

# Critical review of the journal article: evaluating the guest experience at the th...

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This paper is an analysis and evaluation of the Journal article which includes both descriptive part and evaluation of the journal. The study identified and documented a consumer-oriented attributes inventory for evaluating the theme park based on the sample collected on Central Florida from local and international tourists. Data has been analyzed through factor analysis which can be used by operators, owners and marketing executives to promote and add value to guest experience while visiting theme park. This paper is evaluated to identify the strength and weakness of research conducted and gain insights of scientific research.

## **Introduction**

This paper is the critical evaluation of the scientific research paper entitled “Evaluating the Guest Experience at the Theme Parks: An empirical Investigation of Key Attributes” in the year 2009 at International Journal of Tourism Research and in Wiley InterScience. Hereafter, this article is referred as the “ paper”.

### Descriptive Part

#### Theme of the paper

The main theme of the paper is “ Guest experiences” visiting the theme park whose opinion were analyzed and considered as the major aspect to conduct this research. It is useful to remember occasionally that life unfolds as a chain of subjective experiences. Whatever else life might be, the only evidence we have of it, the only direct data to which we have access, is the succession of events in consciousness. The quality of these experiences

determines whether and to what extent the guests repeatedly use to evaluate and select destinations. The phenomenon can be referred as the key perceived attributes of theme park that entertain, annoy or lead a wonderful experience to the guests visiting the theme park. The research article clearly explains that there are various rating and evaluation systems based on variety of attributes which help consumers, owners, operators, and marketers to evaluate and make decisions. Although, rating standards are not uniform, different scholars and agency have set up evaluation criteria that differ with place, organization and other elements. The study is perceptual based, i. e. psychological experience of guests, as a part of social science. This is because empirical psychology is primarily devoted to describing human experience & behavior as it actually occurs. The unit of analysis is the guests visiting the theme park who opinions and responses were analyzed by using factor analysis. Three open-ended questions were asked to the visitors and at least one theme park in the last two years. Human cognitive architecture includes a working memory of limited capacity and duration with partially separate visual & auditory channels, and an effectively infinite long-term memory holding many schemas can vary in their degree of automation. So, the last two years may be long enough for holding theme park experiences.

The research questions of the paper are:

What had they liked the most about a typical visit to a theme park, regardless of its location?

What had they liked least about a typical visit to a theme park, regardless of the location?

What park attributes are critical when evaluating a visit to a theme park?

Aim of the paper

The aim of the paper is to explore the attributes that motivate the guests in visiting the theme park. The aim clearly requires adoption of exploratory research design, i. e. no need for formal hypotheses. The focus of the study is to gain insights and familiarity regarding the variety of attributes leading guests to the theme park as the investigation is at preliminary stage, i. e. there is no proper well-defined attributes and literature that can guarantee the evaluation of guest experience. The paper also aims to define new terms and clarify existing concepts.

Theoretical review, constructs and the model

The theme park attributes developed by previous research were adapted as a theoretical basis of the study. Limited literature is available on the theoretical background used to develop theme park evaluation and rating system. Basically, they are based on product image and customer satisfaction. Predominantly, there is a scarce empirical research that shows why certain attributes were chosen to be the part of the rating system. Very few studies were conducted to develop evaluation or rating system in the theme park industry. Though, there has been several studies conducted on theme park and the attraction industry , the empirical studies has not

address the level of importance of attributes when evaluating the guest experience at theme park. Regardless of the rating attributes, the researchers are having a difficulty to measure specific attributes as it more complex and multidimensional perceptual thought of an individual which can be situational. Also, the need and development to strengthen the criteria for evaluation is changing due to strong market competition and the complexity with the market such as switching behavior of customer, changes in technology, economic value etc. But, there is no consumer-perceived inventory that could be used to evaluate the emerging global theme park. Research paper in similar field, descriptive of the subject area, proper discussion is available in the research, which makes the reader more aware about the phenomenon which we are exploring. Literature containing methodological tool used in research are unavailable, which might affect the quality of article.

The researcher did not use the conceptual framework because there were no definite number and types of attributes leading to the choice of theme park and reasons of revisiting. In other words, the researcher found that the previous researchers were using different types of attributes as independent variables. So, the researcher wants to explore which independent variables to be used or are used by the guests in the first hand. However, we can propose a research model based on the present article because the researcher has already completed his research and his research findings are already published. So, we can propose a refined independent variables and dependent variables for the future research in this connection.

## Empirical work, Research Design and Sample, Measures

The research adopts exploratory research design where it tries to explore the important attributes that measures guest experiences. The study explores visitors experience attributes who has visited theme park, through participant observation and formal conversation. The research found that the seven different attributes (Entertainment variety and quality; courtesy, cleanliness, safety and security; food variety and value for money; quality of theming and design; availability of variety of family-oriented activities; quality of variety of rides and attraction and pricing and value for money) explains 64. 51 % of the dependent variable. The population of the study is all the visitors visiting the theme park and sample consists of 608 local and international visitors at Central Florida. Stratified cum convenience sampling has been done as the researcher has sampled local and international who are above 13 years old as per their conveniences. Firstly, respondent was asked open-ended questionnaire through personal interview. Responses were taken through structured questionnaire in five scale having one to five scale referring; one indicating “ not important at all” and five indicating “ very important”.

