

A suggested development strategy for characters in kids theme parks

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Abstract

Kids theme parks are a representative space to enjoy culture and leisure for family with children, and companies are making efforts to satisfy the various needs of these consumers. In particular, as an extraordinary space, characters are used to effectively convey the image of a special space to consumers. While characters are a means of communication to convey and share the image of a product or service to consumers in a more intimate and lively way, and acts as an important factor for communication with children. Also, it serves as a medium to induce revisit. This study investigates and analyzes the characters of four representative domestic kids theme parks in Korea -Pororo Park, Cocomong Eco Park, HERO Play Park, Paju AZIDONG Theme Park-, and seeks for differentiated development strategies and directions for domestic kids theme park characters.

Keyword : Kids Theme Park, Character, Strategy of Kids Theme Park Characters, Direction of Kids Theme Park Characters

1. Introduction

Today, the quality of life is improved due to the increase of nuclear families, five-day workweek and the increase in income, accordingly, the desire to satisfy cultural and leisure life is demanding (Kim & Kang, 2016). In particular, the interest in cultural and leisure facilities that can satisfy the various needs of family members is increasing and the kids

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park industry is growing faster for children as one of family members in these society where the number of large families and the birth rate are declining(Kim & Kang, 2016; Park, 2020).

Kids theme parks using popular characters can stimulate imagination and induce fantasy so that children can become independent protagonists and immerse themselves emotionally by combining play and experiential facilities with complex cultural and leisure space(Kim, 2013; Park, 2020). In fact, it has secured a stable position compared to the recent decrease in the number of large-scale theme park visitors. The number of visitors to kids theme parks such as 'Pororo Theme Park' and 'Cocomong Kids Park', which have popular animation characters is steadily increasing (Kim, 2013; Kim & Kang, 2016), which implies that character images have a great influence on consumers' decision to visit kids theme parks.

Character is a means of communication to convey and share the image of a product or service to consumers in a more intimate and lively way, and acts as an important factor for communication with children. Also, it serves as a medium to induce revisit. In this way, popular characters reproduced in various products, services, and spaces in reality can be used as an image communication method that can be effectively applied to consumption contents related to children.

Mickey Mouse from America is a personified character of a mouse, and its red bottoms, yellow shoes, round eyes and ears, face, and four fingers are symbols, and the geometric harmony of circles especially stimulated the public's attention(Jeon, 2020).

It is also his charm to gradually transform from a troublemaker in the early days to a character with a positive and strong sense of justice. Such Mickey Mouse is used in short animations, TV series, movies, games, parodies, theme parks (Disneyland), goods, etc. to show the potential for commercial success in character design, and to produce original contents tailored to local cultures and emotions in countries around the world which is moving toward a 'localization

strategy'. (KOCCA, 2007). Hello Kitty from Japan is a cat personified character and has been developed into 430 types of characters over 40 years but is still capturing the hearts of consumers(Yoon, 2010; Yoon, 2010). Hello Kitty has round eyes, a nose, and a red ribbon as its symbol, based on a simple white cat character. In particular, the absence of its mouth reflects the emotions change according to viewers rather than its own emotions so that people eventually imply their emotions such as comfort, solace, and dreams. Hello Kitty has expanded character products through various series, household goods, fashion goods, accessories, and electronic products, but also led more customer expansion through collaboration with various brands, and is still loved by many people(Cho, 2013).

On the other hand, in the case of Korean characters, compared to the United States or Japan, due to the continuous economic recession and changes in the industrial structure, they are not systematic and the market expandability is declining (Kim & Yoon, 2010) Therefore, this study focuses on the marketability of characters based on previous studies (Lee, 2008; Yoon, 2010; Cho, 2013), and investigates representative domestic kids theme park characters in terms of design, marketing, and storytelling. Accordingly, we will seek the development strategies and directions that can meet the needs of users as a communication tool for domestic kids theme park characters. Such results will be used as useful basic data for application of character marketing to theme park business and environment development as part of future domestic theme culture contents.

2. Characters of Kids Theme Park

Kids theme parks refer to a form of theme park that recognizes the recreational and experiential characteristics for infants and children and reflect them to a physical space(Kim and Kang, 2013; Park, 2020). Kids' theme park induces children and parents' continuous interest and satisfaction by

bringing direct participation, experience, learning, and education, out of the passive stance of simple play or viewing.

