

**Guests Determine Success: Consumer Evaluations' Effect on Theme  
Park Success**

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## **Introduction**

For decades, the theme park industry was a business focused on entertaining people during their free time and giving them the opportunity to escape their everyday worries. Theme parks were the staple reward for parents working hard to provide their families with a family fun oriented “vacation.” The intent of theme parks has not changed, but there are many different components that have to be considered when making sure a theme park can continually operate and offer this escape to their guests. The success of theme parks comes from multiple sources such as economic development, technological advancements, physical and psychological variables, as well as guest feedback. This paper will examine the importance of guest feedback in correlation to the success of a medium to large-scale theme park, and how it can be considered along others components that support theme park operation to more fully understand the measures of success in a theme park.

## **A History of Theme Parks in the United States**

Since the early 19th century, theme parks have served as a recreational pastime for people all over the country. The concept of theme parks originated from public parks, which transformed into amusement parks for the working-class family. This was exemplified by the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893/94. In the midway of this exposition stood the first Ferris Wheel, which made it the amusement center for the fair and brought light to many new cultural entertainment forms. From this, the theme park industry over the years has

expanded to one of the most popular pastimes and the industry itself has gone through many changes.

The first theme park in the United States, Santa Claus Land, opened in 1946 in Santa Claus, Indiana. The town and amusement park created a winter wonderland geared towards children and their excitement over the Christmas season all year long. Now known as Holiday World & Splashin' Safari, the theme park is open and is completely operational to this day, celebrating and highlighting holidays such as Christmas, Halloween and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July ("*The Early History*"). The continual operation of this theme park for over seventy years is noteworthy for its ability to keep its guests coming back year after year. This theme park set the standard for what other theme parks would include, creating a blueprint for future parks to follow.

The next theme park that is notable when discussing the history of the theme park industry is Disneyland, founded by Walt Disney in 1955 in Anaheim, California. While it is not considered to be the first theme park in the country, it is often considered the most successful and the most recognizable. Within the first ten weeks of opening, Disneyland Park had over one million guests. Disneyland began its ticket sales as a pay-per-ride admission, and eventually transitioned into semi-inclusive admission price. This means that guests would pay a set amount of money for a set number of rides ("*The Early History*"). This pricing is similar to the fair or carnival style payment with guests buying a set number of tickets and using those tickets to "pay" for ride admission. Disneyland served an important role in the ticket pricing strategies of early theme parks by implementing the forementioned semi-inclusive admission pricing. Disneyland also set a precedent for the expansion of theme parks into larger plots of land, being built on over 160 acres.

In October of 1971, years after the initial success of Disneyland in California, Walt Disney opened another entity called Walt Disney World Resort. Included in the resort over a number of years was Magic Kingdom Park, Disney's Contemporary Resort, Disney's Polynesian Resort and Disney's Fort Wilderness Resort & Campground. The Walt Disney Resort Company has continued its expansion into multiple theme parks and resorts around the Orlando/Bay Lake/Lake Buena Vista area in Florida and around the world ("*The Early History*"). Similar to Disneyland, the success of the Disney World theme parks was immediate and significant. One main difference that has set Walt Disney World apart from Disneyland is the size of the property. In its beginning stages, the Walt Disney Company acquired over 25,000 acres of land for this theme park (and resort) and utilized less than half of it upon opening in 1971, still only using half of the property today.

Another theme park company that represents the extensive history of theme parks is Six Flags Entertainment Corporation. Six Flags Entertainment Co. was founded in 1957 by August Wynne Jr. as a theme park corporation. On August 1, 1961, Six Flags Over Texas in Arlington, Texas opened as the first theme park representing the Six Flags company. An important aspect of this Six Flags park was the fact that they charged admission in an all-inclusive price model. An all-inclusive pricing model for ticket sales involves customers buying a ticket for one set price, and then are able to partake in all rides and attractions available. Contrasting the previous semi-inclusive price model that the Disney parks set, this set the new precedent on most theme park admission pricing for all future theme parks. Six Flags now has over 26 theme and water park locations over North America, and numerous locations across the globe. They are also the largest regional theme park company in the world with over 32 million guests a year ("*The Early History*"). Six Flags is also notable for its focus on its rides and attractions more than its actual

theming. While the Disney parks were recognizable for things like the Epcot Ball, Cinderella's Castle, and other things of that nature, Six Flags became more widely recognized for its thrill rides and attractions.

