded as one time visitors or some of them repeat the visits and if they do so, how often?

Do you give guest satisfaction questionnaire to your customers, to analyze their overall dining experience?

– Could you give sample of questions in this questionnaire?

– What are the most common and repetitive comment that you get?

– Do you ask clients to write additional comments regarding their experience, what are the most general reply? Do you take this feedback constructively to fine-tune your product /dining experience?

How do you explain/ introduce this concept to your dines especially for first time visitors

– Do you conduct the traditional restaurant approach where the server will explain the clients at the table or do you conduct a more innovative approach? Restaurant have approach which is typical or can be linked with your restaurant, when it comes to introduction of the concept:

-Any games played before entering the dark environment?

-What are the most asked questions that guest state when effecting or a booking did the visitors more often ask up on arrival to the restaurant?

How long does the event usually last (period of time)

How would you describe the people visiting dining in the dark concept?

Do you present pictures of the actual dishes after the event if yes why?

-What type of menu do you work with?

Selection of different type of menus focusing over different preferences like meat, vegetarian, fish, vegan, chef choice.

Have they ever been linked with any colors? Blue for fish (seafood) red (meat) green (vegan, vegetarian) white (chef choice)

-Have you ever tried to add music or any sound recordings to the event as to enhance the overall experience: describe the Spence experiments?

-Could you describe the usage of cutlery and tableware?

- do the customers eat by hands or with cutlery

-Do you have records on which course do they adapt on eating with cutlery

-How do you arrange the usage of glassware on the table and it usage

How do you promote the restaurant, Social media presence, website (is it also accessible to visually impaired people by means of technology like “only sound”)

How do you usually sell the event? By promotions, social media advertisement, please specify?

-Do the colors have any meaning to the chefs working in your organization:
Explain the question from point of further development of the concept driven from literature review, of Charles Spence.

Some restaurant executing dark dining concept tend to use different types of quotes summarizing the overall experience, which are mainly put into use during the introduction session or rooms allocated for this purpose

ex. "Here you pay attention on what people are saying, you don't judge on appearance"

ex. "Under cover of darkness, texture and shape take on new importance. Pretensions, etiquette and vanity dissolve in the dark."

ex. "Unlike other restaurants this place is completely devoid of vanity. Everyone must go"

ex. "Intrigue your senses"

ex. "let your senses guide your way.."

Do you think that this may be used as future idea of enhancing the overall experience by already building expectations through psychological way?

What is the futuristic outlook of this concept, is it just a fad (Fads are objects or behaviors that achieve short-lived popularity but fade away) or do you see this concept as an established and long-term basis?

As this is a very innovative concept how do generate the ideas to do this concept (through research, franchised, brain storming etc.) even to improve their dining experience

Appendix 3 Structured Interview regarding 4.2-2

How did you learn about this concept?- from London, researching restaurants doing innovative ways of dining

Where did the idea to make a themed dinner come from, who suggested it?

How and in what ways it was advertised and popularized?

Do you have visitor records:

***what part of them were Maltese and what part were tourists?

How was the restaurant suitable for this type of dinner?

***Could you describe exactly what dark dinner you made?

-Please describe in a few words what happened from the customers entering the restaurant to the beginning of the dining experience:

-Did the actual dinner started at a specific time, including the serving of food at each table at the same time, or was each table worked separately?

-What was the layout of the salon, as for a normal service with separate tables or techniques were used typical of some dark restaurants?

-How many people attended the dinner:

How many people participated in its implementation by the restaurant?

Describe in a few sentences how the menu for this dinner was composed:

-Please describe in a few words what the atmosphere was like in the hall during the dinner, was there any music or sounds?-

After the end of the dinner, were feedback techniques applied?

-Please define what type and how?

-If yes, how did you evaluate the event compared to the clientele comments?

-If you used questionnaires, would you like to share a sample one with me?-

What did you find to be people's opinion of this concept?

Could you specify mainly the opinion of the Maltese population?

Were there any negative comments about something related to the whole experience: service, atmosphere, food?

If so, would you like to share?

Has a preliminary study been done regarding the dishes used by this type of restaurants?

And for a way of serving food?Also drinks

How great was the interest in dinner and do you plan to make a new one in the same

direction?

Do you think that the concept falling into the column as innovative has a future in Malta?
Why?

Appendix 4 Structured Interview regarding 4.2-3

Have you ever heard of 'Dining in the dark', if so, what is your opinion of this concept?

Have you ever attended such a dinner? If so, in which restaurant and how long ago?

What made you want to do it?

What are your thoughts about the concept either ways?

Would you like to try it/again? Would you recommend it?

Do you think that the Maltese culinary scene can offer this type of experience?

-If so, why is there still no restaurant in Malta that offers one?

-If not, why not?

Do you think that the Maltese public is ready to visit this type of restaurant operating the concept on a daily bases rather than pop-up?

-Why?

Are there any obstacles to the development of this concept in the Maltese market based on your professional opinion and experience as a chef / restaurant manager?

Are there any factors that would help to develop this concept in the Maltese market based on your professional opinion and experience as a chef / restaurant manager?

Acting as a manager / chef, how do you think the staff should be trained to perform their duties adequately?

Service Staff?

Kitchen Staff?

Due to literature review and global perception, we first eat with our sight sense?

As from your point of view, how could you implement your style of cooking due to this concept?