A few months ago, I visited Walt Disney World as part of a university excursion. In doing so, I attended a few events in Magic Kingdom. Firstly, I attended the Happily Ever After Fireworks event in Magic Kingdom. It occurs every night at 7:55pm, outside Cinderella’s Castle. The castle is lit up using projections of various Disney movie characters, with songs that correspond to the fireworks display. The event itself lasts for about 18 minutes with show-stopping fireworks to music that brings nostalgia to the audience. The link below is a short video on the ‘Happily Ever After’ Fireworks show!
This blog will be looking at theories such as Disneyization, for a more in-depth analysis of what Disney World actually consists of. It will also look at the events’ environment, the overall experience at the event, the event design and management.

Bryman suggests that Disneyization is:

“the process by which the principles of the Disney theme parks are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world” (1999, p. 26).

There are four main trends to create the parks’ success with the ‘guests’: theming, dedifferentiation of consumption, merchandising and emotional labour (Bryman, 1999). Theming is a main trend noted in today’s society. The theming of Disney Parks allowed it to appeal to adults as well as children; Walt Disney’s main goal is to create an environment where there was plenty of reminiscence. In today’s society, theming is a huge part in the actual experience. For example, many restaurants are themed: Hard Rock Café and the Rainforest Café, where the focus is on the theme rather than the actual food service provided. Disney is also known for reflexive theming, in which the organisation has themes that are internally generated and then reproduced continuously. This relates to the theme, brand and expression that the organisation represents (Bryman 1999).
The second main trend is dedifferentiation of consumption: Main Street USA in Magic Kingdom, is not only used for attractions but also for commercial purposes like shopping. Most of the time guests, have to walk through a store when exiting the ride or park, to which there will be several merchandises available to buy. The main concept here is that Disney has optimised the sale of merchandise and food within its theme park (Bryman 1999). Another example of this is Disney Springs, a shopping centre which is Disney themed and which is beside the Disney theme parks in Orlando, Florida. In today’s society, a better example of this may be Las Vegas, where each house could be a store or casino, where customers can then make purchases. Kumar (2006) agrees with Bryman’s point, stating that social and economic aspects of life, have fused together to appease the commercialisation of consumption.

The third main trend is merchandising: Walt Disney learned the difficult way as he had to guard his rights to his characters, or someone else would make profit using his idea. This is what happened to Walt Disney’s first character, Oswald the Lucky Rabbit. As a result, this copyrighting, Disney was able to create revenue producing merchandise: using movies and the theme parks. In relation to the 21st century, other major production companies like Warner Brother Studios and Universal have also used this method to create profit. Davis (1996), states that ‘cross-promotion’ of goods can be seen as a principle of Disneyization. Wasko et al (1993) also refers to merchandising as “the commercialisation of film” and the “commodification of culture.” Overall, merchandising is in movies, characters, themed restaurants as mentioned in previous paragraphs and American Universities. This has been brought to the attention of British universities, which resulted in the process called Disney-style merchandising (Swanton, 1997).

The fourth trend is emotional labour: this refers to employees having interpersonal contact with customers (Hochschild, 1983). In relation to Disney, employees (known as cast members) are renowned for their happiness and friendliness, which Sorkin (1992) suggests is the stereotypical behaviour of employees in modern culture. However, the requirement of emotional labour can cause resentment within the employee (Zibart, 1997). The need for employees to act and speak a certain way, could make their interactions with consumers more structured and predictable, making the action itself less meaningful and forced (Kinman, 2009).

Pine and Gilmore (1999) led to the series of studies made into The Experience Economy. Their theory was that organisations need to sell experiences, rather than goods and services. It has been said that management of theme parks should utilize theming – which will create an unforgettable experience for the attendees (Astrom, 2017). Theming has many benefits: it can offer consumers an escape from reality (Brown and Patterson, 2000), make consumers remember a key message (Ham, 1992) and doesn’t just attract first time attendees, but also repeat visitors (Weaver, 2011). When attendees visit Disney, they don’t just get immersed in the fantasy of Disney World, they also get reminded of their childhood. This is known as Imagineering – where Disney constructs themed environments on the basis of nostalgia (Archer, 1997). The concept of Magic Kingdom in Orlando was to create nostalgia for the local attendees. The railway station, Main street and the residential district were the three main
elements that Walt Disney wanted to incorporate into the theme park (Neuman 2008).