The changes that have occurred over the years in these theme parks have acted as a roadmap to the creation and expansion of some of the most successful and recognizable theme parks in the world. Recounting where these individual theme parks and theme park companies started to where they are now is important for measuring their success. Starting as an entertainment staple for working class families, the transition into a more high-end product in some cases changes the demographic and attainability of consumption significantly.

### **Components of Theme Parks**

When asking someone to explain what a theme park is, the first thing that comes to mind is rides. Whether it be roller coasters, carnival-style, or sit-down experience-based rides, the main attraction to theme parks tends to be the biggest and fastest ride a park has to offer. For example, the Kingda Ka at Six Flags Great Escape. Located, in Jackson, New Jersey, this roller coaster is widely recognized as being the tallest rollercoaster in the world standing at four-hundred and fifty-six feet tall (Levine). However, rides are only one aspect of a theme park. There are many components to a theme park and its successful operation. These divisions can be separated into Operations, In-Park Services (IPS), Maintenance and Administration.

#### *Operations*

The operations division oversees multiple different departments including front gate/admissions, park services, ride operation, and any entertainment. The front gate and admissions departments are responsible for getting the guests into the park starting at the parking lot, and ending when they walk through the turnstiles. Park services is often in charge of the cleanliness of the park including dining areas, restrooms, and midway cleanliness. Ride operation is straight-forward, being in charge of the operation of rides. These department members are responsible for cycling guests through the rides safely and quickly. While entertainment departments are not always operating with excess financial and creative resources, their main responsibility is to perform midway shows, have character meet-and-greets, and hold events to entertain the guests. This facet of theme park operation has become more popular since an industry shift away from carnival-style theming.

### *In-Park Services*

In-Park Services include departments involving retail shops, food-stands, arcades and rentals. These departments all involve transactions for their services. Retail shops selling merchandise, food stands selling different styles of food, arcades overseeing the use of paid games, and rentals offering services such as stroller and locker rentals. In-Park Services is an important contributor to the financial success with ticket sales bringing in around 50% of a theme parks revenue, the rest of the revenue depends on food, beverages, merchandise sales, and rides or activities (Weatherport). For most parks, In-Park Services is run by its own on-site employees. People are hired to perform many roles including cashier, cook, warehouse member and purchasing staff to continue day to day function of all in park sales.

### *Maintenance*

The maintenance division is responsible for the up-keep of all rides and attractions, as well as facilities (kitchens, restrooms, retail locations). They also are responsible for the landscaping of the property whether it be for appearance or safety. Some examples of safety precautions involved with the landscaping of the property are things like fallen leaves, or snow/ice in the walkways. Some theme parks have operating schedules that fall into the more temperate seasons for its location and tripping hazards such as the ones mentioned above have to be considered.

### *Administration*

The administration division is similar to administration in other industries, overseeing departments such as Human Resources, Loss Prevention, Marketing, Safety and Security. Human Resources works to give employees the resources to be successful in their positions and to resolve problems that may arise in the course of their employment. Loss Prevention works in tandem with Safety and Security to make sure all guests and employees are following all policies and procedures of the theme park. Marketing creates brand awareness for the theme park company using communication such as email blasts, social media posts and television/radio advertisement. The Marketing department is also partially responsible for the collection of guest satisfaction surveys, which is then relayed to all departments and divisions above to enhance the guest experience through constructive feedback. This feedback will sometimes include things that their department might need to change, or sometimes will celebrate an employee's customer service.



All of these departments, and others are responsible for the day-to-day operation of a theme park, and they are all valued for different things. Without the efficient function of all of these components, the “ecosystem” of the theme parks operation will become unbalanced, and eventually will cause unfixable problems for the business.

