

Transforming the theme park customer experience: Focusing on Disney's MyMagic+

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Abstract

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a rising demand for services that do not require physical contact, including efforts to improve the customer's experience in the theme park industry. The customer experience is defined as an experience resulting from the relationship environment between a corporation and its customers. This experience enables customers regular and long-term interaction with the corporation which naturally leads to an increase of satisfaction and loyalty of customers. This research reviews case studies from Disney's MyMagic+, the IoT (internet of things)-based touchless service launched by Disney, and classifies customers' experience into three factors: convenience, personalization, and operation. As a conclusion, Disney's MyMagic+ offers differentiated services according to the customer experience influencing factors, which contributes to the advancement of a new data-based business model.

Keywords: Theme park, Walt Disney World Resort, IoT, MyMagic+, Digital Transformation

1. Introduction

With the advent of digital technology such as mobile, IoT (internet of things), artificial intelligence, and big data—all of which have accelerated automation and target marketing—a new and innovative approach different from the past is required throughout the corporation's overall management including communication, customer management,

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value chain and business models. “Untact”—a combination of the prefix “un” and the word “contact”—is a word that has become particularly relevant during the Covid-19 pandemic. Untact describes doing things without direct contact with other people, such as self-service kiosks, shopping online or making contactless payments with phones. The word originated in South Korea, which combines robotic baristas, virtual make-up studios and digital financial transactions with an aging population and a shrinking labor force. Innovations in untact services at resorts, ticket kiosks, amusement rides, restaurants and souvenir shops shape the customers’ perceptions of the corporation’s commitment towards safety, convenience and cutting-edge technology.

Gentile et al. (2007) explains that “the customer experience originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company.” Experience not only turns into memory but also enables customers to interact with the service providers for a long time, hence, increasing the customer’s satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, the service experience within the theme park creates a satisfied experience and positive emotions at the intersection of various human, physical and systemic points, which leads to both customer satisfaction and profit of theme parks. From a marketing perspective, experience is defined as an independent event incurred by reactions to a certain stimulus. In other words, experience is a special thinking that is a reaction created instinctively from the outer stimulus and varies from each individual. Also, the experience which is induced but not created by itself will be an important factor for a corporation to draw from customers’ experiences and ultimately achieve its goal (Babin, B. J., Attaway, J. S, 2000).

Digital transformation is accelerating throughout the world, and corporations in the theme park industry should precisely identify the changes and demand of market, technology and customers to develop untact services which effectively minimizes physical contact between staff and customers while offering a novel new experience doing even the most mundane

things. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, global theme parks like Disneyland routinely receive complaints from customers having to wait long queues for popular rides and wait in line to purchase meals and souvenirs—all requiring direct contact with theme park staff. Disney World has since invested more than a billion dollars into the technology and infrastructure of the MyMagic+ IoT project in order to address these complaints and improve through innovation the customers' theme park experience. Currently the most active corporation among theme park companies applying digital technology, Disney has heavily invested in MyMagic+ and now offers various technology-based services for visitors of Disney World in Orlando, Florida. MyMagic+ features a wearable wrist band with RFID chips that could store customer's personal data and track their movement throughout the theme park. Customers can enter details of their travel plans and credit card information before the day of their visit to the theme park through the My Disney Experience website and mobile app. Upon arrival at the resort, they can check-in to the hotel at the resort, purchase souvenirs and save photos through MyMagic+.

2. Define customer experiences

Customer experiences refer to the strategic experiential modules of experience marketing that are the combination of senses, feelings, thoughts and actions which make up the customer's holistic experience from the goods and services provided by the corporation. In the theme park industry, it is important to provide marketing that creates value from the customer experience that exceeds the costs they spend. In other words, the major profit of theme parks comes from the entrance fee, food and beverage sales, goods sales and other services, and customers pay for them to attain a valuable and memorable experience (Poulsson &Kale, 2004). When theme parks fail to offer an attractive experience or exaggerate its ability to deliver compared to the reality of the actual services

provided, customers cannot see the purported experiential values of the park and refrain from future visits (Pine & Glimore, 1998). In this regard, the customer experience is a vital result of consumer sentiment, and an important factor that leads to fostering the desire—or even need—to visit again. Therefore, the positive customer experience towards the services provided in the theme park could be related to the customer's loyalty (Goossens, 2000). The original and authentic customer experiences not found in daily life contribute to winning loyalty and high praise from consumers while strengthening the theme park brand.

