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Theme Park Visitors' Experiential and Sociodemographic Drivers of Satisfaction and Loyalty

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Background

- In the past several decades, the theme park industry has grown considerably.
 - The world's top theme parks, water parks and attractions continued to climb to 521 million in 2019, a 4% annual growth rate as represented by the top 10 attraction groups.
- Despite the maturity of the market, the top 20 North American theme parks reported a pre-pandemic attendance increase of 31.3% during the 2009-2019 period (Rubin, 2010; 2020).

Background

- Although researchers acknowledged the importance of theme park visitor experience, most studies did not specifically define what a “theme park experience” is or empirically measured its actual components.
- Very few studies isolated the construct of visitor experience from other predicting variables and measured its exclusive impact on visitor satisfaction and intention to revisit, or loyalty.

Drivers of Satisfaction and Loyalty in the Context of Theme Parks (Previous Research)

- The physical environment, interaction with staff, and interaction with customers (Ali *et al.*, 2016).
- Participation intensity benefit indicator, measured by the time visitors spent on each activity experienced in the park (Fotiadis, 2016)
- Service quality, including tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Hsing *et al.*, 2014).

Drivers of Satisfaction and Loyalty in the Context of Theme Parks (Previous Research)

- Positive experience quality and perceived value, as well as the park's image. (Jin *et al.*, 2015)
- Staff's knowledge of the theme park, roller coasters' safety, the park's security, and ticket prices (Milman *et al.*, 2012).
- The park's food quality, value, and variety, as well as the park's cleanliness and atmosphere (Geissler and Rucks, 2011).

Drivers of Satisfaction and Loyalty in the Context of Theme Parks (Previous Research)

- The park's atmosphere, the existence of thrill rides, the level of crowding experienced, having places to rest, and a perceived reasonable entry price. (Ryan *et al.*, 2010).



The Study's Theoretical Framework (Schmitt, 1999)

- Being potentially one of the most hedonic consumption contexts, theme parks entail the conditions that substantiate Schmitt's (1999, 2003) experiential consumption components, namely SENSE, FEEL, THINK, RELATE, and ACT.



The Study's Theoretical Framework

(Schmitt, 1999)

- **Sensory** experiences are gained through sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell.
- **Feel** experiences appeal to customers' internal feelings and emotions and their impact takes place during the consumption process.
- **Think** experiences appeal to the intellect aiming to create cognitive, problem-solving experiences that engage consumers imaginatively.
- **Act** experiences aim to affect bodily experiences, lifestyles, and interactions
- **Relate** experiences include expand beyond the individual's personal feelings, adding experiences that relate to the individual like idyllic self, other people, institutions, or cultures.

The Study's Theoretical Framework (Schmitt, 1999)

- Schmitt (1999) suggested that experience may be divided into different types, each with its own inherent structures and processes.
- Managers view these types of experiences as Strategic Experiential Modules (SEMs) and include Sense, Feel, Think, Act, and Relate (Schmitt, 1999).

Methodology

- A structured survey was designed to identify potential sociodemographic and experiential drivers of satisfaction and loyalty.
- The survey's online framework was designed to measure and reflect on the respondents' last visit to their favorite theme park in the past twelve months.
- The experiential consumption scale was applied with a series of questions inquiring about the importance of each dimension during the respondents' visit to their favorite theme park.

Methodology

- A random sample was acquired from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an Internet survey respondent marketplace of voluntary participants.
- A total of 371 surveys were collected from U.S. respondents residing in 42 states.



Results

Sample Characteristics

- The average age of respondents was 33.82 years
- Male (58%) and female (42%).
- The plurality of the sample were college or university graduates (48.8%)
- Almost half of respondents were single (47.4%).
- About one-half of the respondents had an annual income of less than USD 35,000.
- About three-quarters of respondents (72%) were Caucasian.
- One-third of the respondents (34.2%) had children under the age of 18 living in the household, with a mean of 1.71 children per household.