### **Theme Park Success on Local Economics**

While the divisions of a theme park work together to continue operation, theme park operation works with other businesses to stimulate the economy. The success of a theme park plays an important role in the success of the economic development of its surrounding geographical area. The creation of a large capital investment, as well as the establishment of local part-time and full-time employment are only some of the benefits of being a host city/town of a theme park. Another major benefit to the local economy is the necessity of construction. Not only are local construction companies used during initial construction, but also during any additions or refurbishments that occur throughout the operation of the theme park. While this may not be a consistent benefit, the size of the projects stimulates significant employment from local, regional and state construction companies.

A second opportunity for economic growth in the local economy of a theme park location is spin-off potential. These spinoffs can include conference centers, hotels, and other resort development. An example of this is the Walt Disney World Resort hotels and the Six Flags Great Escape Lodge. Located right across the street from its partnered theme park (Six Flags Great Escape), the Great Escape Lodge is an Adirondack themed hotel that has over 200 rooms and an

indoor waterpark that is available for use by lodge guests and outside visitors. During the operating season of the theme park, the lodge offers promotions including buying a night at the lodge and getting a day pass for the theme park at a large discount, and in some cases for free. By doing this, the lodge is able to bring more guests to the theme park, including those who may have traveled to this park, without knowing they had a place to stay. This makes the park a destination not only for locals but also for tourists, and builds recognition beyond its geographical location in Lake George, NY and about 20 minutes away from Saratoga Springs, NY. This also creates business opportunities for local restaurants, as the people who stay in the lodge will explore the surrounding area in the time that the theme park is closed. The lodge also has a banquet room that is available for rental for events such as parties, weddings, and business conferences, which also brings additional business to the area.

The last benefit theme parks bring to local economics is simply publicity. Many people will travel to visit these theme parks, or even just drive by and remember the name of the town they were in because they remember the theme park. Places that might not be recognizable without the association of a theme park have now become tourist-heavy destinations. Jackson, New Jersey becomes the home of Six Flags Great Adventure. Bay Lake, Florida is the site for Walt Disney World. Anaheim, California becomes the home for Disneyland. This recognition of location is important in attracting tourism to that area.

### **Technological Advancements of Theme Parks**

Due to the economic stimulus theme parks provide to the local, regional, and even statewide economy, it is important that their technology supports their continuous operation. Since the era when theme parks first emerged until now, technological advancements in rides and attractions have been significant. For most theme parks, becoming obsolete from not being able to afford or even fit into the land itself, a new advanced ride or attraction is what is considered their biggest threat. Like any other industry, consumers are always attracted to the “new and shiny” product. However, there are certain cases where theme parks will have their most popular rides or attractions be old and traditional. This is a situation in which the nostalgia of the ride is its biggest player in success. As long as the ride is still safe for the park’s guests, the park will continue to keep that ride operational for as long as they can.

### *Six Flags Great Escape*

An example of this is *The Comet* at Six Flags Great Escape in Lake George, New York. Originally founded as Storytown in 1954, as a mother-goose themed park, it later changed its name to Great Escape Fun Park. In 1996, Premier Parks bought Great Escape Fun Park and officially changed its name to Six Flags: Great Escape. The Comet is a wooden rollercoaster that debuted at the Great Escape in 1994. Previous to this debut, it was built for the first time in 1927 as “The Cyclone” at Crystal Beach Amusement Park in Ridgeway, Ontario, Canada. This rollercoaster is the perfect example of how history and nostalgia can keep a theme park alive. To this day, the Comet is the Great Escape’s most successful ride, running over 400,000 rides each season (*“History of the Comet”*).

