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Research on the Impact of Experiential Marketing on Consumer Behavior: A Case Study of the Harry Potter Wizarding World Theme Park

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of experiential marketing on consumer behavior, focusing on the Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Studios as a case study. The research examines how immersive experiences, emotional satisfaction, and avant-garde imagination influence purchasing intentions. Through a combination of theoretical analysis and empirical data, the study identifies experiential value-comprising authenticity, immersion, and imagination-as a significant driver of consumer purchase intentions, while the effect of experiential quality (e.g., physical environment, service interaction) is found to be less pronounced. The findings highlight the importance of creating deep emotional connections and immersive environments in theme parks to enhance consumer engagement and loyalty. The study contributes to the understanding of experiential marketing strategies in the entertainment industry and offers practical insights for theme park operators aiming to optimize visitor experiences and drive revenue.

Keywords

Experiential Marketing; Consumer Behavior; Theme Parks; Immersive Experiences; Purchase Intention.

1. Background and Significance of the Study

1.1. Impact of Experiential Marketing on theme Parks

With the continuous development of economy and society and the improvement of people's living standard, theme parks, as a kind of experiential tourism products, are more and more favoured and paid attention to by the majority of consumers. According to the 2023 Global Attractions Attendance Report released by Themed Entertainment Association in 2024, the top 25 theme parks in the world attracted 512.3 million tourists in 2023, with the number of tourists increasing by 145% compared to 2022 This figure highlights the importance and momentum of theme parks in the current tourism market. According to Wei et al (2022) theme parks are able to create immersive and immersive experiences for tourists to satisfy their need for excitement and entertainment, thus significantly increasing consumer satisfaction and experience [1]. As one of the success stories of experiential marketing, Universal Studios has become a leading entertainment destination in the world, attracting a large number of tourists by virtue of its immersive experience design, which incorporates iconic designs from film and television productions into the experiential marketing chain, and recreates the film scenes one-to-one for visitors. According to the first quarter 2024 earnings report issued by Comcast Corporation, Universal Studios theme park revenues reached $1.97 billion, an increase of 1.5 per cent compared to last year. Thierry Coup, senior vice president of Universal Studios Creative, also said in the interview that going beyond traditional boundaries to provide guests with unprecedented immersive experiences is what will keep the operator ahead of the curve.

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In this article, we will take Wizarding World of Harry Potter, the most influential park in Universal Studios, as an example, and explore its practice of marketing immersive experiences, providing a new perspective on Universal Studios and the vast entertainment empire behind it.

1.2. About Universal Studios Harry Potter Park

As a theme park based on famous movie IP adaptation, the magical world of Harry Potter in Universal Studios undoubtedly occupies a pivotal position in the theme park industry. The key to the Harry Potter Park's ability to attract so many tourists worldwide is its adoption of an "experiential marketing" strategy. The park deeply integrates film IP through rich interactive performances, game projects, themed catering, souvenirs and other products, enhancing tourists' sense of participation and immersion. Thierry Coup, Senior Vice President of Universal Studios, pointed out in an interview with NBC Universal that Harry Potter's Forbidden Journey and Eagle Horse Flight both use 3D and real-life construction technology combined with original dialogue explanations from the movie. Visitors can not only immerse themselves in the adventure of the magical world, but also truly feel various stunning visual effects. This successful IP adaptation and experience creation has set an important benchmark in the theme park industry. In 2023, the total reception of Orlando Universal Studios Resort alone will reach 21.25 million, fully reflecting its strong attraction. It can be seen that the Harry Potter Park has successfully created a unique competitive advantage. Through in-depth exploration of the Harry Potter theme park, we can better understand and grasp the development trends of the theme park industry, and provide valuable reference for the operation and management of similar parks.

2. Interpretation of Experiential Marketing Theory

2.1. Experiential Marketing Theory

The application of experiential marketing theory is closely related to flow theory. The flow theory was proposed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in 1975, describing the pleasurable and focused psychological state that people experience when fully engaged in an activity, reaching a state of selflessness (Csikszentmihalyi M.& Csikszentmihalyi I., 1988) [2]. This deeply immersive experience is not limited to work, but also appears in entertainment and social settings, becoming the core reason why people repeat a certain activity and providing an important theoretical basis for understanding consumer experience. Based on flow theory, Bernd Schmitt elaborated on the essence of experiential marketing in his 1999 book "Experiential Marketing". Schmitt criticized traditional marketing for overemphasizing product features and neglecting the comprehensive experience of consumers in the purchase and use process, including sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational aspects (Schmitt, 1999) [3]. He advocates that enterprises should shift from product centered to consumer experience centered, by creating sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational experiences to provide consumers with unforgettable and unique experiences, enhancing brand value and customer loyalty. By integrating sensory elements such as vision, hearing, and touch, triggering emotional connections, activating thinking, designing interactive experiences, and promoting social interaction, businesses can provide customers with more attractive and memorable experiences, thereby influencing consumer behavior.

