

Definition and Theories of Theme Park Experience

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Abstract: Theme parks offers customers typical experience consumption, and the core value is to create great experiences for consumers. Consumer experience can occur at every stage of consumption. Discovering the essence of tourism experience has been the focus of researchers. Consumer experience is a complex construct. Understanding consumer needs and creating a good experience for consumers have important implications for both academic research and management practice. Therefore, it is important to understand the definition and related theories of theme park experience. The controversy over the term experience in the marketing world comes from the different ways in which scholars understand it. Researchers study experience in many scenarios, which results in different understandings of experience. By reviewing the current mainstream experience research, it can be found that experience theory and traditional marketing theory are not consistent in many aspects. Numerous scholars have proposed new concepts and theories to advance the discipline, but the integration of the entire theoretical system is very limited. This paper analyzes and summarizes the definition and theories of theme park experience, finally offers several perspectives of further studies on theme park experience research.

Keywords: Theme Park; Experience; Experience Classification; Co-creation of Experience; Experience Theories

1. Introduction

Theme parks are very typical experience consumption, and the core value is to create great experiences for consumers. The experience perspective views consumption as spiritual enjoyment. It is necessary to study the internal needs, psychological characteristics and unique

behavioral patterns of consumers under the experience economy, to determine the experience goals of consumers, to help enterprises understand consumers and create unforgettable experiences for them, so as to really help enterprises to be able to run well for a long time. Numerous theoretical researchers have explored the formation mechanism, operation law and mode of experience and put forward many meaningful theories. Therefore, it is important to understand the definition and related theories of theme park experience.

2. Definition of Experience

In the field of science, experience is generally defined as an experiment based on objective facts and data. In the field of psychology, experience is a cumulative experience that begins with personal feelings. In the fields of sociology and philosophy, experience is subjective and cognitive behavior developed by individuals. In the field of anthropology, experience is a way for individuals to develop a self-culture. In the field of management, researchers generally study experience under the direction of marketing and consumer behavior. Often, the word experience is used in everyday life. Some people will use experience to describe a show, a dinner, and some companies even consider experience as the goal of business management. Experience is a vague concept with rich connotations. It is even considered to be a management industry term, not a real academic concept. Despite this ambiguity, many scholars still regard experience as a psychological process.

2.1 From Economic Perspective

Pine II et al. define experiences as unique economic offerings that are carefully designed by firms to be delivered to consumers [1]. In this perspective, experience is economic good separated from services. In recent years, very few scholars have defined experience from an

economic perspective because of the narrowness of this definition.

2.2 From Psychological Perspective

The peak experience is a state of sublimation beyond sensory experience, the highest realm that human beings can perceive, and an instantaneous departure from the real world. Sundbo describe experience as a journey of the mind in which the consumer is left with something to do, something to learn, and something to enjoy [2]. Consumer experience is the subjective response of the consumer, a psychological experience that occurs when the consumer comes into full contact with the company. This perspective views experience as highly subjective, and experience can be either a process or an outcome.

2.3 From Management Perspective

This perspective defines experience as a consumer's intrinsic response to a stimulus created by the company. Meyer et al. (2007) define experience as an individual response that occurs in a consumer's direct and indirect contact with a company [3].

3. Theories of Experience

Numerous scholars have proposed new concepts and theories to advance the discipline, but the integration of the entire theoretical system is very limited.

Toffler proposed the experience scenario theory, pointing out that the experience itself has value and can be used to sell, and he categorized the experience into direct experience and indirect experience [4]. Direct experience is the experience that consumers get in the real environment, and these experiences will bring positive or negative impacts to the consumers' real life. Indirect experiences are those in which consumers experience thrills, excitement and novelty in an environment created and designed by a company, and which have nothing to do with real life. The theme park industry is a typical indirect experience, and Hirschman et al. categorize consumption into utilitarian consumption and hedonic consumption. In utility consumption, consumers are rational, focus on product functions and features, and do not bring their own emotions into the experience, which is relatively stable. Hedonic consumption is those products or services that evoke emotions, perceptions, interests, and fantasies, and they

trigger consumers' senses of smell, hearing, taste, perception, and sight [5]. Hedonic consumption emphasizes the consumer's own internal value goals. Consumers focus on the cost of money and time they need to pay when purchasing utility-based goods. Consumers are also emotionally invested in the decision-making process, but it does not involve a specific emotion. Hedonic consumers, on the other hand, are more interested in the experiential emotions they can obtain than in the money and time they invest. Holbrook et al. used games as the object of their study to incorporate aesthetics, personality, and consciousness into the study of consumer experience [6].

4. Consumers' Co-creation of Experience

The traditional view puts the consumer outside the enterprise and sees the consumer as a passive buyer, the last link in the market chain Toffler and his wife's book *The Revolution of Wealth* suggests that in the future economic and social development, production and consumption will merge into one and become the dominant consumption pattern [4]. They proposed the term consumer producer, emphasizing the importance of consumers to the production process of products or services. More and more scholars are focusing on consumer participation. This theory can also partially explain how tourists perceive the scenes created by theme parks. The service scene of a theme park can be viewed as a novel, and the elements of the service scene are like the characters and personalities in the novel, which visitors will indulge in. Therefore, when tourists play in the park, their level of involvement will affect the whole experience of the park.

