

# The Influence of Atmospheric Experience on Theme Park Tourist's Satisfaction and Loyalty in Malaysia

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Malaysia is filled with lots of exciting places for family activities thus it is an ideal destination for local and international tourists. Tourism Malaysia data shows that tourist arrivals to Malaysia decreased from 2016 (25.95m) to 2017 (25.83m). Understanding atmospheric experiences is crucial in identifying the most impactful factors on visitor loyalty. The main objective of this study is to describe and explain the atmospheric construct (ambience, interaction, and design); the construct of satisfaction and the construct of tourist loyalty. The study will be focusing on selected theme parks from southern, central, and northern Malaysia. This study focuses on what types of atmospheric experiences emotionally touch tourist at the theme park. The theme park tourist will be the target respondent of this study. The outcome of this study will be a source of information for theme park management to enhance their understanding of the main contributors of visitor loyalty and to allow them to increase the quality of their services by creating a positive image of the theme park

**Key words:** *Tourist, Loyalty, Atmospheric Experience, Satisfaction, Theme Park, Malaysia.*

## Introduction

Atmosphere can be classified as the ambience of the surrounding which at the same time seeks to create positive intentions, persuade the customer and attract them to purchase the products or services (Kotler, 1973; Abdulrasheed, 2017). It is regarded that well planned management, excellent ambience, well-organized and maintained equipment and facilities, and customer service are all part of atmosphere creation that leads to satisfied customers which are necessary in order to be competitive and sustain their business in the future. Gupta

and Kumar (2009) also state that “customer satisfaction has become an important tool in developing customer satisfaction measures and establishing business processes that link quality with customer satisfaction” (p.119). As Dahlsten (2003) asserts “It is widely acknowledged that customer satisfaction is a function of the relationship between customer expectations and experience, that it is dependent upon value and that it is formed continuously” (Gee, et al, 2008; Meyer and Meyer, 2017; Al-Ahmad and Ismaiel, 2016). This shows customer satisfaction tends to be a key part of the company retaining its present state and growing in the future.

Thus, tourists’ satisfaction and loyalty must be taken seriously by theme park management in order to maximize their profit, but at the same time retain existing tourists’ and also attract new target tourists (Loke, 2017). By knowing the level of tourists’ satisfaction to atmospheric experiences provided, there would be a win-win situation to the tourists’ benefit, which fulfills their needs and wants, and at the same time the theme park can improve their level of service and management to further satisfy tourists (Meyer and Meyer, 2016; AlAli, 2016). It is important to satisfy tourists’ needs and wants so their loyalty can be retained, this is necessary to remain competitive. At the same time the theme park can improve their level of service and management which allows for effective future planning in order to cope with changing needs and wants of tourists.

### ***Problem Statement***

By the year 2020, Malaysia may become the major theme park hub in the Asian region. Malaysian is currently occupied by 20 theme parks and water parks, with more coming by the year 2020. These parks include: Twentieth century Fox Studios, Ubisoft video game theme park, Matta Fair, Legoland, Sea Life Malaysia, The Malaysian Reserve and the Desaru Coast Adventure Waterpark.

Understanding the impact of atmospheric experience on visitor satisfaction will enhance the ability of the parks to positively influence visitor satisfaction and subsequently will allow the parks to stay competitive by creating visitor loyalty. This is supported by Jamal (2017), who provides that the more that visitors have pleasant memories with their tourism experience, the higher their intention to revisit will be and the more they will spread their positive experience to others.

The lack of importance placed on visitors’ needs and wants, besides low service quality creates a major influence on the level of visitors’ satisfaction and reduced the tendency of revisits. It is important for the theme park management to make sure their customers are satisfied with the products and services that they offer (Saudi et al., 2018).

In addition to understanding the type of atmospheric experiences that emotionally touch visitors, upgrading the facilities provided and providing a choice, or variety of games in the theme park, will lead to the retention of visitors and potentially encourage new visitors to attend. Thus, there is a clear need to study what types of atmospheric experiences emotionally touch visitor satisfaction and promote visitor loyalty of theme parks in Malaysia.

### ***Scope of Study***

The scope of this study is the tourists of Sunway Lagoon, i-City, Legoland and Lost World of Tambun, especially Malaysian and Non Malaysian tourists (Sinaga et al., 2018). This study assessed the level of tourists' satisfaction with their atmospheric experiences in Malaysian theme parks. Their experiences were recorded with regard to factors such as ambience, interaction provided by customer service personnel and the design of Sunway Lagoon, i-City, Legoland and Lost world of Tambun. It involves tourists from different age levels, genders, nationalities, occupations and educations.

Sunway Lagoon is known as the one-stop place for fun, and caters for ages 8 to 80 and it provide over 90 attractions spread across 88 acres which are contained in six adventure zones including Water Park, Amusement Park, Wildlife Park, Extreme Park, Scream Park and Nickelodeon Lost Lagoon Asia.

I-City is popular for their digital lights and is located in Shah Alam. It also provides other attractions such as water world, snowwalk, trick art museum, red carpet (wax museum), horror house and city walk (Sinaga et al., 2019). The customer expectations towards I-City attractions provide that the LED lights are how the I-City Shah Alam has come to be well known.

Legoland is situated in Nusajaya, Johor. Legoland consists of theme and water parks. Miniland is also part of the attraction, the miniature build based on well-known landmarks such as Petronas Twin Towers, the Merlion Statue, Wat Arun and Taj Mahal.

The Lost World of Tambun is situated in Ipoh, Perak. The water theme park is one of the biggest parks in Malaysia situated upon 40 acres. It is located at the end of Tambun Caves, which contain 5,000-year-old Neolithic cave paintings. The Lost World of Tambun consists of a water park, amusement park, adventure, petting zoo and hot springs. The Theme park is very popular among the Perak community itself especially for the hot springs, which is beloved by Chinese people who subscribe for the annual fee membership at the park (Wnuk, 2017).