2.2. Application of Experiential Marketing Theory in Enterprises

With the development of the economy and society, consumers pursue diversified and personalized consumption experiences. Liu Meiying, Deputy Secretary General of the Beijing Municipal People's Government, pointed out that service consumption will increase by 12.0% year-on-year in 2024, and the demand for culture and tourism will continue to rise. As an important place for entertainment experience, theme parks fit the connotation of experiential

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marketing theory. Amusement park companies create unique and unforgettable experiences for visitors by integrating multidimensional experiential elements such as sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational aspects. Experiential marketing emphasizes attracting and retaining customers by creating unique experiences. Amusement parks create fun and surprising experiences through theme design, amusement facilities, performances, and role-playing, enhancing visitors' social interaction and brand identity. In addition, the amusement park triggers a multi sensory experience for visitors through carefully designed scene arrangements, theme elements, and interactive activities, using smoke, sound effects, and special lighting to immerse them and forget about real-life troubles. This unique experience attracts a large number of tourists, helping the amusement park establish a strong brand image and loyalty, thus standing out in the fiercely competitive market. Therefore, the application of experiential marketing theory in the amusement park industry is of great significance in enhancing competitiveness and attractiveness.

3. Marketing Practices in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter

The Harry Potter Theme Park of Universal Studios is committed to creating an immersive experience of the magical world for tourists. The park presents the unique charm of the Harry Potter magical world in all aspects through the deep restoration of original works and the integration and application of advanced technological means. As more and more Harry Potter fans and theme park enthusiasts pour into this magical world, Universal Studios is also constantly improving the immersive communication chain of the magical world, which can be summarized as three stages of "bedding", "reappearance" and "extension".

3.1. The Foundation of the Wizarding World

The "foundation" of the magical world mainly consists of three parts: first, architectural models; Secondly, image and sound effects; Thirdly, character simulation. Architectural models refer to the streets, castles, etc. in theme parks, and are also the main construction part of the theme park narrative framework, including the realistic reproduction of equipment, supplies, and other models of scenes in movies and TV shows. Imaging and sound effects refer to creating immersive scenes through virtual audiovisual effects created through electronic and digital technologies. Character simulation mainly refers to the cosplay of classic characters in movies and TV shows by staff, simulating their speaking tone to create a realistic experience. By "laying the groundwork", tourists can unconsciously accumulate a sense of immersion, forming a "quantitative change" of immersion from shallow to deep. Thierry Coup, Senior Vice President of Global Creative Company, pointed out that the design of stores and signage is scaled according to the proportions in the movie. The college flag and the spire of Hogwarts Castle further enhance the magical atmosphere. The details inside and outside the castle, such as the dense forest and Hagrid's warning recordings, immerse visitors in them through stereo sound effects, preparing for the subsequent "reproduction" stage.

3.2. Reproduction of the Wizarding World

The "reproduction" of the magical world relies on core amusement projects, creating immersive "smooth bursts" for tourists through sensory stimulation brought by giant equipment. This is also the largest part of the park affected by technology. By using onboard tools to create spatial displacement and combining auditory, visual, tactile and other sensory stimuli, we aim to create an immersive adventure experience for tourists. In order to enhance the authentic experience of tourists, the park has established a 4D Ride Type project - Harry Potter's Forbidden Journey. The first part of the project focuses on visual "reproduction". The Forbidden Journey takes place in Hogwarts Castle, a towering and majestic building standing deep in the park. Its magnificent exterior and intricately crafted internal structure perfectly recreate the image of this wizarding

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school in the movie. Tourists immerse themselves in it, as if they have truly entered that magical campus world. The multi sensory immersive experience of 'smooth explosion' is the moment when tourists sit on the project seats. This project uses KUKA Arm Technology combined with screen carousel and real-life construction technology to reproduce the real scenes in the movie. When riding, the robotic arm rotates with the 3D image to achieve true spatial displacement, realizing the means of using physical models to create real visual effects, allowing visitors to stay in the first perspective and immerse themselves in completing this adventure journey.