Another way in which technological advancements have affected theme parks is with the introduction of consolidation of services for guest convenience. An example of this is with Disney's Magic Band. The Magic Band is a wearable bracelet that offers guests the opportunity to consolidate all of the things they need to keep track of while visiting their theme park/resort into one place. These bracelets can be used to do things such as; unlock the door of the guests Disney Resort hotel room, enter the theme and water park (with valid admission), check in at FastPass+ (skip the line) entrances, and even charge food and merchandise purchase to a guest's Disney Resort hotel room (Walt Disney World). This means that Disney Theme park guests can enter the theme park carrying nothing but their MagicBand, and be able to enjoy every ride and attraction of the park. By doing this, Disney reduced consumer frustration on topics such as, losing physical tickets, forgetting their wallet, and things of that nature. This sent a shift in the use of technology of theme parks, now with the development of apps that allow guests to upload their tickets onto their phone, check ride wait times, and even order their food online. With the guest being able to have this information at their fingertips, they are able to cater their experience to what they are most interested in, making their evaluation of their experience more positive.

With the world focuses on moving forward, and using technology to do that, it is important for business in the theme park industry to stay up-to-date on technology that has gone from a novelty to a necessity.

### **Physical Variables for Success**

While the rides and attractions are the key to the success of a theme park, there are external variables that affect a park's success. These factors hold true for both long-standing and

newly developed theme parks, and are most times out of the control of the theme parks operators. Some of these variables include; the weather of whatever geographical location the theme park is in, the amount of land available to buy and expand on, zoning laws, and discretionary income of the surrounding area.

### *Weather*

Most important to any outdoor attraction, such as concert venues, fair grounds, and theme parks, is to have an operating season that cooperates with the weather of the location of the attraction. Warm weather all year long is not required, if the park can generate enough income to be able to supplement that “off-season” of not being able to operate. According to a study done by Harry G. Foden published in the Economic Development Review, theme parks can be successful “with 140-150 days of operation...warm, rain-free weather is most desirable, particularly during the period April 1 to November 1” (Foden). For example, Six Flags Great Adventure is open from around the beginning of May and will close shortly after Christmas day in December. (Six Flags Entertainment Co.). Even in this period of operation, the rides and attractions that are offered to guests are limited for guest safety in caution of unsafe weather conditions.

### *Available Land*

For newly developed theme parks, the price of land is very important for its success. Land is an expensive asset, so it is important that theme park creators can find land that will fit the need and the price point. Theme parks also need to evaluate whether or not they have enough land for expansion. As an effective way for theme parks to keep up with competition, parks often

expand their offerings by adding rides and attractions, but without enough land or without enough land that is unable to be built on, that expansion becomes almost impossible. Another important part of purchasing land is that not only the size of the theme park should be calculated in the amount of land, but also sufficient parking space for the carrying capacity of the theme park.

### *Zoning Laws*

Zoning Laws are a necessary evil in the world of theme park development. A theme park can be on a 200-acre plot of land, but 85 acres could be considered protected wetlands and are unable to be built on. This creates problems during expansion and fees for the upkeep of the land. The inability to use and develop the land is considered a serious fiscal liability. The monetary and time consumption it takes to argue zoning laws and classification is considered undesirable for theme park developers, and oftentimes will debilitate the creation and expansion of theme parks, and in hand, their success.

### *Discretionary Income of Surrounding Community*

Discretionary income is the money left over after paying necessities, such as rent/mortgage payments, healthcare and transportation costs, out of an individual or family's disposable income. Discretionary income of the surrounding community, and that of tourists traveling to the community is important to the success of a theme park because without it, those people will not partake in the non-necessity attraction. This disposable income acts in a cyclical nature with theme park success. When the community is able to bring revenue to a local

business, in this case a theme park, the business is able to pay its employees more, which in turn, will give the residents of the community more income, disposable or otherwise. This theory can be seen in multiple economic models, most specifically, the income effect. This effect is noted by a marginal propensity to spend or save. This means that people will decide to spend or save their money depending on whether their income has increased or decreased. If a business specializes in goods or services that are bought when incomes have decreased, it may see a boom in profits. The opposite effect will happen for those businesses that provide goods or services when income has increased, business like theme parks, restaurants, bowling alleys, and movie theatres. (Investopedia).

### **Psychological Variables to Success**

Similarly, to physical variables, there are intangible variables and components to a guest's perception that change the overall guest experience. These variables are often affected and manipulated by subtle considerations in the creation of a theme park. This can be examined from the kind of rides in the park, to what kind of floors are used in queue lines.