Results

Favorite Theme Park as the Measurement Context

Respondents' top three favorite theme parks selected from a list provided in the research instrument were:

- Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom in Florida
- Disneyland in California
- Universal Studios Florida
- The "other" category as the fourth most popular theme

Results

Favorite Theme Park as the Measurement Context

Favorite theme park	Frequency	%
The Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World Resort, Florida	70	18.9
Disneyland at Disneyland Resort, Anaheim, California	54	14.6
Universal Studios Florida at Universal Orlando Resort, Orlando, Florida	33	8.9
Other (several different names provided by respondents)	29	7.8
Epcot at Walt Disney World Resort, Florida	27	7.3
Cedar Point, Sandusky, Ohio	26	7.0
Six Flags Great Adventure, Jackson, New Jersey	18	4.9
Busch Gardens Williamsburg, Virginia	17	4.6
Universal Studios Hollywood, Universal City, California	13	3.5
Kings Island, Ohio	10	2.7
Hersheypark, Hershey, Pennsylvania	10	2.7
Six Flags Magic Mountain, Valencia, California	10	2.7
Disney's Animal Kingdom at Walt Disney World Resort, Florida	9	2.4
Islands of Adventure at Universal Orlando Resort, Orlando, Florida	8	2.2
Knott's Berry Farm, Buena Park, California	8	2.2
Disney's Hollywood Studios at Walt Disney World Resort, Florida	7	1.9
Disney California Adventure Park at Disneyland Resort, Anaheim, California	7	1.9
SeaWorld Orlando, Florida	6	1.6
Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, Florida	4	1.1
SeaWorld San Diego, California	4	1.1
Canada's Wonderland, Ontario, Canada	1	.3
Total	371	100.0

Results

Level of satisfaction, likelihood to revisit their favorite theme park, and perceived value for money

Respondents' overall satisfaction (8.69)

- Measured as a single item with a 10-point scale. 1=Very Dissatisfied, 10=Very Satisfied

Respondents' likelihood to revisit (7.34)

- Measured as a single item with a 10-point scale. 1=Very Unlikely, 10=Very Likely

Respondents' perceived value for money (6.98)

- Measured as a single item with a 10-point scale. 1=Not a good value for money, 10=Very good value for money

Results

Estimating respondents' level of satisfaction

Only three of the 18 independent variables were found to be significantly influential, with a relatively small R^2 value (.276).

- Value for money perception ($\beta=.368$)
- FEEL ($\beta=.233$) component of the experiential consumption dimensions
- Overnight stay at the theme park's destination ($\beta=.140$)

Were significant in influencing the respondents' level of satisfaction with their favorite theme park.

Results

Estimating respondents' likelihood to revisit the respondents' favorite theme park

Only three of the 19 independent variables, including satisfaction, were found to be significantly influential, with a relatively small R^2 value (.179).

- Value for money perception ($\beta=.201$)
- Level of satisfaction ($\beta=.118$)
- The number of past visits to the respondents' favorite theme park ($\beta=.202$)

Discussion

- The purpose of this study was to identify the drivers of satisfaction and loyalty in the context of theme parks
- The study aimed to investigate the relative influence of Schmitt's (1999, 2003) experiential consumption dimensions of SENSE, FEEL, THINK, RELATE, and ACT, along with other potentially influential factors such as sociodemographic characteristics, past experience and visiting behavior.

Discussion

- The results indicated that **theme park overnight visitors** who expected **emotional stimulation** from their favorite theme park and who perceived their visit as a **good value for money** were more likely to be satisfied than those who were not.



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Discussion

- While attracting theme park patrons for overnight stays may increase their level of satisfaction, this consumption behavior may be exclusively applicable to travelers who are willing to invest their time and travel to these destination parks.
- Not all U.S. theme parks provide corresponding facilities like hotels, restaurants, and other tourism and hospitality services that would enable overnight stays.

Discussion

- Considering theme parks' fundamental guest experience core of thrill, excitement, and exhilaration, it is evident that theme parks stimulate these feelings that impact consumer satisfaction.
- Stimulation of excitement may require not only the physical products but also service personnel's mood and the general service atmosphere
- Although SENSE was not found to be significantly influential on satisfaction, the impact of colors, shapes, and sounds on emotions cannot be overlooked.

Discussion

- The drivers of likelihood to revisit (loyalty) the respondents' favorite theme park were the **number of past visits** to the respondents' favorite theme park, **value for money** perception and **visiting satisfaction**.
- Although the model did not confirm the FEEL dimension's direct influence on likelihood to revisit, its indirect effect was implied through its influence on the respondents' level of satisfaction.



Discussion

- The data revealed that not all types of experiences were significant contributors to theme park patrons' satisfaction and their intention to return.
- Sociodemographic variables, like children living in the household, **were not influential** on either satisfaction or likelihood to revisit a favorite theme park.

Practical Implications



Practical Implications

- Industry decision-makers should continue focusing on innovative visitor experiences but should consider carefully where to direct their marketing and operational budgets.
- The study confirmed that FEEL experiences had the most powerful impact on visitors' satisfaction, and therefore, theme park experience designers should develop experiences that are potential to stimulate emotions.

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