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Delighted or Outraged? Uncovering Key Drivers of Exceedingly Positive and Negative Theme Park Guest Experience

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Abstract

Purpose - Despite multiple studies of customer delight in various service industries, limited research exists in the hedonically-driven theme park context. This study explores the key drivers of customer delight and outrage in theme parks by analyzing TripAdvisor's comments from visitors to the top 20 North American theme parks.

Design / Methodology - Following the analysis of thousands of extremely positive and negative comments using MAXQDA qualitative software, keywords drivers of delight and outrage were identified. The researchers applied both thematic and root cause in order to ascertain the sources leading to both positive and negative consumer feedback.

Findings - Delighted guests relayed various aspects of their experience including positive affect experience, positive value perceptions, and limited wait times. Root causes that influenced customer delight included: excellent core product, quality food and beverage, servicescape, pricing decisions, and low visitor demand or sensible admissions policies. Outraged guests described various aspects of their experiences such as negative perceptions of value, long waits, poor customer service, and negative emotions. Root causes for customer outrage included low quality or deficient core products, poor quality of food and beverage, poor facility maintenance, aggressive pricing decisions, poor staff selection, training, and working conditions, and high customer demand on any given date or aggressive admissions policies.

Originality / Value – The present research is unique in that it exposes the key themes of customer delight and outrage in the theme park setting, presents a conceptual model, and analyzes its root causes.

Introduction

The concept of tourism experience has been extensively addressed in the literature, more specifically with regards to the concept of authenticity (Cohen, 1979; MacCannell, 1976) and then a variety of contributions from the perspectives of culture (Bricker and Kerstetter, 2006; Lee, 2001), activities, interests, or attitudes (Otto and Ritchie, 1996; Volo, 2009), or the experiential consumption setting (Lindberg et al., 2014). Experiences have also been studied at different consumption situations like holidays and backpacking (Binkhorst and Den Dekker, 2009; Uriely et al., 2002), cultural and heritage tourism (Beeho and Prentice, 1997; Prentice, 2001), urban tourism (Page, 2002) and food services (Quan and Wang, 2004). However, the different components of experiences have only recently been studied with contributions by Pine and Gilmore (2011) as a prime example. Schmitt (1999) proposed that experience may be classified into various types, each with its own structure. More specifically, Pine and Gilmore (1998) suggested that experiences can be categorized in a grid by their level of absorption versus immersion and active versus passive participation that yielded four types of customer experiences: entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapist (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, p. 102).

Schmitt (1999) proposed a different typology for experiential consumption and suggested that executives perceive different forms of experiences as Strategic Experiential Modules (SEMs). These SEMs and include Sense, Feel, Think, Act, and Relate (Schmitt, 1999). These SEMs were addressed in the literature, in particular their roles in predicting consumer attitudes, behaviors, and behavioral intentions in different industries (Tao, 2014), including the tourism and hospitality industry (Nadiri and Gunay, 2013; Song et al., 2015).

To gain a deeper insight into the emotional aspects of customer experience, the concepts of delight and outrage have emerged in the past two decades. In support of this notion, Schneider and Bowen (1999) stated that "focusing on customer delight and outrage - emotions more intense than satisfaction or dissatisfaction - may lead to a better understanding of the dynamics of customer emotions and their effect on customer behavior and loyalty" (p. 26). Despite the extensive research on customer satisfaction and its relationship to loyalty and other business outcomes were questioned (Skogland and Siguaw, 2004), the construct of customer delight emerged as an alternative to customer satisfaction.

Customer delight has been studied in multiple settings including retail (Arnold et al., 2005; Barnes et al., 2016), hotels (Lee and Shea, 2014; Magnini et al., 2011; Torres and Kline, 2006), restaurants (Bowden and Dagger, 2011), performing arts (Swanson and Davis, 2012), and festivals (Crotts et al., 2008). However, limited customer delight research has been conducted in the area of theme parks with the exception of the studies conducted by Ma et al. (2013; 2017). The topic of customer outrage is even less understood having received limited attention in the scholarly literature (Antonetti, 2016). Given the hedonic nature of the theme park experience, it is necessary to determine the key drivers of customer delight and outrage.

Theme parks are of particular relevance, as they have been described as a form of entertainment, aiming to a create an fantasy setting reminiscent of a different place and time (Milman, 2009). Browne and Browne (2001) referred to a theme park as "a social artwork designed as a four-dimensional symbolic landscape, evoking impressions of places and times, real and imaginary" (Browne and Browne, 2001, pp. 387-389). These contemporary visitor attractions are often described as figurative landscapes that re-create stories, books, plays, and films (King, 2002). Theme parks are an important segment of the hospitality industry and serve

as economic engines for local communities in which they operate. In recent years, the theme

park sector has grown significantly in both North America as well as worldwide (Rubin, 2016).