#### *Queue Line Adaptations*

Waiting in a line at a theme park has become somewhat of a tradition in the theme park experience. For some, it is easier to spend the extra money to buy a skip the line pass, and for others, coming up with a strategy to get to the rides and attractions with the shortest lines is the name of the game. With the amount of time guests wait in line in an average day at a theme park, it is important that park engineers design their queue lines to be as entertaining to the guests as

possible. Some ways to make a queue line more enjoyable for guests is to make them as comfortable as possible. An example of this can be examined in queue lines that are exposed to extreme heat and sunlight. In a case such as this, engineers should consider doing things like installing canopies and fans intermittently. Another great way to make the queue line wait more enjoyable to guests is by creating an exciting suspense by encouraging guests as they are progressing in the line. This idea was first studied in a journal article published by Johnathan Ledbetter, Amira Mohammed-Ameen, James Ogelsby and Michael Boyce, academically recognized research psychologists, that discusses maintaining a guest's interest in things other than time while in a queue line. The queuing environment must be desirable to facilitate interest among the guests because their level of interest plays a part in the perception of time. "If an activity is undesirable, the level of interest will decrease, leaving the mind unoccupied, which becomes more conscious of time passing" (Ledbetter et al. 23). One way theme parks are able to divert the guest attention from how long they are waiting in line is by theming the queue lines. If the ride or the theme park itself has specific themes or characters associated with it, these can be used to create a story that the climax is represented by the ride. Some theme parks also install TV's in a queue line that show videos about that character/theming and will also promote different offers and promotions happening in the park. Not only do these promotions offer a distraction to what can be a monotonous wait, it also gives guests the opportunity to learn about other experiences they are able to have during their visit.

### **Collecting Guest Feedback**

With all uncontrollable variables being understood, it is then the responsibility of theme park operators to collect feedback from guests. Similarly, to other businesses in the hospitality



and tourism industry, collecting feedback from guests at a theme park is a strong way to determine if you are delivering the product that your consumer wants to experience. That feedback of guest experience can come in multiple different ways including word of mouth, social media interaction, and guest satisfaction surveys, which will be the most focused strategy for collecting guest feedback in this paper. In some cases, guests will have the opportunity to fill out Guest Satisfaction Surveys (GSS) on their way into a park, during their visit, and days to months after their visit is over. Each of these timelines holds key information about the guest and their willingness to return. On their way into the park, guests are able to evaluate what they have experienced so far. While the assumption is that there is nothing to evaluate until the guest has already spent some of their day at the park, that is far from the truth. Modern technology has given the theme park the opportunity to make an impression on the guest well before they ever step foot on the property. One way of doing this is by giving the guest the choice to buy their ticket online, and even upgrade things like season passes and different meal plans all from the comfort of their home on their phone or computer. This transaction, in person, is often one of the more stressful processes in entering a theme park so it is especially important for the theme parks website and guest service team to be user friendly and professional. During their visit, guests also get the chance to give immediate feedback of their likes and dislikes about their experience. This is often when specific employees will get the most feedback. If a guest has an especially good or especially bad experience with an employee, they often take immediate action to have their concerns heard by the correct people. Guests can do this by talking directly to management at the park or reporting their feedback to places like hospitality.

After their visits, larger theme park companies often send out GSS to get feedback on their overall experience, rating things such as friendliness, cleanliness and overall guest service.

These surveys are often extensive and are broken down to evaluate each aspect of a guest's experience.

### GSS Content Breakdown

In a GSS survey that was studied for this paper, there were multiple sections of the survey including overall overview, ride experience, live show experience, waterpark experience, games experience, food/dining experience, retail experience, and park environment. These sections offered long answer comment sections, but were mostly a rating scale measuring from worst to best. An example of this format pictured below is taken directly from the guest satisfaction survey.

**About Your Visit**

Overall, how would you rate your experience at  ?