3. MyMagic+ platform's customer experience factor analysis

MyMagic+ platform comprises of four services: “MagicBand,” “FastPass+,” “My Disney Experience,” and “PhotoPass Memory Maker.” MagicBand allows hotel guests to conveniently pay for parking and hotel stay with their credit card while allowing payments to be combined to one member of a family household, restricting payment access made by children and create a unique payment password for added security. MagicBand is available to both hotel guests at Disney operating hotels and annual members of the park, and is available for purchase at the site. The customized MagicBand is delivered to the group before visiting the resort with various color options available and guests' names inscribed for added security and customization. FastPass+ allows hotel guests to reserve up to three tourist destinations per day. The My Disney Experience website and mobile app offer FastPass+ reservation, map, estimated waiting time, and the sharing of travel schedules with accompanying friends and family at the resorts. Lastly, PhotoPass Memory Maker gives guests access to all photos taken at photo spots, restaurants, character gatherings and entertainment locations for 30 days through the MagicBand, Memory Maker Card or Disney Photo Pass Card.

Guests are able to download all photos taken at the theme parks, print out photos at home or photo kiosks, and for an additional fee have printed photos delivered to their home by mail. In this research, the differentiated customer experience factors provided by Disney's MyMagic+ Platform are case-studied according to the three categories of "convenience, personalization, and operation" as suggested by Sijwang in his article "Disney's MyMagic+: Transforming the Theme Park Experience" (Harvard Business Review, 2017).



Figure 1. DisneyMagic Band
(<https://www.disneytouristblog.com/>)

3.1 Convenience

MyMagic+ was devised to integrate various functions such as resort payment, hotel room access, ticketing and FastPass into the digital architecture composed of a radio system and RFID support wristband. Guests can enter the hotel and theme parks without the need to contact staff and effortlessly pay for food, goods and services without taking out their wallets, which significantly saves time and effort for both the customer

and the theme park staff. Disney reported that MyMagic+ has reduced the average time waiting at the ticket gate by a remarkable 30%. Also, guests can reserve FastPass+ for no waiting, priority seating on selected rides, which further increases the efficiency of time in the park.

3.2 Personalization

Using information such as birthdays provided by the customer, MyMagic+ could create personalized experiences for visitors. For example, when Captain Jack Sparrow of Pirates of the Caribbean approaches a girl in the audience, calls her out by her name and congratulates her on her ninth birthday, that experience provides a precious and unforgettable memory for the girl. Also, when Magic Band technology is integrated into part of popular destinations, visitors can select the color, shape and engine of their virtual cars while waiting for the fast track attraction at Epcot. Visitors arriving at the attraction can simply tap their MagicBand and integrate their customized cars into the display screen.

3.3 Operation

The sensor of Magic Band tracks the location and movement of the guests, thereby offering a more pleasant theme park visit experience by managing their path of their visit to the park. For instance, operation staff can immediately locate the place where visitors are crowded within the Magic Kingdom park and can then send a parade of Disney characters to that location. Similarly, the park can allow visitors to use their Fast Pass in certain areas and situations in order to disperse a particularly crowded area of the park.



Figure 2. DisneyMyMagic+
(<https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/plan/my-disney-experience/my-magic-plus/>)

4. Implication

This research reached the following implications by analyzing customer experience factors provided by Disney's MyMagic+. Firstly, the digital transformation of the theme park industry does not automatically occur merely by introducing the digital technology such as AI, big data, and IoT; such technologies need to be intelligently integrated into the needs of the park so that they redefine the essence of theme park industry, including organizational culture, task process and communication. Secondly, we see how Disney is able to integrate various data about visitors' behaviors through MyMagic+ to offer a customized customer experience to each individual. Various online channels such as website, mobile and social media work together to make MyMagic+ an integral part of the Disney experience.

Since Covid-19, there is an increase of demand for untact services in the theme park industry, which ultimately increases the demand of services such as Disney's MyMagic+. To accomplish this, and win future and regular park visitations in a hyper competitive environment of the theme park industry,

it is essential for corporations to apply digital technology to their theme parks. In conclusion, the theme park companies should transition from being solely an amusement park of rides and be transformed into a truly 21st century entertainment company characterized simultaneously as a big data company, IoT company and a mixed reality company.

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