
Visitor Experiences and Satisfaction in Theme Parks: An Exploration of Travel Companions from Digital Platform TripAdvisor

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Abstract: Customer experiences are essential elements leading to satisfaction and are crucial for business success. However, individuals' experiences may be influenced by their companions, although empirical evidence is limited. This study explores the tourist from a companion perspective. Using reviews on Disneyland, California, from the digital platform, TripAdvisor, the paper employs a text analytic approach to investigate online reviews. The results reveal that visitor experiences primarily revolve around service performance, service personnel, and the settings, contributing to an entertainment and aesthetics experience. Eight critical factors for visitor experiences in theme parks are identified. The results delineate multiple dimensions of tourist experiences that influence satisfaction when individuals travel with different types of companions, highlighting the pivotal role of social interactions in shaping both experiences and evaluative outcomes.

Keywords: Theme Park; Travel Experience; Satisfaction; Disneyland, online review, TripAdvisor

Introduction

Theme parks have emerged as a major component of tourism, providing visitors with immersive and enjoyable experiences. Researchers suggest that theme park commodities are a type of experiential product, designed to transport consumers into an imaginative environment that simulates different times and locations (Tasci and Milman, 2018; Harriman, 2023). In a broader context, Schmitt (2003) suggests that customers have shifted from product function and efficiency to experience and consumption scenarios. Customer experience is an important part of marketing and leads to satisfaction (Camilleri, 2017).

Indeed, experiences are essentially personal; they represent customers' personal sentiments and fulfill their inner needs (Chang and Horng, 2010). Individual experiences are not formed in isolation but are the outcome of both personal assessment and social comparison. Festinger (1954) posits that individuals often assess their personal experiences by comparing them with the views and judgments of others. Within the tourism context, travelers' experiences are inevitably shaped by the presence of companions, whose participation can foster deeper engagement with activities and subsequently influence perceptions of the destination (Schmelkin et al., 2004; Lin and Donggen, 2014). Although a substantial body of literature has

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examined tourist experiences and satisfaction, relatively little is known about how these aspects differ across various travel companion types. Research on theme park experiences, in particular, has predominantly emphasized external factors, such as physical settings and interactions with service personnel (Tasci and Milman, 2018). To date, however, no studies have systematically investigated the influence of travel companions on individual experiences within this context. To fill this gap, this study analyzes visitors' online reviews of the world's first Disney to explore how travel companions influence visitor experiences and satisfaction. The paper mainly explores the following research objectives: 1) What are visitor experiences in theme parks? 2) What factors affect visitor satisfaction in Disney? 3) In what ways do visitor experiences and satisfaction differ depending on the type of travel companions?

Literature Review

Customer experiences and satisfaction

Experience has been a significant focus in studies of consumer behavior, service management, and marketing (Kandampully et al., 2023). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) define customer experience as the subjective perception and response to products, evoking feelings of fun, enjoyment, and fantasy. Verhoef et al. (2009) point out that customer experience is the integration of a series of sensory, affective, cognitive, relational, and behavioral feelings and responses that customers experience through touch points with the organization throughout the entire process of pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase.

Pine and Gilmore's (1999) seminal framework on the four realms of experience: Entertainment, Esthetics, Education, and Escapist, has become a cornerstone for categorizing customer experiences, distinguishing them according to the degree of participation and environmental immersion. Subsequent scholarship has advanced this perspective by conceptualizing service experiences through alternative lenses. Grove and Fisk (1992) adopt a dramaturgical framework, emphasizing the interplay among service employees as actors, customers as the audience, the physical environment as the stage, and the overall service performance. Building on this framework, Chang and Horng (2010) propose a multidimensional model of experience quality that encompasses not only environmental and service-related elements but also the influence of other patrons, travel companions, and the customers' own cognitive and emotional involvement. Taken together, these frameworks underscore that experiences are co-created through dynamic interactions between individuals, companions, service providers, and settings, rather than being solely determined by environmental or organizational inputs. This synthesis highlights the necessity of examining underexplored social dimensions of experience, particularly the role of companions, which remains relatively overlooked despite its theoretical importance.