3.3. Extension of the Wizarding World

The 'extension' of the magical world, as the final stage of immersive experience, pushes tourists' immersive experience to a climax through product purchases. As Universal Studios has the exclusive license of IP, these goods are only sold in the park, further strengthening the immersion of tourists, making them feel that only consumption in the park can obtain a complete magic experience. When you finally taste the Butterfly, it's like a system of engaging everything and plaguing you in a world where you can't find anywhere else but there. In addition, tourists can also wear the Hogwarts school uniform purchased at Gladrags Wizardwear, hold the wand personally selected by Ollivander, and become the best 'wizard'. By using NFC technology, standing in front of the magic showcase in Hogsmeade Village, waving a wand and reciting spells, evidence of the existence of magic can be seen, achieving the "monetization" of tourists' immersion. The accumulation of "foreshadowing" and "reproduction" in the front enables consumers to transform immersive emotions into driving forces for consumption. From the restaurant's specialty food to IP products such as clothing, figurines, and movie props, these unique charms not only ensure that tourists are attracted before entering the park, but also provide supplementary shopping for immersive experiences, ensuring that every tourist passes by and never misses out.

4. Research Design

4.1. Research Variable Setting and Hypotheses

This paper studies the impact of experiential marketing strategies on consumer purchase behavior. The research site is the interactive store or experience project provided in the theme park of Wizarding World of Harry Potter of Universal Studios in Beijing. Based on previous research literature and combined with the research content and purpose of this article, the variables will be set as: experience quality, experience value, and consumer purchase intention. The experience quality is divided into five dimensions, namely physical environment, communication environment, tourists, surrounding products, and park photography. The experiential value is examined from three aspects: authenticity, immersion, and imagination. Based on the previous literature research, this article proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Experience quality has a positive impact on purchase intention

H2 experience value has a positive impact on purchase intention

4.2. Questionnaire Design

In order to verify the correctness of the research hypothesis, the questionnaire design of this article referred to the scale developed by Chen & Du in 2019 for the study of theme park experience as the basis for the questionnaire design [4]. The scale adopts the Likert 5-point scale format, with scores ranging from 1-5 for "completely disagree", "disagree", "generally", "agree", and "strongly agree". This questionnaire mainly consists of three parts:

Part I: The question includes the basic personal information of the investigated person, and whether they understand the IP address of Harry Potter and Universal Studios.

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Part 2: The question includes the feelings of the surveyed individuals regarding the quality and value of their experience in the park. The quality of experience mainly includes the physical environment, communication environment, tourist interaction, and souvenir design within the park. The experiential value is understood from three dimensions: authenticity, immersion, and imagination to understand the feelings of the respondents.

Part Three: The question mainly focuses on the respondents' willingness to purchase souvenirs and related products after playing.

5. Data Analysis

This study used statistical software SPSS to analyze and test the data collected from the sample survey, which mainly involved data quality testing, reliability testing, and correlation analysis.

5.1. Frequency Analysis of Demographic Variables

Table 1. Frequency analysis of demographic variables

	Option	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Gender	Male	106	53	1.47	0.50
	Female	94	47		
Age	20 and under	42	21	2.69	1.21
	21-25	47	23.5		
	26-30	56	28		
	31-25	42	21		
	35 and above	13	6.5		
Are you a fan of this IP	Yes I'm	114	57	1.82	0.96
	Not a fan	9	4.5		
	I know	77	38.5		
Have you ever been to Universal Studios	Yes	200	100	1.00	0.00

Based on the above analysis, the numerical characteristics of demographic variables can be seen. This reflects the distribution of the surveyed subjects. The mean represents the central tendency. The standard deviation represents the fluctuation situation. According to the frequency analysis results of each variable, it can be seen that the distribution basically meets the requirements of sampling. For example, the gender survey results. The proportion of males is 53%, and the proportion of females is 47%. It can be seen that the survey sample has good representativeness in terms of gender, which can reflect the general situation of the overall gender composition.In addition, all respondents have been to Universal Studios, ensuring the objectivity of the evaluation of the experience value and quality of Universal Studios.

5.2. Overall Reliability Test

Table 2. Overall Reliability Analysis

Clone Bach Alpha	Cloning Bach Alpha Based on Standardization Terms	Items
0.952	0.952	38

This Paper used Cronbach's alpha coefficient to test the overall reliability of the scale. The results showed that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient based on standardized items was also

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0.952, indicating that the scale has extremely high internal consistency reliability. It is generally believed that a Cronbach alpha coefficient greater than 0.9 indicates excellent reliability of the scale, and the coefficient in this study is much higher than this standard, indicating a high degree of consistency among the 38 items of the scale, which can stably and reliably measure the studied construct. Therefore, the reliability of the scale in this study is excellent and suitable for further data analysis and research inference.