Poor	Poor	Just OK	Just OK	Good	Good	Very Good	Very Good	Excellent	Excellent
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**In just a few words, what made your experience excellent?**  
*Please note, you'll get plenty of opportunities going forward to share longer comments with us.*

Characters remaining: 120

Figure 1 – Guest Satisfaction Survey

This format is important to note because it gives guests the opportunity to have a larger scale to be able to rate and comment on their experience. This rating scale was used on multiple occasions throughout the survey to comment on different experiences. If the guest marks that they did not participate in any one of these facets, the option to complete an evaluation will disappear, giving the guest a survey that is more specialized to their experience.

### *Overview*

The overview section of a guest satisfaction survey focuses on collecting information from the guest that is not opinion based. This includes demographic information such as age, and gender identity. Other information collected in this section helps determine components of the guest experience that may be out of the control of the theme park itself. This information includes, the size of the party (number of people in the group), the time they entered and left the park, and then gives the opportunity to comment on their overall experience, as shown in the figure above.

### *Ride Experience*

When evaluating the guests ride experience, this survey collected opinions on things such as length of ride lines, number of rides the guest went on during their visit, the safety of the rides, the friendliness and speed of the ride operators and any technical issues the guests may have experienced.

### *Live Show Experience*

In this section of the survey, guests were asked to rate and comment on things such as the convenience of show times, the performance quality, the appeal of show content to them and their group, costume character interactions, and the appeal of costume characters to the party's interest.

### *Waterpark Experience*

The theme park surveyed in this study includes an outdoor waterpark for free admission located with the theme park. While this is not an industry standard in the structure of theme parks, it is still an important addition to surveying the overall experience. In this specific survey, the evaluation of things like waterslides and attractions, cleanliness, variety of attractions, waterpark dining experiences, and ambiance was asked of the guest.

### *Games Experience*

Stemming from the carnival-style theme park design, games are also not a necessity in theme park operation, but have become more popular as an offer to guests and a revenue builder for the company. The survey asked guests to rate things like the quality of service from games employees, the fairness of the games, value for the money they spent to play the games, and the quality of prizes.

### *Food/Dining Experience*

The food and dining experience is evaluated by guests by determining where and what kind of food was purchased, and if they used a meal plan or voucher to purchase their food. The

guest was then asked to rate on a scale the service quality, speed of employees, cleanliness of dining locations, and the appearance, taste, and temperature of the food.

### *Retail Experience*

The retail experience section of the survey has guests rate their overall shopping/browsing experience, service quality, speed of employees, employee product knowledge, cleanliness, merchandise value, appearance, quality, and the value of the merchandise when compared to the price.

### *Park Environment*

Park environment can be described as the places that aren't specifically dining locations, retail shops or rides. In theme parks, this place is called the "midway" and is where all of the floor traffic takes place with guests travelling throughout the park. This section of the survey gets guests feedback on the enforcement of park policies, cleanliness of the park and restrooms, employee service, the photo and ticket buying experience, parking experience, and the experience of entering and leaving the park.

## **The Downside to Consumer Feedback as a Success Marker**

As discussed in this paper thus far, there are many reasons as to why consumer feedback is an important variable in determining the success of theme parks. On a smaller scale, GSS is able to help theme parks know exactly what their consumers are looking for and what they think they can do better. However, that is not always the most reliable way to determine how to make a

theme park successful. There are two main reasons as to why guest feedback is not always the first thing to look to; guests do not consider logistics or feasibility, and feedback is, for the most part, subjective.

In customer service industries, the law of the land is that “the customer is always right.” While this is a great rule of thumb in terms of customer satisfaction, blindly following their say as law can lead to some mistakes and costly challenges for the short- and long-term. In the theme park industry, following guest suggestions can be helpful in smaller scale problems such as “I would like to see more trashcans around the park to throw my garbage away” or “There should be maps located throughout the property.” Things like these, for the most part, are simple fixes, and find the flaws in the operation of a theme park from a user’s perspective. The problem begins with responses like “There should be a thrill rollercoaster in this park” or “Another theme park I went to offered live animal shows, this theme park should too.” Theme park professionals are in constant development to make the park their operating as new, and as relevant as they possibly can. Most theme park professionals would love to be able to add a rollercoaster to their park the second a guest said they should, but there are various factors that have to be considered. The first factor is the price of the addition; creating and building a roller-coaster involves many costs that might not come to mind immediately. These things include the cost of ride parts and their shipping/freight to the park location, construction, labor, and sometimes even licensing rights if the name or style of the ride is under copyright protection. This is not to mention the non-financial factors such as zoning laws, and even the simple question of whether the park itself has enough land to be able to hold a ride any bigger than what it already has.