The tourism industry has been a pioneer in providing more customized experiences (Jurowski, 2009). In the tourism field, extensive literature has focused on measuring tourist experiences in different settings, such as religious sites (Bond et al., 2015), museums (Packer and Bond, 2010), B&Bs, hotels, cruise ships (Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis, 2010), and attractions (Li et al., 2015; Tasci and Milman, 2018). However, to the best of our knowledge, none of them have examined the influence of travel companions on individual experiences. As Chang and Horng (2010) mention, companionship affects respondents' evaluation of experience quality and is therefore an important part of customer experiences.

Customer experience plays a critical role in satisfaction, serving as a bridge connecting customers' purchase process with their post-purchase behavior. Many studies have explored the factors influencing tourist satisfaction. For example, El-Adly (2018) investigates customer satisfaction in hotels and identifies the relationship among perceived value, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. Ren et al. (2016) explore consumer experience in budget hotels and find that four dimensions of experiences (tangible and sensorial experience, staff aspect, aesthetic perception, and location) significantly influence satisfaction. Radojevic, Stanisic, and

Stanic (2018) find that in hotel services, satisfaction among business-stay customers is lower than leisure-stay customers. However, exploration of the effect of consumer experience on satisfaction mainly focuses on the hospitality field, with limited research on theme parks, except for a few exceptions. For example, Ali et al. (2018) surveyed visitors at two Malaysian theme parks and demonstrated that key elements of customer experience, namely the physical environment, staff interactions, and interactions with fellow visitors, have a significant impact on both customer satisfaction and delight.. Researchers agree that tourist satisfaction is influenced by tourists' experience, which also impacts their post-trip behavior (Hosany and Martin, 2012; Lin and Kuo, 2016; Sharma and Nayak, 2018; Hosany and Prayag, 2013).

The influence of travel companion

A tourist's experience is shaped by both personal factors and social comparisons. Drawing on social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), every individual uses others as a standard of comparison to evaluate themselves in the absence of objectivity. According to the theory, individuals' self-evaluations are typically shaped by the experiences, perspectives, and attitudes of others. This comparison affects people's own feelings and evaluation of travel products and services, further influencing their own experience and satisfaction. The study by Yim et al. (2014) suggests that companionship in the shopping process influences customers' purchase decisions. Chang and Horng (2010) argue that companionship affects how individuals assess the quality of their experiences, with harmonious interactions and enjoyable moments with companions serving as key determinants of experience quality. Das and Varshneya (2017) identify the relationship between companions and customer emotions, suggesting that companions such as peers and family members influence individuals' affective states. Current literature is primarily limited to the field of marketing, making it difficult to expand research content into other fields.

During travel, individuals inevitably compare themselves with their travel companions. Srinivasan and Bhat (2008) suggest that travel activities are often conducted with family members, friends, and colleagues, collectively known as companions. Companions are usually individuals with similar interests (Wang and Cao, 2010; Yang and Xu, 2013). Researchers suggest that peer influence on decision-making and word-of-mouth are significant (Yang et al., 2015; Mishra et al., 2018). When suitable companions are found, their influence continues during tourism activities, mainly reflected in restrictions on tourist behavior and travel expectations (Song et al., 2011; Arroyo et al., 2020). For example, the presence of companions can enhance enthusiasm for participating in tourism activities (Lin and Donggen, 2014) or extend travel time (Srinivasan and Bhat, 2008). Additionally, Schmelkin et al. (2004) confirm that traveling with companions influences visitors' evaluation of the destination. Furthermore, different travel companions will impose different restrictions on tourist behavior. However, few studies (Arismayanti et al., 2022) have examined tourists' experiences from the perspective of companionship, particularly in contexts involving large visitor volumes over a period exceeding five years. This paper therefore explores the influence of different companions on visitor experiences and satisfaction.

Tourists' experiences in theme parks

Since the opening of Disneyland in Anaheim, California in 1955, the theme park industry has rapidly developed worldwide (Ali et al., 2016). In the era of the experience economy, experience, which encompasses not only physical but also emotional aspects, plays a crucial role in contributing to satisfaction (Pizam and Tasci, 2019). Prebensen and Xie (2017) find that emotional experience is more significant for tourists than physical experience. Furthermore, satisfaction influences tourists' willingness to revisit, recommend, and repurchase (Tsang et al., 2012), which further impacts the performance of a theme park.