Though many North American theme parks are at a maturity stage, the top 20 of these attractions

reported increases in visitation of 22% for the 2006-2015 period (Rubin, 2016). North American

Theme parks also enlarged their revenues from $16.6 billion in 2014 to $18.3 billion in 2015, a

10.4% growth (Rubin, 2016). As the popularity of these attractions continues to grow, many of

them aim to develop creative experiences to grow their market share and generate incremental

revenues (Clavé, 2007; Milman et al., 2012).

At the present time, researchers have studied the concept of a "theme park experience, yet

most studies have been unable to produce a definition of the construct or to empirically measure

its latent components. Moreover, while recent research sought to quantify the impact of a variety

of these variables on customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Fotiadis, 2016; Jensen,

2007; Manthiou et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2010), very few studies addressed the hidden

components of experience, and their impact on visitor satisfaction and intention to revisit or

loyalty. In the theme park setting, it has been suggested that visitors have become increasingly

demanding in their search for experiences that can offer quality products, provide excellent

service, thus demonstrating continual improvement in key aspects of their experiential

consumption like waiting in line, rides, entertainment, food services, and merchandising that are

crucial to create value and cultivate the "wow" factor (Hunter, 2004). In support of the notion of

customers becoming more demanding, Dey et al. (2017) state that "today's customers expect to

be surprised by their hosts and need stronger stimuli to feel dumbfounded" (p.58). Therefore,

customer delight values of perfect quality and noble customer service may enhance satisfaction

and loyalty. In fact, prior research suggested that customer delight has a positive effect on

various customer engagement measures including emotional loyalty (Kim et al., 2015), positive word-of-mouth (Swanson and Davis, 2012) and repurchase intentions (Bartl et al., 2013).

In this research, the authors sought to identify the key customer delight and outrage drivers in a theme park context. Using a qualitative approach, the researchers identified the influence of each driver on the visitor's assessment of delightful and enraging experiences. Consequently, the following research objectives were established: (1) To uncover the key drivers of customer delight and outrage in theme parks, (2) To analyze the root causes for delightful and outraging experiences, and (3) To propose conceptual models for delight and outrage in the theme park context.

Literature Review

Customer delight and outrage in the theme park context

The origins of the customer delight concept are traced back to the work of Oliver and Rust (1997) and Keiningham et al. (1999). Customer delight has been conceptualized in three different ways. The first set of researchers defined delight as an emotion. For example, Kumar et al. (2001) defined customer delight as an emotion encompassing of joy, thrill, and exhilaration. Similarly, Patterson (1997) described delight as a pleasurable experience. The second group of researchers defined delight as a process of exceeding customer expectations. For example, Keiningham et al. (1999) suggested that customers evaluate their experience among the upper and lower limits of a "zone of tolerance" and that delivering service that surpasses the upper threshold of such zone would delight customers. In contrast, delivering experiences below the lower zone of tolerance would likely yield the opposite effect, namely customer outrage. The third group of researchers approached customer delight from a motivational perspective.

According to Schneider and Bowen (1999), delighting guests was a function of satisfying the needs of security, justice, and self-esteem.

It is noteworthy that continued debate exists on several aspects of delight. For example, Crotts and Magnini (2011) posited that surprise is a critical driver of customer delight. In contrast, Ma et al. (2013) suggested that a positive surprise is not always needed to delight the guest. Barnes et al. (2016) explored two paths towards delight: one with joy and the other with surprise. Results revealed that both paths were feasible towards attaining customer delight, however, both could yield delight independently.

The opposite of delight, customer outrage, has received less attention in the literature but is nonetheless a critical construct. Schneider and Bowen (1999) argued that a violation of the guest's needs for security and justice will likely yield outrage. After conducting a comprehensive review of outrage and anger-related literature, Antonetti (2016) identified two main forms: problem-focused anger and vengeful anger. Accordingly, problem-focused anger is motivated by a customer's desire to solve a problem, is less intense, and is typically expressed by the consumers. In contrast, vengeful anger is motivated by a desire to hurt the company, is more intense in nature, and often results in customer deviance.

Several studies looked at the relationships between customer experience and delight in the context of the hospitality industry. Verma's (2003) research proposed several factors that account for customers' outrage including not performing or delivering the promised service, being rude, disrespectful, displaying offensive behavior, and demonstrating an indifferent attitude. Seeking to ascertain the key components of customer delight within the hotel context, Magnini et al. (2011) used TripAdvisor posts in a content analysis study that addressed the main

words and phrases associated with this construct. The authors suggested that service and cleanliness were two of the most critical components to attain customer delight in hotels.

Two recent studies sought to pinpoint the key drivers of customer delight in hotels (Torres et al., 2014; Torres and Kline, 2013). Following content analysis of customer letters written to provide affirmative comment to hotel managers, a typology for customer delight was developed (Torres and Kline, 2013). Some of the different types of customer delight included receiving friendly service (charismatic delight), competent service (professional delight), skillfulness at resolving problems (problem resolution delight), appealing to a customer's esteem needs (fulfillment delight), and receiving service superior to that of competitors (comparative delight). Additional research with hotel guests from four countries (Torres et al., 2014) revealed that the phenomenon of customer delight may be culturally-driven. For their part, Beauchamp and Barnes (2015) revealed the employee variables that are likely to yield customer delight to include: employee affect, employee effort, and employee skill.