The next downside to using guest feedback as the number on determinate of success is that it is subjective. There are some cases in which objective reasoning is used in filling out GSS such as “the sink in the bathroom was overflowing, and no one was fixing it and that is a problem.” But most of the time, GSS is affected by a guest experience that is out of the control of the park operators. One of the variables out of theme park operators’ control is weather. When bad weather is around at a theme park, rides will tend to shut down for safety precautions, lines will seem longer, and sometimes the park will even close. This makes people who wake up on overcast days decide that they would rather wait until a bright and sunny day to go to a theme park, but that can sometimes create a more frustrating experience for the guest. On especially nice days, theme park attendance will be higher, thus creating more congestion and lines virtually everywhere in the park. The front gate, bathrooms, queue lines for rides and food stands, all become much longer, and in turn, negatively impact the guest’s experience, and giving them reason to rate their experience lower on a GSS. This factor is for the most part out of the control of the theme park itself. Even with its best employees working as fast and efficiently as possible, there will still be a longer line than on a day that doesn’t have as nice of weather. Another unfortunate truth of the subjectiveness of GSS and guest feedback is that what side of the bed a guest woke up on can have an effect on a GSS. If a guest woke up in a bad mood, or something happened that put them in a more negative state of mind that had nothing to do with their theme park experience, any minor inconvenience they experience that could be normal to theme park function (i.e., waiting in line for a ride) will become so much more intolerable, and again, negatively influence their feedback.

## **Using Guest-Feedback as a Business Strategy**

Even with these drawbacks of guest feedback, the impact it can have on individual theme park success is important to note. On a large scale, a corporate theme park company listening to each individual guest recommendation is not efficient or effective. This is not to say that managers and operators do not look at guest feedback, but it is analyzed on a broader scale. For a local, privately-owned theme park, listening to the guests, what they want to see, and what the park can do better, can make or break the business. For example, if a locally-owned theme park charges a \$50 admission price and makes \$40,000 in ticket sales, listening to guests' complaints and suggestions makes the difference on whether those guests will return. If the income generated from a yearly family trip that theme park stops due to dissatisfaction of service, that is a \$200 loss in revenue from ticket sales for a "small" business, on top of revenue lost from stroller rentals, merchandise, food sales and other addition expenses.

When a theme park receives survey results, they will complete small-scale changes such as telling the foods department that surveys showed people were not content with the temperature of their food. Then, the foods department will come up with an approach to fix that problem. The management will also complete large-scale changes and come up with strategies for the future of the business. If in the feedback, the trend is that people wish they could have their parking price included in the price of their ticket, plans will be communicated throughout management on if that change is realistic and if it is, how to make that change possible. While these changes sometimes will take years to execute and change strategies on the way, the use of feedback from guests is an opportunity to give a fresh outlook and perspective on the operation of the theme park and the industry as a whole.



## **Conclusion**

As this paper demonstrates, theme park operators have long been looking for ways to measure their success and make sure that their guests having a great experience. Looking at different factors that lead to success of the business such as technological advancements, psychological variables of success and overall park environment, held little weight in comparison to listening to what guests wanted to see in their visits. When collecting guests' feedback, theme park operators have the option to interpret the satisfaction of guests through other formats beyond the GSS, like social media interaction and in-person reviews. However, guest satisfaction surveys, especially when analyzed alongside other factors, act as a way to create an experience that is for the guest, by the guest. This is the ultimate goal of every theme park operator, and of many in the hospitality industry more broadly: to entertain their guests and to give them memories that will last a lifetime.

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