Numerous researchers have studied the factors (including benefits) affecting tourists' satisfaction and developing memorable experiences in theme parks. According to Pikkemaat

and Schuckert (2007), theme parks are influenced by 15 major dimensions, which encompass quality, safety, variety of attractions, innovative elements, operational capacity and queuing systems, infrastructure, resistance to weather conditions, the ability to foster imagination and escape, uniqueness, thematic coherence, environmental harmony, design, emotional experiences, interactivity, and branding. The elements of 'quality' and 'safety and security' are found as the key factors. Chiappa et al., (2013) emphasize that theme parks cannot be competitive solely based on price and the number of attractions, as high-quality services are necessary to meet tourists' expectations. Geissler and Rucks' study (2011) find that price is also an important factor affecting customer satisfaction. Regarding 'queue management', Alexander et al., (2012) confirm that long queuing experiences could have a negative impact on customer satisfaction. Most existing research emphasizes external elements, including the physical environment and interactions with staff or fellow visitors. However, Tasci and Milman (2018) criticize that some of the measured variables are vague.

Current studies on theme park experiences have mainly used questionnaires and other traditional data collection methods. Compared with traditional methods, user-generated reviews offer the advantages of real-time feedback and low cost, and have been utilized by many scholars as a new way to obtain real experiences and perceptions of tourists (Xiang et al., 2015; Xu and Li, 2016; Tussyadiah and Zach, 2017; Geetha et al., 2017). Recognizing this research gap, this study enriches the understanding of customer experience and satisfaction in the context of theme parks by analyzing online reviews.

Methodology

Online Reviews as digital data source

With the advent of the Web 2.0, user generated content (UGC) has gradually emerged on the Internet, especially in the field of tourism. More and more tourists are keen to share their travel experiences on social media and travel websites (Ascaniis and Gretzel, 2013). Online reviews are regarded as important digital information source which influences greatly on the consumers' feelings of trust and satisfaction towards a business' service offer as well as its reputation (Sparks and Browning, 2011; Baka, 2016). These words or pictures helps tourists visualize the image of the destination (Prebensen, 2007), and consumers generally believe that the content of reviews posted by others on social media and travel websites is more authentic, especially the information related to attractions, tourism product recommendations and complaints. As one of the most popular UGC platforms utilizing digital technology to allow user easily using the star system for ranking and providing more relative review content (Esty, 2015), Trip Advisor collected over 500 million comments in 2017, which covers 7.3 million pieces of business information of hotels, attractions, restaurants and other facilities around the world (<https://tripadvisor.mediaroom.com/CN-about-us>). It serves as a specialized travel review community where visitors can exchange travel information and share their travel experiences (Nizamuddin, 2015). Therefore, this study uses tourist reviews on Trip Advisor as the data source.

As the world's first theme park, California Disneyland has attracted worldwide attention since its opening. Therefore, this research collects online reviews of California Disneyland from Trip Advisor. From 12 to 22 Aug 2017, a total of 14,143 pieces of relevant reviews have been collected from Trip Advisor using web crawler software, covering the publishing dates ranging from June 1, 2012, to July 30th, 2017. As one of the useful tools for big data collection, the crawler software is widely used (Xiang et al. 2015; Guo et al., 2017). After data cleaning and filtering, 14,044 valid comments were obtained, and the first 200 high-frequency words were extracted from reviews using the text analysis software KH Coder (Higuchi, 2015), following pre-processing, lexical analysis, and visualization process.

Data Analysis

A text mining approach has been used to analyse the visitor experiences in theme parks by extracting important attributes from online reviews.

First, the Stanford POS Tagger was employed as a preprocessing tool (Tussyadiah and Zach, 2017). This tool, implemented in Java, applies a part-of-speech tagging approach developed by Toutanova et al., (2003). The preprocessing procedure involved several steps: segmenting the text into sentences, inserting markers for segmentation, eliminating stop words (e.g., common functional words such as ‘a,’ ‘an,’ and ‘the’), assigning part-of-speech categories (e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives), and performing lemmatization to reduce words to their base forms.