Despite the interest in customer delight in various service industries including hotels, restaurants, and retail, little is known about how to delight guests in a theme park setting. Nevertheless, a few studies customer delight in the theme park setting exist (Ma et al., 2013; Ma et al., 2017). The aforementioned researchers devised a model to test the behavioral foundation of delight and to test the antecedents and consequences of delight using cognitive appraisal theory (CAT). The study by Ma et al. (2013) lent support for the use of CAT as a basis for studies of emotion. In light of the limited research on customer delight in the theme park setting, the authors sought to uncover the key drivers of customer delight in such experiential consumption environment. Furthermore, given the importance of its opposite, customer outrage, the researchers also examined the antecedents to this negative emotion. Table 2 presents a

summary of some of the key drivers of customer delight in various industries (i.e., hotels, restaurants, retail).

<p align="center">**>>>Insert Table 2 Here<<<**</p>

Online and offline word-of-mouth behavior

Consumer experiences not only act as catalyst towards their satisfaction (Anderson and Mittal, 2000) and loyalty (Fornell et al., 2006), but also foster WOM behaviors (Keiningham et al., 2007). The impact of consumer experiences on WOM widely discussed within face-to-face interactions (Babin et al., 2005, Groeger and Buttle, 2014), online interactions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002) and experiential settings (Voss and Zomerdijk, 2007). The topic was approached from different perspectives, including the impact of seeded marketing campaigns (Chae et al., 2017), digital word-of-mouth and its offline amplification (Fulgoni and Lipsman, 2015), drivers of electronic word-of-mouth (Liu et al., 2015, Pauwels et al., 2016), and the impact of transmission encouragement on consumers' transmission decisions (Stephen and Lehmann, 2016). Several studies investigated during-the-experience word-of-mouth behavior and distinguished it from post-consumption experience (Rahman et al., 2015). The social network approach calls for patterns of interactions among people as a grid of connections (Newman, 2002), where individuals within a network are called nodes and the relationships between these individuals are called ties (Zhang and Venkatesh, 2013).

TripAdvisor is the world's largest travel word-of-mouth site with 435 million reviews and opinions covering 6.8 million lodgings, restaurants, and attractions. The various sites of TripAdvisor comprise largest travel community worldwide, with 390 million average monthly unique visitors in 49 markets worldwide (TripAdvisor, 2017a). The social media platform uses a team of moderators that examine questionable reviews, as well as automated tools on the site that

<p align="center">8</p>

help flag doubtful content for review (TripAdvisor, 2017b). The platform has been considered as "a leading provider of customer reviews in the hospitality and tourism industry in terms of the number of posts and number of views" (Molinillo et al., 2016, p. 16).

TripAdvisor platform has been used to study the role of social media in various hospitality and tourism settings, including the hotel industry (Fong et al., 2017; Molinillo et al., 2016; Sebastian et al., 2016), the restaurant industry (Bowden and Dagger, 2011), museums and heritage sites (Wong, 2017; Carter, 2016) and destination image (Garay and Cànoves, 2017; Kladou and Mavragani, 2015). Other studies about the TripAdvisor platform addressed reviews' credibility, rankings, and trust (Ayeh et al., 2013; Filieri et al., 2015; Jeacle and Carter, 2011), as well as insights into suspicious ratings (Schuckert et al., 2016). A group of studies addressed managerial responses to consumers' postings (Xie et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2015).

Consumer experience in the theme park context

The contribution of experiential quality to overall satisfaction and behavioral intentions in a theme park and attraction settings has also been recognized in the literature (Jin et al., 2015; Kao et al., 2008). Manthiou et al. (2016) acknowledge the importance of theme park visitation in creating long-term memories for their visitors. Recent studies indicated that attractions' satisfaction and loyalty drivers encompass tangible and intangible variables. Tangible variables include service delivery components such as the servicescape, core product (i.e., rides), sanitation, and the interactions between staff and visitors (Johns and Gyimóthy, 2002). Intangible variables include the customer's value perception, service quality elements (to include reliability and responsiveness) as well as the guest's perception of enjoyment, immersion, and surprise. (Johns and Gyimóthy, 2002).

Seeking ascertain the key components of consumer satisfaction within the theme park

sector, Cheng et al. (2016) suggested that the servicescape, recreation experience, availability of

information and support services among others are critical satisfaction components. In a similar

vein, Milman et al. (2012) posited that the most critical attributes affecting theme park visitors'

satisfaction included safety and security, ticket prices, and knowledge of the park by its staff

(Milman et al., 2012). Geissler and Rucks (2011) also concluded that theme park visitors'

experience was impacted by the park's food quality, value, admission pricing, and variety, as

well as the park's cleanliness and atmosphere.