5.3. Validity Analysis

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett inspection

KMO sampling suitability quantity.		0.923
Bartlett sphericity test	Chi square	4999.263
	Variance	703
	Significance	0

This Paper analyzed the validity of the data using KMO sampling appropriateness scale and Bartlett sphericity test. The results showed that the KMO value was 0.923, much higher than the standard threshold of 0.7, indicating that the data is very suitable for factor analysis, and the correlation between variables is strong, which can effectively extract common factors. In addition, the approximate chi square value of Bartlett's sphericity test is 4999.263, with 703 degrees of freedom, and the significance level is infinitely close to 0, rejecting the null hypothesis of no correlation between variables and further confirming that the data is suitable for factor analysis. In summary, the sample data of this study has high validity and can meet the requirements of subsequent factor analysis, making it suitable for further exploration of potential structural relationships between variables.

5.4. Correlation and Regression Analysis

Table 4. Correlation Analysis

	Purchase Intention	Experience Quality	Experience Value
Purchase Intention			
Pearson Correlation	1	.555**	.745**
Sig. (2-tailed)	-	.000	.000
N	200	200	200
Experience Quality			
Pearson Correlation	.555**	1	.750**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	-	.000
N	200	200	200
Experience Value			
Pearson Correlation	.745**	.750**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	-
N	200	200	200

This study is based on survey data from "The Wizarding World of Harry Potter: The Impact of Experience Marketing on Consumer Behavior", and explores the impact mechanism of experience quality and experience value on consumer purchase intention through correlation and regression analysis. Correlation analysis shows that there is a significant positive correlation ($p<0.01$) between purchase intention and experience quality ($r=0.555$ * *) and experience value ($r=0.745$ * *), and the correlation of experience value is stronger than that of

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experience quality. It is worth noting that there is also a high correlation between experience quality and experience value (r=0.750 * *), suggesting the possibility of multicollinearity between the two.

Table 5. Regression Analysis

Coefficient a											
Model	Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Significance	Zero-order	Partial Correlation	Part	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
		B	Standard Error								
1	(constant)	1.158	0.895	-	1.293	0.197	-	-	-	-	-
	Experience Quality	-0.002	0.017	-0.007	-0.095	0.924	0.555	-0.007	-0.005	0.483	2.283
	Experience Value	0.246	0.024	0.75	10.483	0	0.745	0.597	0.496	0.483	2.283
Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention											

Regression analysis further confirmed this inference. In the linear regression model constructed with purchase intention as the dependent variable, the non standardized coefficient of experience value is 0.246 (beta=0.750, t=10.438, p<0.001), indicating that for every 1 unit increase in experience value, purchase intention will significantly increase by 0.246 units, and the standardized coefficient highlights its dominant role. The impact of experience quality on purchase intention did not pass the significance test (B=-0.002, beta=-0.007, t=-0.095, p=0.924). Although the VIF value of 2.283 is below the threshold of 5, the high correlation between experience quality and experience value (r=0.750) may lead to its explanatory power being partially absorbed by experience value, resulting in statistical insignificance in the regression model.

Based on the questionnaire content, the experience quality covers dimensions such as physical environment, service interaction, and tourist behavior, while the experience value focuses on the deep experience of authenticity, immersion, and imagination. The analysis results indicate that consumers are more inclined to stimulate their purchase intention through immersive experiences at the value level, such as detachment from reality and time forgetting effects, rather than simply focusing on environmental quality or service efficiency. This discovery has enlightening significance for the marketing strategy of theme parks. By optimizing immersive scene design and strengthening emotional resonance, it may be more effective in driving consumer behavior than improving the quality of basic services. Future research needs to further control for collinearity between variables or use structural equation modeling to distinguish between direct and indirect effects.

6. Conclusion

This study analyzed the impact of experiential marketing on consumer purchasing behavior and found that experiential value has a significant positive effect on purchase intention, while the impact of experiential quality is not significant. This indicates that theme parks can effectively enhance consumers' willingness to purchase by creating immersive experiences and emotional resonance. The successful practice of Universal Studios Harry Potter Park further verifies the importance of experiential marketing in enhancing tourists' immersion and emotional connection. Therefore, theme parks should focus on enhancing experiential value, creating unique immersive experiences through technological innovation and emotional interaction to enhance consumer loyalty and purchase intention.

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