Table 1: Selected TF-IDF of High Frequency Words

High frequency words	Line	wait	Fast	People	visit	food	world	hour
1	0.091	0.110	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	0.026	0	0.099	0	0	0	0	0.036
3	0.063	0	0.080	0	0	0	0	0
4	0	0	0	0.047	0	0.046	0	0
5	0	0	0	0	0	0.037	0	0
6	0.056	0	0.071	0	0	0	0	0.078
7	0	0	0	0	0	0.044	0.047	0
8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
9	0.048	0	0.061	0	0	0	0	0
10	0	0.049	0	0.053	0	0	0	0

Subsequently, key terms in the reviews were identified by extracting and manually refining high-frequency words. This procedure was carried out independently by two researchers and later verified by additional reviewers. Rather than relying solely on term frequency (TF), this study adopts the combined measure of term frequency and inverse document frequency (TF-IDF) to determine the relative importance of words within the text corpus (Blei and Lafferty, 2006). Each word is assigned a TF-IDF score, with higher values indicating greater significance. From the 200 most frequent words, several irrelevant items—such as generic nouns (e.g., *people*), unspecific verbs (e.g., *start*, *told*), vague adjectives (e.g., *maybe*, *actually*), and ambiguous terms (e.g., *option*)—were excluded due to their limited analytical value and low TF-IDF scores (see Table 1). Conversely, words directly associated with tourists’ experiences, such as *food* and *wait*, were retained, even when frequently occurring (see Table 1). Following this refinement, 60 terms remained, all of which were closely aligned with the study’s second research objective. These final terms, presented in Table 2, serve as the core analytical units for the subsequent analysis.

Given the relatively large number of selected terms (60), factor analysis was employed to reduce dimensionality and to uncover the latent structure among variables, thereby enhancing data parsimony (Xiang et al., 2015). As noted by Hair (2009) and Xiang et al. (2015), factor analysis is appropriate for non-metric variables when intercorrelations exist among them. After confirming that the dataset satisfied the assumptions required for regression analysis, a multiple

linear regression model was estimated. In this model, the extracted principal components (PC_i) served as independent variables, while the TripAdvisor rating scores for Disneyland were used as the dependent variable, enabling examination of the relationship between visitor experience dimensions and satisfaction. The PC_i values were normalized within the range of 0 to 1, whereas the rating scores spanned from 0 to 10, with the model fitted using the ordinary least squares (OLS) method.

Table 2: High Frequency Words (top 60)

High Frequency Words			
ride	walt	recommend	check
wait	service	money	evening
food	halloween	cast	picture
parade	couple	clean	lunch
family	parking	queue	gate
mountain	photo	friendly	Caribbean
adventure	castle	daughter	party
firework	close	Fast-pass	weather
ticket	stroller	hopper	drink
character	helpful	mickey	friend
crowded	weekend	water	princess
staff	employer	Christmas	snack
expensive	employee	theme	entrance
price	cost	holiday	school
hotel	husband	restaurant	shop

Results

Attributes of visitor experiences in Disneyland

Table 3 shows the results of factor analysis of every principal component including their eigenvalue, variance percentage and cumulative percentage of. The greater the cumulative percentage is, the more information of variables the principal component contains, and the more powerful the explanatory of variables is. As the forth column in Table 3 shows, these eight variables can be extracted, and explains 20.042% of total variance.

Table 3: Explained total variance of principle component

Items	Eigenvalue	Variance Percentage (%)	Cumulative Explained Variance Ratio (%)
1	1.878	3.184	3.184
2	1.721	2.917	6.101
3	1.57	2.662	8.763
4	1.46	2.474	11.237
5	1.368	2.318	13.555
6	1.32	2.238	15.973
7	1.283	2.174	17.967
8	1.224	2.074	20.042