### ***Research Questions***

- What is the relationship between atmospheric experience and tourist satisfaction?
- What is the relationship between tourist satisfaction and tourist loyalty?

### ***Research Objective***

- To examine the relationship between atmospheric experience and tourist satisfaction
- To examine the relationship between tourist satisfaction and tourist loyalty

### **Literature Review**

According to Kotler (1973), atmosphere has been discussed as an important tool for how one can change or influence customers' attitudes and behaviors (as cited in Slatten, Mehmetoglu, Svensson & Svaeri, 2009). The construct of atmosphere is paramount for service organizations because services are produced and consumed simultaneously (Bitner, 1992). This special singular characteristic implies both that the customer will be exposed to the atmosphere of the 'production site' and that customers' perceptions of the atmospheric qualities are related to customers' responses. In this study, the atmosphere may be divided into three facets which are ambience, interaction and design (Heide and Grønhaug, 2006) (as cited in Slatten, Mehmetoglu, Svensson and Svaeri, 2009). Kotler (1973) defined atmospherics as "the effort to design buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his purchase probability." He further asserted that atmospherics can be a marketing tool to induce positive behaviors in consumption situations where products or services are consumed (as cited in Liang & Zhang, 2012). Gupta and Vajic (1999) write that an experience occurs when a customer has a sensation or knowledge acquisition, or both, as a result of interaction with different elements of a context created by a service provider (as cited in Slatten et al., 2009). Williams (2006) says that tourism provider's offer always has close links to the customer experience. Customer experiences are critical for suppliers of tourism experiences that have a strong foundation because the customer can understand these experiences to be the core product (the bundle of memories, as it were, that they take away with them). It is also mentioned that customer experiences constitute a crucial factor that influence the customers' willingness to repeat the experience or to recommend it to friends or colleagues (Slatten, Krogh & Connolley, 2011; Marcinkiewicz, 2017).

Oliver (2006) reported that satisfaction is the consumer's fulfillment response. Torres and Kline (2006) defined customer satisfaction as "the individual's perception of the performance

of the product or service in relation to his/her expectations”. Moreover, customer satisfaction is an attitude change resulting from the consumption experience (Liang & Zhang, 2012). Customer satisfaction is typically defined as an overall assessment of the performance of various attributes that constitute a product or a service (Bartikowski and Llosa, 2004). In a study of service quality, perceived value, and satisfaction on the Xitou Nature Education Area, the author defined tourists’ satisfaction as perceived pleasure or disappointment after tourists experienced the products or services of travel destinations (Lin, Shih, Liao & Tsai, 2011). Tourist satisfaction is important to successful destination marketing because it influences the choice of destination, the consumption of products and services, and the decision to return (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under or over-fulfillment. Here, pleasurable implies that fulfillment gives pleasure or reduces pain. Thus, individuals can be satisfied just to get back to being normal, as in the removal of an uncomfortable state. Moreover, fulfillment is not necessarily limited to the case of met needs. Over-fulfillment can be satisfying if it provides additional unexpected pleasure; and under-fulfillment can be satisfying if it gives greater pleasure than one anticipates in a given situation. Satisfaction, is a post-usage phenomenon, is purely experiential, and results from comparative processes. In the domain of the consequences of satisfaction, a major concept is that of loyalty. Brand loyalty is a deeply rooted commitment to repurchase a product or repatronize a service in the future. In marketing literature, customer satisfaction is conceived to be part of an overall model of customer behavior that evolves over time (Namasivayam & Lin, 2008; Abdullah et al., 2018).

Wonderful experiences can be considered to be a vital determinant of customer loyalty, the wonderful experiences come from the satisfaction that lead to a positive behavioral attention outcome after the happiness experience, Ali et al.,(2018). Having dissatisfied visitors will encourage them to move to other choices of place in the future, thus encouraging visitors to revisit is a crucial factor in determining the future of the theme park. The future may involve determinations as to the necessity of upgrades to the ambience of the theme park which will increase the level of satisfaction among visitors during their activity experience and then lead to an increase of level of loyalty towards the respective theme park, Qu Kangli (2017) .

### **Research Methodology**

This study will used Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), a version 25.0 software program for data analysis. The data will be operated and loaded through SPSS in order to perform the essential data statistical analysis to study the relationships between atmospheric experience and tourist loyalty, and answer the research questions.

Apart from the primary data collection, researchers had also been looking into secondary data collection which comes from published journals, articles from websites, press release and books that related to the study.



**The above conceptual framework is derived mainly from previous study by Slatten et al. (2009)**

### **Conclusion**

Understanding tourist satisfaction factors leads to creating long term relationships with customers and contributes positively to business growth. By making tourists' satisfied with most contributor factors identified in the atmospheric experience through their services or products offered, the potential of receiving repeat tourists' is high.

This study provides a new basis of knowledge, with a specific focus on Malaysian theme parks and is expected to be an extension of existing literature despite the prior research undertaken. Importantly, this study will be beneficial for future researchers to reflect on when considering whether to look into new directions, on a similar basis, at a later point in time.

From a practical perspective, it is believed that an in-depth outcome from this study will also be useful for organizations in the tourism industry such as hotels, food service providers, and other tourist attractions, as the outcomes will serve as guidelines in understanding the importance of satisfying the tourist in attracting their loyalty.

In addition the data collected can be a source of information for the particular theme park to: keep track of their business strategies when identifying possible new tourism attractions, increase their tendency of having repeat tourists, and to attract potential tourists toward their theme park.

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