Kids theme parks are a non-daily place, and use characters to effectively convey the image of a special place to consumers. According to the Korea Creative Content Agency's research on trends in the character industry (2021), 'characters are visually created through anthropomorphic or allegorical methods for the purpose of conveying specific ideas and images, and are virtual social actors endowed with unique characteristics and personalities' (Korea Creative Content Agency, 2021).

The characters of kids theme parks are visual objects endowed with unique and differentiated characteristics and personalities to symbolize the objects, and they tend to utilize characters, animals, and protagonists of animations and novels that enhance friendly and appealing emotional visual images to visitors (Kim & Kang, 2016). In addition, it has a strong commercial meaning, and the economic value in terms of customer attraction and advertising effect. In order for such a character to become a product, it must contain commercially relevant values from design, story development, and marketing (Ahn, 2010).

3. Research Methods and Analysis

3.1 Case Study and Data Collection



In this study, a case study analysis was performed based on professional data and literature data of each kids theme park. Referring to the studies of Kim & Yoon (2010), Cho (2013), Lim (2014), Kim & Kang (2016), and Park (2020), the analysis targets are four representative domestic kids theme parks -Pororo Park, Cocomong Eco Park, HERO Play Park, Paju AZIDONG Theme Park-, and the analysis consisted of ① theme, ② location, and ③ characteristics (design, marketing, storytelling aspects) of each kids theme park. Table 1, 2, 3, and 4.

3.2 Research Analysis

3.2.1 Pororo Park

Pororo Park is a kids theme park with domestic characters as its main theme. The Pororo character motivates children to feel familiarity and interest in the kids theme park and enter the space created with the characters. Pororo Park's interior design using popular animation characters and their stories stimulates children's curiosity (Kim, 2015).

Table 1. Characters of Pororo Park



Type		Content
Subject		Bigger emotions, bigger education, bigger play
Location / Website		Seoul, http://www.pororopark.com/
Characteristic  	Design	11 animal characters giving personality to anthropomorphic characters Wear a flight cap (helmet), goggles, and a jumpsuit. Reflect children's preferred colors and accessories
	Marketing	Movies, TV, goods, social media community Offline business (Kids Cafe, Theme Park, Museum Park, Exhibition/Experience Exhibition, Ride Business, Musical and Small-scale Performances, Event Performance, etc.)
	Storytelling	The daily life of ordinary and troubled protagonists and each incident that takes place in it The daily lives of ordinary protagonists and the events that take place in them

3.2.2 Cocomong Eco Park

Cocomong Eco Park is a space that has moved the wonderland of children's imagination into nature. In the theme park that satisfies the five senses, children will grow while feeling nature with Cocomong. (Lee et al., 2019).

In particular, through various programs of the theme park, children and characters learn the value of nature together, grow into adults with emotional leadership in the future, and provide experiences to grow into potential leaders who think not only of themselves but also of the global environment.


Table 2. Characters of Cocomong Eco Park

Type		Content
Subject		Various play facilities centered on physical and brain development
Location / Website		Gyeonggi-do, http://www.cocomongecopark.com/main.html
Characteristic  	Design	Foods in the Refrigerator 12 characters, giving personality to anthropomorphic characters, A combination of food and animals, a cute two-headed body, Familiar and friendly expression through the design of each original food and changed character
	Marketing	Movies, TV, goods, social media community Offline business (Recruitment of experience groups)
	Storytelling	Instructive story of friends in the country of refrigerators Addition of villain characters, confrontation between friends from the refrigerator country and villains

3.2.3 Hero Play Park

Hero Play Park is a theme park where children can acquire various experiences and knowledge and play safely by combining educational elements as well as play (Park, 2020; CM Hero Group, 2020). In particular, through various play and educational experiences based on storytelling that combine 6 hero characters, a play space, and motion technology, the ‘value of a hero’ is delivered in everyday life.