As shown in Table 4, the rotated principal component matrix contains 8 principal components and 23 variables, and correlation coefficients of the principal components and variables are also listed. PC1 contains four variables: staff, clean, friendly and helpful, and they are positively correlated with PC1. As these words mainly relate to staff, PC1 is named as Staff. PC2 explains three variables: mickey, Halloween, party, therefore is named as Atmosphere. PC3 contains five variables: food; expensive; water; drink; snack, and is named as Food. PC4

is named as *Activity*, as it contains *firework* and *parade*. PC5 contains three variables: *memory*, *photo*, and *picture*. Among them the greatest correlation coefficient is 0.61, which belongs to *memory*, and the words *photo* and *picture* are related to memory. PC6 mainly refers to *ticket*. PC7 is named as *Time* as it contains *holiday* and *weekend*, representing leisure time of tourists. PC8 includes *ride* and *wait*, therefore is named as *Queue*. Ultimately, eight principal components were derived to capture the underlying dimensions of experiences in theme parks: *Staff*, *Atmosphere*, *Food*, *Activity*, *Memory*, *Ticket*, *Time*, and *Queue*.

Table 4: PCA Matrix

High Frequency Words	Components							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Staff								
staff	0.641							
clean	0.467							
friendly	0.727							
helpful	0.665							
Atmosphere								
mickey		0.508						
halloween		0.817						
party		0.840						
Food								
food			0.600					
expensive			0.464					
water			0.472					
drink			0.517					
snack			0.465					
Activity								
parade				0.743				
firework				0.745				
Memory								
character					0.610			
photo					0.477			
picture					0.573			
Ticket								
ticket						0.562		
hopper						0.503		
Time								
weekend							0.430	
holiday							0.604	
Queue								
ride								0.566
wait								0.431
Eigenvalue	1.878	1.721	1.57	1.46	1.368	1.32	1.283	1.224
Cumulative Explained Variance Ratio (%)	3.184	6.101	8.763	11.237	13.155	15.973	17.967	20.042

Factors influencing visitor satisfaction in Disneyland

Next, we use the score of these eight principal components as independent variables, and the rating scores from Trip Advisor as dependent variable, to conduct the regression analysis at the confidence level of 95%. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Regression Coefficient

model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. error	Beta		
constant	4.412	0.008		549.649	0.000
staff	0.042	0.008	0.043	5.159	0.000
atmosphere	0.027	0.008	0.028	3.384	0.001
food	-0.035	0.008	-0.037	-4.415	0.000
activity	0.062	0.008	0.065	7.759	0.000
memory	0.028	0.008	0.029	3.440	0.001
ticket	-0.072	0.008	-0.075	-8.963	0.000
time	0.015	0.008	0.015	1.858	0.063
queue	-0.057	0.008	-0.059	-7.075	0.000

Table 5 shows, among the 8

factors, *Ticket* and *Activity* have the highest influence (-0.072 and 0.062 respectively). It shows that these two variables are the most significant factors affecting tourists' satisfaction. The former is negatively correlated with visitor satisfaction, which means that the mentioning about ticket is related to a lower score on satisfaction. However, *Activity* is positively correlated with tourist satisfaction, activities such as *parade* and *fireworks* have positive influence on tourists' satisfaction. As such, the variables; *Staff*, *Atmosphere* and *Memory* are positively correlated with tourists' satisfaction (Table 5), and they are also positively correlated with the corresponding loading factors in Table 4. This means the high appearance of positive words such as *friendly*, *helpful*, *picture*, *party*, is related to the high score of visitor satisfaction. The variables, *food* and *queue* are negatively correlated with tourist satisfaction, which means the low satisfaction is mainly related to expensive food and long queue. Among all the variables, *Time* has the lowest coefficient (0.015), meaning time has little influence on tourist satisfaction.

Companion and visitor satisfaction

Trip Advisor divides visitors into five types (Table 6): travel alone, business partners, friend, couple and family. Most people travelling with family members (68.73%). We then use these groups to explore companionship and visitor satisfaction.

Table 6 Number of Visitors and Satisfaction of Different Travel Companion

Type	Quantity	Percentage	Average score
Travel Alone	316	2.25%	4.689
Business partners	156	1.11%	4.323
Friends	1419	10.10%	4.578
Couple	2500	17.80%	4.531
Family	9653	68.73%	4.198
Total	14044	100%	4.463

In order to explore the relationship between companions and tourists' satisfaction, we use One-way ANOVA (Table 7). The results suggest ($F= 4.223$, $P= 0.002$) that there is a significant difference among different groups on tourists' satisfaction.