Another study that identified visitor satisfaction in theme parks was conducted by Ryan

et al. (2010) suggested six categories to quantify theme park satisfaction including "the

atmosphere of the park, the existence of thrill rides, degrees of crowding experienced, having

places to rest, and a perceived reasonable entry price" (p. 195). Kao et al. (2008) indicated that

four experiential qualities were positively associated with experiential satisfaction. These

included "immersion," "surprise," "participation," and "fun" (pp. 168-169).

Beyond satisfaction, which tends to be more attitudinal in nature, as compared to delight

(Torres, 2014), other researchers have studied the role of customer emotions in the theme park

setting. For example, Bigné et al. (2005) illustrated how the emotions of pleasure and arousal

heavily impact customer satisfaction and their behavioral intentions. Jensen (2007) posited that

theme park customers' satisfaction has both motivator and hygiene factors. Motivating factors in

the theme park context include entertainment, educational events, and socializing. Some hygiene

factors include parking, eating, and restrooms. Ali et al. (2016) constructed a structural model to

quantify customer satisfaction the theme park industry and concluded that "physical

environment, interaction with customers and interaction with staff significantly influenced

customer satisfaction". Finally, theme park operators are often faced with overcrowding. This can be beneficial due to the increased revenues, yet challenging due to guests waiting in line for long periods of time. In this regard, research by Budruk et al. (2002) concluded that perceived, expected, and preferences for crowding and density, actual density, and visitors' previous experience at the attraction may impact patrons' level of satisfaction.

As demonstrated above, studies on theme parks have enabled researchers to categorize various types of guest experience. Furthermore, drivers of satisfaction in the theme park context have been the subject of various research studies. Finally, theme park researchers have begun exploration of customer emotions in this critical industry. Table 1 presents some of the key drivers of satisfaction in theme parks based on the existing scholarly work. In spite of this body of literature, more research is needed to understand the drivers and root causes of delightful and enraging experiences in theme parks.

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Theoretical Framework

Based on the literature, the researchers developed a conceptual model. Later, the researchers utilized the findings from qualitative research methods to ascertain whether there was support for the various constructs and relationships presented. Consequently, the present research utilized both inductive and deductive processes (more on the methods and findings sections). A theoretical model (Figure 1) presents several themes theorized to result in theme park customer delight and outrage. The researchers proposed that the *core product* (i.e. rides, shows, entertainment), *affective experiences, the physical environment, value perceptions, customer service, and wait times* are all critical components of the *customer experience* in the theme park setting. Depending on how customers appraise these experiential components, they will emerge

delighted or *outrage*d. When customers are delighted, they will express their *positi*ve emotions via *electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM).* Similarly, enraged visitors will express their *negative* emotions via *eWOM.* When the theme park experience has a high-quality core product, positive emotions are experienced, the physical environment is suitable, a positive value is perceived, good customer service is received, and low levels of crowding are experienced; customers will be *delighted*. In contrast, when customers obtain an outdated or dysfunctional core product, experience negative emotional events, have negative perceptions of the physical environment and the value proposition, receive poor customer service, and wait for extremely long periods of time, guest will become *outraged*. Support for these concepts can be found in the literature presented. More specifically, prior research supports the importance of the core product in theme parks (Jensen, 2007; Johns and Gyimóthy, 2002; Ryan et al., 2010), positive affect (Kao et al., 2008; Schmitt, 1999), the physical environment (Ali et al., 2016; Geissler and Rucks, 2011; Johns and Gyimóthy, 2002), customer service (Ali et al., 2016; Johns and Gyimóthy, 2002; Milman, 2012), and levels of crowding (Burduck et al., 2002; Ryan et al., 2010).

Theme park experiences occupy a "sweet spot", as they incorporate elements of the various realms of experience (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). The unique approach of studying the meaning of theme park customer comments and feedback will help us uncover the major principles of service and experience management, in view of the theme park visitors' hedonistic experience. This approach will help us in particular to understand the significant instances of extreme delight and outrage.

>>>Insert Figure 1 Here<<<

METHOD

In recent years, a several studies aimed at gaining greater knowledge of the impact of electronic word-of-mouth on consumer behavior and the strategies utilized by businesses to manage their online presence (Molinillo et al., 2016). To the author's knowledge, no empirical study has been conducted concerning the role of social media, including TripAdvisor, on consumer satisfaction and behavioral intention with a specific emphasis on the theme park sector.The present research uses data from TripAdvisor to ascertain patterns of delight and outrage among theme park visitors.

The researchers used a qualitative approach to determine the key drivers of customer delight and outrage in the theme park industry. To obtain key feedback concerning customer's experience, setting, the authors obtained data from TripAdvisor. A similar approach was undertaken by Magnini et al. (2011) in research project related customer delight in the lodging industry. Given the text-based and quantitative (i.e., number of stars) data available in the TripAdvisor platform, the researchers decided to undertake two separate data collection efforts. Both databases were built using a list of the top 20 theme parks in North America based on the number of annual visitors (Rubin, 2016).