Table 3. Characters of Hero Play Park

Type	Content
Subject	A variety of play and educational experiences
Location / Website	Seoul, http://www.herokidspark.co.kr/
Characteristic 	Design Five ‘value’ characters: courage, confidence, challenging spirit, dream, and wisdom. Give each character a valued personality, Cute form of 2 heads Heroic expression of human and anthropomorphic animal characters Reflect children’s preferred colors and accessories
	Marketing Kids model contest, education & communication space SNS community Brand expansion (Kids Park, Sports Park, WOW ZOO)
	Storytelling The superheroes who guarded the Hero Play Park put their courage, confidence, spirit of challenge, dreams, and wisdom into five medals, and when they collect all these medals, they transform into superheroes. Protect the play park and medals

3.2.4 Azidong Theme Park

Azidong Theme Park provides play and educational spaces for each area considering the cognitive and physical development characteristics of children. In particular, it uses 5 puppies with strong personalities and 3 kittens (genetic variants of cats) to create a fun and touching story that is created by conflicting with each other. (Azidong Park, 2020)

Table 4. Characters of Azidong Theme Park

Type		Content
Subject		A variety of play and educational experiences
Location / Website		Seoul, http://azidong.com/default/
Characteristic  	Design 5 anthropomorphic puppies and 3 cats (genetic variants of cats) characters with different personalities Familiar and friendly expressions through character designs that apply names related to good living habits such as Dirty and Slow and friendly animals	
	Marketing Provide educational contents related to good living habits (good morning song, greeting song, tidy song, well-being song, reading song, well-being song, get along song, animation song, etc.) Provide Aji-dong website skin, Aji-dong avatar, Aji-dong emoji, educational flash contents and goods Partnership with TOP portals and launch of design brand 'Color+Code'	
	Storytelling A fun and touching story in the daily life of dogs and cats	
	Value Provide play and educational spaces considering the cognitive and physical development of children along with friendly characters	

The case analysis of domestic kids theme parks using the above representative characters is summarized as follows.

First, in terms of design, each anthropomorphic animal, food in the refrigerator, and heroic values were applied to the character to give it a character. In addition, ① a cute appearance with a 2-headed body, ② use of children's preferred colors, ③ reflection of a friendly and interesting image, and ④ application of familiar names exposed in various media to enhance consumers' preference.

Second, in terms of marketing, most kids theme parks operate movies, TV program contents, and SNS communities based on various online and offline media. It is carrying out marketing strategies such as small-scale performance, event performance, kids model contest, education and communication space, brand expansion, partnership with TOP portals, and production of goods.

Third, in terms of storytelling, ① a daily life story format in which an ordinary protagonist and his or her family or friends experience interesting and touching things in daily life together in a fragmentary way ② villain characters are added to make children and hero characters play villains together It takes the form of a good and punishing evil story to protect friends from evil.

Fourth, in terms of value, by conveying the education of right lifestyle and attitude along with friendly characters, the message of environmental protection, and the value of good and punishment, children not only improve their self-reliance and independence, but also develop interest in a wide range of social relationships and phenomena. We are providing opportunities to pursue and deliver new values with

4. Conclusion

A theme park is a non-daily space and uses characters to effectively convey the image of a special space to consumers. Therefore, this study investigated and analyzed the characters of four representative kids theme parks in Korea, and based

on this, tried to present a differentiated development strategy and direction of domestic kids theme park characters. As a result of the study, the following strategy was derived.

First, the current domestic kids theme park character design has limitations in that it targets infants and children. In order to expand the theme park market and customers in the future, it is necessary to break away from the prejudice that characters are only for children and to have a new perspective and perception based on a basic understanding of characters.

Second, domestic kids theme park characters are marketing through various online and offline media, but there are regional limitations in brand awareness. In the future, through the use of a wider range of media, it will be necessary to attract potential customers that can lead to sales of services and products by making the character brand recognized and liked by people around the world beyond the region.

Third, the storytelling of domestic kids theme park characters has limitations in its form, such as the fragmentary enumeration of events in daily life with the protagonist and characters and the heroic story due to the appearance of villain characters. Since the storytelling expansion of characters in kids theme parks is an important factor for communication with children, domestic kids theme park characters will also build storytelling expansions of various and detailed theme park spaces in the future to deliver attractive stories to consumers. It should be possible to obtain satisfaction through out-of-daily experiences through it.

Fourth, in domestic kids' theme parks, characters are simply limited to play or educational aspects. Since the characters are a reflection of human dreams, wishes, hopes, and wishes, domestic kids theme park characters also approach human emotions and images through universal values that everyone can sympathize with, providing hope, dreams, and comfort to those who are alienated. You should be able to play a role that can give.

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