Table 7 Correlation of travel companion and tourists' satisfaction

Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean	Square	F	Significance
Between groups	15.6522	4	3.193	4.223	0.002
Within the group	13001.480	14039	0.927		
Total	13017.132	14043			

In order to further explore these differences among groups, we then use the eight factors discovered in experiences (Table 4 &5), and extract the corresponding eight elements from five types of tourist review texts. The tf-idf values of the principal components, as shown in Table 6, are used as independent variables and the visitor satisfaction score is used as a dependent variable. Stepwise regression analysis is performed at a level of 95% significance. Table 8 shows a general result of the linear regression analysis which includes negative and positive factors affecting visitor satisfaction. According to beta value from regression analysis, we identify the most influencing factor. As some variables do not significantly affect satisfaction in some groups, they are automatically removed, which also indicates that tourists with different companions consider different factors when evaluating satisfaction.

First, for people travelling alone, all seven variables except ‘*ticket*’ were excluded, indicating ticket is the only factor negatively affecting their satisfaction (Table 8). Second, for people travelling with friends, *Time*, *Ticket*, *Queue*, and *Activity* are the factors that mainly affect tourists’ satisfaction. From the Beta value of four variables, we find that *Time* has the greatest impact on satisfaction. *Ticket* and *Queue* are negative factors while *Time* and *Activity* both have positive correlation with satisfaction. Third, for people travelling as couples, five variables may influence satisfaction: *Activity*, *Atmosphere*, *Time*, *Queue* and *Ticket*. Forth, for the largest group, people traveling with family members, *Ticket*, *Time*, *Activity*, *Memory*, *Queue*, and *Atmosphere* are the factors that mainly affect satisfaction. Among the six variables, *Ticket* has the greatest influence on satisfaction. Last, for people travelling with business trips, insignificant influence was found, maybe due to the small number of reviews (156 pieces).

Table 8 Comparison of linear regression results of different travel companions

Type	Negative factor influencing satisfaction	Positive factor influencing satisfaction	Most influential factor
Solo	ticket		ticket
Friends	ticket	time	time
	queue	activity	
Couple	ticket	time	activity
	queue	atmosphere	
Family		time	ticket
	ticket	activity	
	queue	atmosphere	
		memory	

Through the stepwise regression analysis, the influencing factors of tourists’ satisfaction who travel with different companions are found. As can be seen from Table 8, *Ticket* has a great influence on visitor satisfaction for travelling alone and travel with family members. However, *Time* is the most important element for tourists travelling with friends. And tourists travelling as a couple are significantly affected by *Activity*.

Discussion

The above results indicate that eight variables: Staff, Atmosphere, Food, Activity, Memory, Ticket, Time, and Queue constitute the main components of visitor experiences in theme parks. According to the four realms of experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), we find that tourists are mainly entertainment-oriented, reflecting the nature of experiences in theme parks (Pikkemaat and Schuckert, 2007; Blumenthal and Jensen, 2019). These results also align with Grove and Fisk’s (1992) theatrical components: the setting (atmosphere, queue, memory), service performance (activity, food, ticket), service personnel (staff), and the audience (time), which are important parts of visitor experiences in theme parks. As can be seen, the factors that appeared most are related to service performance and the setting. Considering that theme park products are essentially experiential consumption (Tasci and Milman, 2018), the setting and

service performance will help create a fantasy atmosphere for theme park visitors.

Regarding visitor satisfaction in theme parks, the online reviews confirm previous research indicating that tickets (Heo and Lee, 2009; Fotiadis, 2016) and activities (Godovykh et al, 2019) have the greatest impact on tourists' satisfaction, followed by Staff, Memory, and Atmosphere. The results also demonstrate that Food and Queue have a negative influence on visitor experiences, corroborating Alexander et al.'s (2012) research.

Further comparison with different travel companions suggests that different factors influence visitor satisfaction in different groups. For solo travelers, who do not need to consider others (Zhang, 2016) and are least likely to be influenced by others, ticket (related to price) becomes the only important factor influencing satisfaction.