The first database was constructed by using keywords related to customer delight and outrage. In a prior study, Magnini et al. (2011) used keywords associated with customer delight to sort through TripAdvisor comments and selected those customers that were delighted. The present research uses a similar approach. The key words for customer delight were based on prior studies including a) Kumar et al. (2001) which defined delight as an emotion composed of joy, thrill, and exhilaration; b) Patterson (1997), which described delight as a pleasurable experience; and c) Schneider and Bowen (1999) which posited that delight can be attained by the fulfillment of the need for esteem. Contrary to Magnini et al. (2011), the researchers chose not to

use the word "surprise" as subsequent research has demonstrated that delight can be attained without a surprise component (Barnes et al., 2016; Torres and Kline, 2013).

The second form of data collection took into account the number of stars given by the customers in TripAdvisor. The purpose of generating these alternate databases was to ascertain whether differences existed among the comments chosen on the basis of keywords (a strategy employed by Magnini et al., 2011) or comments were chosen on the basis of star rating alone. For these purposes, the researchers sought five-star and one-star comments for each of the top 20 North American theme parks. The rationale behind choosing five-star and one-star comments were that such customers were most likely to be either delighted or outraged.

Data collection was limited to a maximum of 200 comments from each park posted within the past five years (2012-2017). In many cases, it was not necessary to go back five years, however the number of comments available was different for delight and outrage. Furthermore, differences were noted among the theme park regarding the number of reviews, with parks at the top of the visitor count typically receiving greater number of TripAdvisor postings. The comments analyzed were from a variety of seasons including summer vacations, special events in the Fall, Holidays at the theme parks, and Spring Break. The nature of the comments seemed consistent throughout the seasons with the exception of commentary on special events, shows, and seasonal entertainment. Additionally, the positive or negative comments concerning waiting and crowding were different amongst the various seasons depending on the theme park's peak attendance periods. Comments from TripAdvisor were copied from the website and transferred into a word processing software. After all databases (2 for delight and 2 for outrage were built), the researchers imported the Word documents into MAXQDA, a qualitative software, for further analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

Given the aforementioned studies, the researchers searched for the words: "delight", "delightful", "joy", "exhilaration" (words identified by Kumar et al., 2001), "pleasure" (identified by Patterson, 1997), and "feel special" (following the critical nature of esteem need fulfilment highlighted by Schneider and Bowen, 1999). Each search was limited to comments placed during the 2012-2017 period for the top 20 theme parks in North America (Rubin, 2016).

The authors discontinued the information gathering process for each theme park once 200 TripAdvisor comments for that specific theme park were obtained. The search yielded a total of 1,330 comments associated with customer delight with a total word count of 313,933. Similarly, a text-based database was built for customer outrage. Some of the semantics used to describe this emotion included "outrage", "anger", "angry", "enraged", "disgust", and "awful". These customer outrage words were highlighted by Antonetti's (2016) research. The search for words related to customer outrage in the top 20 theme parks yielded a total of 625 comments for a total word count of 172,608. It is interesting to mention that the total number of comments for outrage was significantly lower that delight in the theme park context.

The 5-star delight database for the top 20 North American theme parks yielded 4,000 comments for a total of 377,328 words. The 1-star database for the top 20 North American theme parks yielded a total of 2,510 comments for a total of 505,394 words. The establishment of these two methods: collection by text-based content and collection by quantitative rating allowed the

researchers to conduct analyses of both datasets and determine whether any similarities or differences existed.

Data were analyzed using MAXQDA (2017), a qualitative analysis software package Word counts were obtained for both the delighted and outraged guests. Following the identification of keywords, the researchers clustered each set of words into meaning units. This is consistent with the notion of thematic analysis. Consequently, the present research utilized both an inductive and deductive approach. The initial literature guided the conceptual model and data collection strategies. Afterwards, the data (i.e., TripAdvisor postings) revealed key words concerning both customer delight and outrage. These key words are reported in the findings section and helped refine the original model. For three out of the four databases (Tables 3-5), the criteria set forth by the researcher was 400 occurrences in order to make it to the list of key words. For the final database (Table 6), the threshold set forth by the researchers was 150 words due to the significantly smaller size (in terms of overall word count) of the database as compared to the other three. Additionally, the researchers engaged in root cause analysis. Connelly (2012) describes root cause analysis as "a systematic process used to address problems or non-conformance to identify the source of the problem" (p. 316). Root cause focuses exclusively on "why" a phenomenon occurs as opposed to "how" it occurs. The process involves the steps of "data collection, causal factor charting, root cause identification, and recommendation generation and implementation" (Rooney and Vanden Heuvel, 2004, pp. 46-48).