Zhang study found that in theme parks, visitors with a high tendency of external control behave negatively when receiving services and have a low level of active participation in services. When visitors feel happy and feel that the park is important to them, they will be more engaged in the park, actively participate in the service delivery process, and have a more enjoyable experience [7]. Zhang further states that in a park, consumers are socialized to think of themselves as part-time workers and actively participate in the service delivery process. When visitors are more knowledgeable about the park and have a wealth of product knowledge, they are more inclined to play the park on their own and are less likely to be involved in the park's

service process. Consumer involvement in service completion is to gain a sense of control and consumer satisfaction is significantly increased [7].

5. Classification of Experience

Consumer experience can occur at every stage of consumption, either during service production, during service provision, before service purchase or after service completion. Based on the above perspective, experience can be regarded as a process-oriented comprehensive experience, and the experience process can be divided into pre-experience, present experience and post-experience. Theme park tourism process is divided into visitors' plans and expectations before the tour, the play process and the memories after the end.

5.1 Depth of Experience

The essence of tourism experience is spiritual pursuit. Wilber's spectrum of consciousness suggests that human consciousness is progressive, from the material level, to the biological level, to the mental level, and finally to the spiritual level. The ultimate goal of tourists is to find themselves and their spiritual home, and what tourists seek in theme parks is a dream world and a spiritual home.

5.2 Cognitive and Emotional Experience

Cognitive experience is the knowledge and understanding of tourism products, and emotional experience is the emotion and resonance of tourism products. Cognitive experience assumes that consumers are rational, and the satisfaction is formed after evaluating the quality of products and services. Emotional experience contains emotional experience and symbolic experience, and consumers seek memorable experience, hedonism and sensory enjoyment. However, there is little practical research on emotional experience.

5.3 Ordinary and Mere Experience

Another classification of experiences, ordinary and mere experiences. Ordinary experiences are mostly related to daily life, and theme park experiences contain both ordinary and transcendent experiences. Mere experiences are profoundly meaningful to visitors, bringing a greater sense of authenticity and allowing visitors to express themselves more freely, i.e., existential authenticity. Mere experiences can

influence the behavioral intentions of visitors in a way that ordinary experiences do not. It is important to stimulate the five senses of the consumer, to surprise them and to satisfy them in a way that they did not expect. The most discussed mere experiences in the theme park industry are the flow experience and the authentic experience. Authentic experience is more scrutinized, i.e., the quest for authenticity by visitors. Tourists want the destination they are traveling to is authentic and pure.

5.4 Supporting and Peak Experience

The peak experience is inspired by those tourist attractions that are so different from everyday life. This experience is the ultimate goal of the traveler. Tourists go on a trip to get a feeling that is totally different from their daily life [8].

During the trip, tourists meet many familiar and unfamiliar things. The basic motivation for tourists to travel is the pursuit of novelty, variety, and unfamiliarity. Supporting experience is also called secondary experience, and this part of the experience is closer to daily life, such as accommodations and meals during the trip. Certain unique accommodations and meals can also bring tourists the peak experience, such as a gourmet meal with exotic local flavors. Supporting experience is more understood as meeting the physiological and safety needs of tourists, and the peak experience is more summarized as the realization of the sense of belonging and self needs. If tourists are not satisfied with the supporting experience, even if they are very satisfied with the peak experience itself, their overall experience will be greatly reduced. The peak experience and the supporting experience have to be organically combined to bring tourists the best feeling, and the two are not fixed and interchangeable [8-10].

6. Conclusion

Through the literature review of experience, it is not difficult to find that the following changes have occurred in the theoretical research on consumer experience. Firstly, the research methodology has changed from qualitative to quantitative research methods. Now most scholars combine interviews, conduct questionnaire surveys, and analyze data through structural equation modeling, making the research results more convincing. Secondly, early research focused more on experience design and management from the perspective of

enterprises, and now more on enterprise-consumer experience value co-creation. Thirdly, more scholars have begun to conduct research on experience classification, focusing on the different combinations of experiences that bring consumers different levels of satisfaction and influence their behavioral intentions. Fourthly, the experience of different industries and products varies greatly, and scholars have begun to conduct in-depth research on the consumer experience in specific scenarios.

This paper offers several perspectives of further studies on theme park experience research. Firstly, what exactly are the experience elements that affect tourists' willingness to play. Theme parks provide not only good service quality, but also the overall experience of tourists. Experience is multi-level and multi-dimensional. The level of visitor experience is from the basic sensory experience, rising to cognitive experience, emotional experience, and then back to the experience and spiritual experience. But not everyone can reach the highest level of experience. Secondly, the theme park experience is part of the ultimate experience and transcendent experience, but also part of the supporting experience. It is important to think of the park experience as an overall continuous, moment-by-moment experience. Everything a visitor experiences during a tour can be an experience. Before visitors even walk into the park, the signs they see outside the park, or even the music and laughter they hear wafting through the park, are all part of the experience. Thirdly, it is important to emphasize the symbolic dimension of the experience, such that the authenticity of the experience can better help shape the memories of visitors. Authenticity is one of the key marketing elements offered by the tourism market. Emphasis is placed on the value of the experience and the spiritual and symbolic dimension of the visitor's experience. Therefore, when studying the theme park experience, it is important to consider both functional experiences such as service quality and experience quality, as well as symbolic experiences, and include the value of experience in the study. If you want to attract tourists, you must adhere to the perspective of experience, shape the first-class experience scene, improve the quality of experience, and provide

experience value. Fourthly, for theme parks, it is not just about creating a satisfying experience for visitors, but more about a memorable experience. Unforgettable experience will bring more visitor loyalty. Finally, the measurement of experience is highly subjective and depends on the satisfaction intrinsic feelings about the consumption experience.

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