## Findings and Recommendations

The study affirms the importance of pretty attributes through data collection, observation, interpretation as a methodological tool to study guest experiences visiting at a theme park and discuss the key attributes required

and which can be important for owners, stakeholders etc. Some of the key finding of the paper are listed below:

It is an exploratory research design because researcher has few or no studies related to the subject to be relied upon to predict an outcome.

In most of the features, tourists have more importance as compared to the resident except for the price of admission and line management for rides and attraction.

The researchers listed different attributes in terms of guest significant and has explained himself that there is no existing theory that undertakes the experiences. The researcher has followed the same mistake as he did not mention the source for selecting the source.

As the number of respondents (sample) is comparatively less, the validity of the study can be an issue. Additionally, few studies were conducted in this area; so, it lacks to establish a standard attribute. Since, the study is conducted in a sector i. e. hospitality, the finding cannot be generalized in another sector. The evaluation criteria were limited to seven vague attributes titled value; rides; shows, staffs, souvenirs and crowds. But, no reference to the source of attributes.

Regardless of rating attributes or scale adopted, researcher still faces a complexity and multidimensional consumer perception of quality developing a rating scale or evaluation criteria.

There are no empirical consumers' perceived inventories that can be used to evaluate emerging global theme park industry. Implications Beneficial for potentials visitors since they are information oriented.

New source of information to operators and marketing decision makers when developing new product, adopting operating procedures or introducing marketing strategies Useful for operators to set price by considering the overall guest perceived value for money.

The evaluation parts Heuristic Evaluation of the paper

The paper is published in Wiley Interscience owned by John Wiley & sons Ltd and is a peer reviewed article. All research articles in this journal have undergone rigorous double-blind peer review, based on initial screening and refereeing by at least two anonymous reviewers. Editorials, Practice review and Book review have undergone editorial screening. According to Scimago Journal and country ranking system, the International Journal of Tourism Research ranks 37 position. The paper has 31 cites and is peer reviewed according to international journal of tourism research. The author is a Professor of hospitality management in the department of Tourism, Event & attraction in the Rosen College of Hospitality at University of Central Florida, Florida (Florida). His area of research Includes tourism planning and development, theme park and attraction management, consumer behavior and consumer experience. The writer has reading around 32582 papers and has citation history of over 250 which proves his credentials (Gates). More recently, Dr. Milman was the recipient of the Martin Oppermann Memorial



Award for Lifetime Contribution in Tourism Education, International Society of Tourism and Travel Education (ISTTE), the Canadian Pacific Visiting Scholarly grant and Outstanding Faculty award at Rosan College of Hospitality (Gates).

### Empirical Positioning of the Research

The author is addressing an interesting phenomenon as the problem is very much genuine and there is no standard rating system of attributes for hospitality product. There is also no proper empirical studies addressing the level of importance of key attribute to evaluate the theme park. The theme park is booming so the article can be useful for different stakeholders. Also, the theme park itself is a global phenomenon, making it a multi-billion dollar business from very large scale to small countless venture in the market. The key attributes can be used to valuable for decision making to all the stakeholders who are on business and for new entrepreneurs as well.

### Theoretical Model

The research lacks the proper evidence and literature supporting the research question. The literature and the constructs are not well balanced, either supported with appropriate literature that can support the paper and the researcher draws the attributes without any reference and support the addressed topic. In my opinion, the paper is innovative as the researcher have done topic in new topic and there is no replication of the topic addressed. Similarly, there is no proper model that supports the constructs and the research seems not be intense research as he has only deployed factor analysis for the study. Factor analysis can yield a sense of awe

regarding making judgment in multi-dimensional subjective underlying constructs.

The latent variables are not supported with proper literature and the finding can be biased as you can get the answer depending upon the question you ask. The study uses factor analysis, but it cannot measure the relationship between the variables. More analytical in measuring responses and explaining the responses. From the reference we can clearly see that the researcher has not used good journal as a resource, and relevant to the topic, for example he has taken Travelocity, Trip Advisor, theme park critic etc. Thus, it is not a comprehensive theoretical review. Meta-analysis, in statistics, approach to synthesizing the result but related studies which has been ignored in the study which hinders the research quality output as it lacks systematic identification, evaluation, statistical synthesis, and interpretation of result from multiple studies. The researcher has also ignored other statistical research tool and has deployed only one tool to conduct the research.

The research is not that general as it specific and has subjective influence as the researchers have made research in his own judgment which can be clearly seen. Generally, the model can be and cannot be falsified because the model cannot be truly accepted in all parts of the world because the research sample has been taken from Central Florida. The uncontrollable external factors such as politics, technology, socio-cultural value etc. have a significant relation which might alter the variables. The research is explorative in nature and the sample size is limited to one region with small

number, the true result can be general and the research has higher chances of being falsified. Had the research been conducted with more sample size from various parts of the world, then it is more likely that this attributes can be based to evaluate result. Approach to the data The research design does not fit the research question and the statement they want to make but has followed scientific tools and methods to conduct the research. The choice of population and sample is good but has only collected 608 samples from one region of America to measure the attribute. They only used factor analysis to conduct the research because there might not be proper literature to support the research. Since, it is an individual level paper they cannot cover the entire population and collect sample from various part of the world as it is not national level research.

The research has been conducted independently without being biased and has followed the scientific tools and methods to conduct the research. The research has questions of some subjective speculation regarding selecting literature but other elements are fact based. The paper has followed limited empirical tools and methods to conduct the research but has been able to fulfill the objective of the question raised. The theme raised and addressed by the paper is new and interesting as theme park is the blooming industry.