Findings

Customer Delight

At the phase of the data analysis, the researchers obtained the word frequency counts for delight and outrage. For customer delight, the TripAdvisor's 5-star database featured keywords

such as "ride," "roller," "coaster," and "show," all of which were associated with the theme park's core product of rides and shows. Additionally, words like "great," "fun," "love," and "amaze," highlighted both positive guest experiences and guest affect (Table 3). The findings confirmed previous research indicating that theme park experiential consumption involved both tangible and intangible variables (Johns and Gyimóthy, 2002). The impact of tangible variables on theme park satisfaction was also suggested in other empirical studies including thrill rides (Ryan et al., 2010), food quality (Geisser and Rucks, 2011), amusement consumption (Cheng et al., 2016), and roller coasters (Milman et al., 2012). Kao et al. (2008) stressed various affective components including surprise and happiness. In a similar vein, Bigné et al. (2005) illustrated how arousal emotions among consumers influenced satisfaction and behavioral intentions in the theme park industry.

Words associated with positive value generation such as "worth" were also noted among the comments analyzed in this present study. In addition, words associated with speed and limited waiting times were noted such as "fast" and "line". Customers were also delighted by their food experience and the theme park's featured theme or story (Table 3). Several words highlighted the interactions within the traveling party or with other patrons including "family," "kids," and "little." Please note that words referring to theme park employees were not included in the top words listed, which is inconsistent with previous empirical studies suggesting that communication with park employees, and other visitors influence customer delight and visitor satisfaction (Ali et al., 2016; Kao et al., 2008). Milman et al. (2012) also specified that one of the most critical factors impacting visitors' satisfaction was the staff's knowledge of the facilities and attractions. It is also noteworthy that words associated security and safety identified in other studies (Kuo and Wu, 2014; Milman et al., 2012) did not surface in the top word list.

An alternate search for customer delight was conducted by scanning words that were commonly associated with customer delight. The findings and themes emerging from this search were similar when compared to the 5-star delight database (Table 4). A key theme emerged from the search was related to the theme park's core product. Words such as "ride," "show," "coaster," and "attraction" are all emblematic of the theme park's various attractions entertainment offering. Waiting was another key theme in the TripAdvisor comments. Words like "time," "wait," and "long" are all representative of the waiting periods and queues encountered by theme park guests. In many cases, guests experienced short wait times, yet in other instances, guests remained delighted despite the wait. Several words highlighted the positive experience and affect of the theme park visit including "great," "enjoy," "fun," "love," and "amaze." The data from the two analyses, the first based on TripAdvisor's customer's rating (5-star) and the second based on keywords associated with customer delight were compared. The comparison of the data analysis featured in Tables 3 and 4 demonstrated that the patterns of customer delight from both databases are very similar, as evidenced by the similar themes and keywords presented in both tables.

After performing content analysis on the postings from delighted theme park visitors, the researchers conducted two additional forms of analyses: theme analysis, and root cause analysis. For the purposes of theme analysis, words were clustered in meaning units. The first theme identified was related to the theme park's core product (words including: "ride," "show," and "attraction"). The theme park's Servicescape (Booms and Bitner, 1981), namely the physical setting in which a service process occur, was also a theme emerging from the researcher's

analysis. Servicescape was documented by words such as "park," "place," or "world." Shorter than expected wait times was also an emerging theme expressed by customers with words such as "time," "line," "wait," and "pass." Positive affective experiences were yet another theme emerging from the postings with words such as "great," "fun," "enjoy," "love," "amaze," and "delight" emerging to prominence. The traveling party was part of guest's delightful experiences ("kid," "little") and so was the availability of high-quality food and beverage (food).

Seeking to uncover the causes for such feedback, the researchers engaged a root cause analysis. Rooney and Vanden Heuvel (2004) explain that root cause analysis involves collecting data, and identifying and charting the root causes (often done by asking "why" five times). The present study used a similar approach. Guest expressed their positive emotions (i.e., customer delight) via electronic word-of-mouth (i.e., TripAdvisor) that could be the first source for this root cause analysis (i.e., why do guests express positive feedback? Because they were delighted). The researchers then inquired "why are customers delighted?" Based on the emerging themes, guests were found to be delighted by a) positive affective experiences, b) positive value perceptions, c) short or limited wait times, and d) positive sensory experiences. The next level of root cause analysis revealed more specific causes behind these exceedingly positive guest experiences. For example, a well-designed and well-maintained physical facilities, along with quality food and beverage services were found to cause positive sensory experiences. A great core product consisting of shows, rides, and other forms of entertainment, along with positive guest interactions with others was found to cause a positive affective experience. In addition, a fair price along with the overall quality of the theme park's offering was found to cause positive value perceptions. Finally, low demand on specific visit dates, along with sensible admissions policy (i.e., not overcrowding) was found to be a cause for short or limited wait times.

Following the thematic analysis and root cause analysis, the researchers revised the theoretical model proposed earlier in this paper (Figure 1) and developed a modified model which highlights the causes, effects, and consequences of customer delight in the theme park setting. This model begins with the root causes for theme park customer delight (quality core product, customer-to-customer interactions, quality food and beverage, physical environment, pricing decisions, and customer demand and admissions policy) and then lists the results of these decisions (positive affective experience, positive sensory experience, positive value perceptions, and limited waiting and crowds). These factors lead to customer delight, which in turn is expressed in eWOM. See Figure 2 for details.