For tourists traveling with family members, the ticket is an important factor influencing satisfaction. Past studies point out that family members can decrease people's urge to purchase as they prefer to save money (Huang et al., 2013), so cheap tickets become important for tourists. This group of travelers also has the lowest satisfaction scores. This may be explained by Huang et al. (2013) stating that tourists' intentions to complain change according to the level of intimacy with their companions; people with closer relationships are more likely to complain about the experience.

However, for tourists traveling with friends, time significantly influences visitor satisfaction as it might be difficult to find a suitable time for everyone, although they enjoy each other's company (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003; Park, 2004). For couples with no children, the ticket is not an issue but activities significantly influence satisfaction, suggesting they emphasize engaging experiences in the park. A further examination of the original reviews suggests the words used in their experiences mainly relate to personal psychological feelings, such as 'inner child can resurface' or 'close to our hearts'.

Our study suggests that tourist experiences and satisfaction vary according to different travel companions, suggesting that personal evaluation of travel experiences and satisfaction may be influenced by others, which can be explained by social comparison (Festinger, 1954).

Conclusion

Understanding visitor experiences is important for digital marketing, particularly how certain aspects of experiences are related to high customer satisfaction. This study utilizes online visitor reviews of Disneyland California from TripAdvisor. Utilizing a web-based analytical method, this study investigates visitor experiences and satisfaction in theme parks, while examining the impact of travel companions on these experiences.

Firstly, the study reveals that visitor experiences in theme parks mainly focus on entertainment aspects, including service performance, service personnel, and the settings, confirming Grove and Fisk's (1992) theatrical components of experiences. In this case, service performance and service setting become the most important parts of theme park experiences, possibly related to the nature of experiential consumption of theme park products (Tasci and Milman, 2018).

Secondly, this paper identifies key elements that contribute to theme parks experiences, such as, *Staff, Atmosphere, Food, Activity, Time and Ticket*. These factors relate closely with service performance and service settings, it further confirms the nature of experiential consumption in theme park products.

Thirdly, the study finds that tourists' satisfaction varies with their travel companions, confirming social comparison theories can be applied in travel (Festinger, 1954). Our study reveals that tourists travelling alone or with family members pay more attention on tickets, focusing on the outward facility driven experiences; while couples pay more attention to the inward driven experiences, such as activities and memories.

This paper contributes to relevant theory in the following aspects:

It delineates multiple dimensions of tourist experiences that influence satisfaction when individuals travel with different types of companions, highlighting the pivotal role of social

interactions in shaping both experiences and evaluative outcomes. Framing the analysis within Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, the research extends the understanding of how companionship impacts tourist experiences, offering a nuanced perspective on the social determinants of satisfaction. In contrast to previous investigations of theme park experiences, which have predominantly emphasized environmental or physical aspects, the present study underscores the centrality of travel companions in the co-creation of visitor experiences, thereby addressing a notable gap in the existing literature.

The paper also establishes a rigorous method of analyzing online review data by using a series of PCA and regression analysis based on TF-IDF score to extract key components of visitor experiences and to identify the link between visitor satisfaction and experiences.

This paper has some practical implications for theme park management. In order to improve visitor satisfaction, Disney could highlight different elements when marketing to different segments. For example, using a flexible ticketing strategy for those who travel alone or with family members; for couples, marketing focus could be on special, personal activities and events. In addition, quality food and shorter queues would contribute to a more general positive experience and higher satisfaction.

The study also has its limitations. Review data has limited information as it lacks details on visitor demographics and tourist expectations due to self-selection bias (Li and Hitt, 2008). Further studies can consider using a mixed method by combining data from online reviews, questionnaires, or interviews to study the relationship between customer experience and satisfaction and to observe the experience characteristics, satisfaction, and loyalty of different groups based on demographic characteristics. It is also noted that the platform of TripAdvisor was launched in 2000 and the users are usually young travellers compared with the visitors identified by many previous studies on theme parks, therefore, the visitor experiences discussed in this particular study may be biased. Nevertheless, future research could cover a much broader age group.

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