>>>Insert Figure 2 Here<<<

Customer Outrage

Seeking to uncover the key drivers of visitor outrage in theme parks, a database was obtained. The researchers analyzed the 1-star comments on previous visits to the top 20 North American theme parks. The findings revealed that many service failures were associated with the core product as demonstrated by high-frequency words such as "ride" and "attraction." The word "down" also showed a high frequency and was used to describe a ride malfunction (i.e., "the ride is down") or a decline of the park's visiting experience over the years (i.e., "this park is going down"). Additionally, several words associated with waiting in lines like "wait," "time," "hour," or "long" were found in multiple guest outrage comments. Theme park overcrowding and negative customer-to-customer interactions were also a repeated pattern among outraged guests. In addition, for many visitors, the theme park experience didn't offer the value for money they expected, as represented by multiple comments listing words like "money," "ticket," "pay," or "price." Unlike the comments for customer delight, outrage comments included several words

associated with service including "staff" and "service". Table 5 provides the word frequencies found among outraged guests.

>>>Insert Table 5 Here<<<

An additional database for customer outrage in theme parks was obtained by performing a lexical search for words commonly used to describe customer outrage such as "enraged" and "angry." The findings from the MAXQDA word frequency count revealed that some of the words entailed product-related problems such as "ride," "show," "attraction," and "old." Another area that generated customer outrage was associated with waiting, expressed with words such as "line," "time," and "hour." Cost and value issues were featured with high-frequency words such as "rate," "ticket," and "price." The patrons' traveling party and their customer-to-customer interactions were relevant to customer outrage with words like "crowd," "people," and "child." Furthermore, some outraged guests were uncomfortable by the amount of walking inside the parks, expressed by the word "walk." Finally, it was noted that food and beverage quality and problems with the customer service were culprits for customer outrage expressed by the words "staff," "service," and "employee" (Table 6).

These findings differ from those of prior research which supported the impact of experiential quality to visitors' satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Jin et al., 2015; Kao et al., 2008; Manthiou et al., 2016). Theme parks are important landscapes of American pop culture and deliver an environment of objects, images, and ideas (King, 2002). These modern attractions seek to create an environment of fantasy (Milman, 2009) and if experiential consumption expectations are not met, consumers will not be satisfied and even raged (Cheng et al., 2016).

Providing visitors with memorable experiences while visiting theme parks is critical given the highly competitive marketplace. Queues and lines have been an issue of concern for

theme park operators. The prior research examined the various degrees of crowding (Budruk et al., 2002; Ryan et al., 2010) and the total time visitors spent on each activity experienced in the park (Fotiadis, 2016). While major theme parks (e.g., Walt Disney World's Faspass+) have embarked on sophisticated technology to alleviate long lines (Walt Disney World, 2017), other parks did not invest or implement well this aspect of customer service. The data from the two analyses, the first based on TripAdvisor's customer's rating (1-star) and the second based on keywords associated with customer outrage, were compared. The comparison of the data analysis featured in Tables 5 and 6 demonstrated that the patterns of customer delight from both databases are very similar, as most of the same words rose to prominence in both searches.

>>>Insert Table 6 Here<<<

As a second level of scrutiny, the researchers engaged in thematic analysis. Words associated with problems of deficient, malfunctioning, and outdated core products were prominent among TripAdvisor postings (e.g., "ride," "show," "down," or "old"). Long wait times were another noticeable theme, demonstrated by words such as "line," "time," "hour," and "queue." Perceptions of poor value-for-money and excessive pricing was another theme emerged from outraged guests, expressed by words such as "pay," "spend," and "worth." Additional words included "greed" or "greedy" to describe theme park owners. Low-quality food and beverage was another major theme emerged from outraged guests' analysis, as evidenced by the frequent use of the word "food" among outraged guests. Additionally, issues associated with customer service (e.g., "staff," "service," and "employee") were prominent. This pattern is different than that of the delighted customers, for whom customer service and the staff were not keywords used to describe their experience.

Seeking to uncover the causes behind the above guest feedback, the researchers engaged in a root cause analysis process. The first step of analysis was to read the guests' comments (as demonstrated by the word counts and thematic analysis conducted above). As in the customer delight analysis, the reasons behind the feedback were analyzed by asking "why" (amongst the three researchers) multiple times, consistent with root cause analysis. When posed with the question of "why," customers expressed negative feedback in TripAdvisor, the researchers concluded (based on the findings and the existing literature) that they were outraged. Why then, where customers outraged? The thematic analysis revealed that customers were outraged because of long waits, poor customer service, negative value perceptions, negative affective and sensory experiences.

In order to more thoroughly scrutinize the root causes for customer outrage, the researchers re-examined the data and internally asked the question "why" once again. Long waits and crowding is a result of a) high levels of customer demand for specific rides and attractions and b) overly aggressive admissions policies by theme park operators (meaning the park admitted more people than their facilities and staffing could handle). Additionally, the researchers ascertained the root cause behind poor customer service and determined that poor staff selection, training, and working conditions can contribute to this problem. Negative value perceptions, aggressive pricing decisions coupled with low levels of enjoyment of the core product were found to be key causes of negative value perceptions. Negative sensory experiences were caused by poor maintenance and upkeep (i.e., sight aspect of sensory experiences), and poor quality food and beverage (i.e., smell and taste aspect of sensory experiences). Finally, negative affective experiences were found to be caused by a low quality or deficient core product along with poor service. A model presenting the causes, effects, and consequences of outrage in

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theme parks are presented in Figure 3. The models presented are unique in that: a) they present a framework for the causes and consequences of delight and outrage in the theme park industry, b) they are created from both an inductive and deductive process, c) they utilize a traditionally utilized qualitative analysis (thematic analysis) along with an analytical process normally used in other disciplines (root cause analysis), d) take into account both the literature and guest feedback to propose a new way of looking at customer delight within theme parks.

>>>Insert Figure 3 here<<<

Discussion

The findings revealed that delighted theme park guests relayed their thoughts concerning the core product, Servicescape, positive emotions, food and beverage, and the traveling party. This is consistent with customer delight theory that has acknowledged the role of thrill and exhilaration in generating customer delight (Kumar et al., 2001). In addition, the widely cited Schmitt's (1999) customer experience theory suggests that experience can be divided into different categories including sense, feel, think, act, and relate (Schmitt, 1999). This study's findings suggest that many of theme park visits' experiential components fall under the "sense" and "feel" categories. This is in contrast to the existing typologies of customer delight in the hotel setting (Magnini et al., 2011; Torres and Kline, 2013) which highlighted elements like service, cleanliness, and professionalism. Contrary to the accommodation industry, it appears that the theme park experience has several idiosyncrasies. For instance, the concept of enjoyment is particularly important as more experiential and affective-based descriptors were mentioned by the customers. Fun, enjoyment, thrill, love, amazement, and delight are all critical drivers of customer delight during a theme park visit. Additionally, the traveling party seems to

have a stronger impact on the guest's impression of delight echoed with words such as "family" and "kid" rising to prominence.

In addition to its contribution to customer delight theory, this investigation also adds to the limited number of studies on customer outrage. In the theme park context, guests were outraged with failing, outdated, or underwhelming attractions. Additionally, waiting, queues and crowds were also identified as significant problems. These findings were consistent with the existing theme park literature on crowds and waiting in line (Budruk et al., 2002, Ryan et al., 2010). Cost and value perceptions were also critical in generating customer outrage. Recent media articles commented on how several theme parks have increased pricing above the rate of inflation, thus becoming inaccessible for many middle-class consumers (Harwell, 2015). Service and staff were not noticeable among the delight themes, however, they were important keywords for customer outrage in the theme park setting. Verma (2003) argued that being rude, disrespectful or indifferent can cause customer outrage.

An incidental finding of this study was related to the length of the consumer online comments. Postings from outraged guests were in average longer than those of delighted customers. Consequently, outraged guests are more likely to provide detailed feedback concerning their negative experiences. Another key finding was that in general, there was a greater probability for a theme park guest to be delighted, as opposed to outraged, as demonstrated by the greater number of comments found for customer delight for the selected theme parks.

Practical implications

One of this study's finding that is of a particular relevance for industry managers relates to the measurement of the guest experience. By having keywords associated with delightful experiences, theme park operators can devise specific questions (via survey method) to ascertain whether their customers are delighted or outraged. The present research demonstrated that good theme park entertainment can generate customer delight, whereas underperforming and outdated attractions can generate the opposite effect. Consequently, it's important to pay close attention to the design of new and creative attractions, and the renovation or replacement of those that are no longer engaging customers. Furthermore, the emotional component of delight emerged in this study, thus theme park executives should spend time and effort in making sure their designed and intended experiences appeal to their guests' emotions. The traveling party also seemed to be a source of delight for many, consequently creating opportunities for each party to interact with one another may yield positive results.

Guests were outraged for a multitude of reasons, primarily with the theme park's pricing and value proposition. Additional research can ascertain whether this pattern is more prevalent on certain demographics and visit characteristics. Emerging from this research is a paradox for theme park decision makers; On the one hand, increasing prices can decrease the number of visitors, thus yielding lower wait times and a reduced perception of crowding, while on the other hand, increasing prices can also cause perceptions of the lower value of the theme park visitor.

Waiting in line was yet another problem among outraged customers. This particular finding might come as no surprise to managers, as queues have been an endemic problem in the theme park and attraction industry. In recent years, many theme parks have tried to alleviate waiting by creating virtual queues, improving queue design, and developing interactive

experiences while waiting, to name a few. These investments in queue technology and design can ultimately be beneficial in minimizing guest outrage.

Finally, staff and service seem to generate outrage among customers, thus theme park operators should conduct more extensive staff training and help them detect and correct any signs of outrage among guests. An additional suggestion for theme park operators would be to involve their consumer analytics divisions in performance analyses similar to the analyses employed in this study and compare the results to their competitors in order to ascertain strengths, weaknesses, and best practices.

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