“You can create and design and build the most wonderful place in the world. But it takes people to make the dream a reality.” – Walt Disney

The quote by Walt Disney himself, shows that it is not only the park that creates the theme of Walt Disney World, but also the employees. Employees are important for the event design, as they reinforce the theme (Stromberg, 2015). Disney go as far as even to say that employees are ‘cast members’ that wear costumes, not uniforms, and are ‘on stage’ when they are in public (Miller, 1992). By having their own Disney Philosophy, it reinforces how employees should treat their ‘guests’.

Bryman (2003) states that Disneyization is the staging of goods and services for consumption. He argues that it is an invisible process, whereby consumers are willing to buy products and services without having to think about the economic consequence; and are willing to be pulled into a themed experience where they can buy merchandise (Bryman 2003). The event at Magic Kingdom is called “Happily Ever After,” which is the famous phrase after every Disney fairy tale. It reiterates that ‘guests’ can be optimistic, be hopeful and dream for a better future (Mollet, 2013).

‘Happily Ever After Fireworks Show’ is a primarily visual experience. Researchers have developed something called ‘feeling fireworks,’ for the visually impaired so they can then experience the fireworks as well (Knoop et al. 2017). Management can use researchers to their advantage, to make the experience more memorable to consumers. By using technology, the ‘Happily Ever After Fireworks Show’ can be inclusive to everyone. The tactile effects are created by using water jets that spray onto a screen, with different nozzles to create different firework effects. Here is a video to explain what it looks like:
Glocalization is a theory developed by Robertson (1992), which fuses together the concept of ‘Globalization’ and ‘Localization’. It refers to the interface of the global and the local. Matusitz (2011) states that Glocalization has more chance of success if the theme, product or service is accommodating to the local culture, in where it is situated. For example, when Disney opened their Hong Kong Disneyland in 2005, it was not as successful as they thought it would be. This is because of the lack of familiarity with the Disney culture and characters in China. As a result, Disneyland wanted to tailor the attraction to the local Chinese culture, environment and mindset, whilst keeping the Disney theme (Marr, 2007).

The management of Disney World made four major glocalization changes to aid the success of Hong Kong Disneyland: reduction of prices, adapted to local customs, change of décor and settings and finally, adapted the labour practices to those of Chinese expectations (Matusitz, 2011). Briefly, admission tickets were too high for the local visitors, as China was still a country with low income levels since the 1990s financial crisis. Hence, they were lowered so that visitor attendance rates would increase. In relation to the adaptation to local customs, Disney introduced Halloween Haunt, Sparkling Christmas and Disney’s Chinese New Year. This links in with Disneyization’s theming aspect, where the theme of the event can aid event attendance and create memorable experiences to those of the Chinese Culture. The Disney characters also underwent a ‘makeover’ in terms of their costumes, which appealed to the Chinese tourists more than the American costumes. Another similarity to Disneyization’s
theming aspect is, how the Glocalization of Hong Kong Disneyland underwent a major change of décor and settings to fit in with the Chinese traditions. *Feng shui,* is an ancient Chinese culture in where arrangement of products or services are very important. Therefore, many things were re-positioned to fit in with the Chinese culture, making the visitors feel more comfortable and willing to spend more money, as their beliefs increase prosperity (Holson, 2005). The final practice was adaptation of labour practices, in Disneyization, Disney’s practice was to implement the “smile factory” strategy, however in Hong Kong, people aren’t hospitable, so this raised suspicion within the community. The Chinese culture is more conservative, so the employees had to act like emotional people rather than emotionless robots (Clandinin, 2006). This is contrasted to Disneyization’s ‘smile factory’ as employees are expected to smile, all day everyday even if they are not being real. Glocalizations hasn’t just happened to the Hong Kong Disneyland but the Disneyland Paris, as well (Zhang, 2007). Glocalizing Disney theme parks, allows for success within the local community whilst still maintaining Disney Values.

In contrast to Bryman’s Disneyization theory, is Ritzer’s McDonaldization theory (1993). McDonaldization has four main principles: efficiency, predictability, calculability and control using non-human technology. However, by using technology to control people, the rationality can cause irrationality. McDonaldization requires humans to learn and keep up with the new technological advances to operate efficiently (Mohamed, 1997). By having to rely on technology so much, there could be a possibility over losing control, which would in turn decrease efficiency.

Max Weber’s theory of rationality plays side by side to Ritzer’s McDonaldization’s theory. Weber states that the large organisations are a bureaucracy in where there are institutionalised rules that are created to benefit the organisation (Ritzer, 1993). As a result of the rules in place, the way in which they operate are highly predictable, creating a rational set of rules to abide by. However, he proposes that this causes the ‘Iron Cage.’ By having rules and regulations, it can create a dehumanising environment for employees to work in, which can then lead to poor service quality. It can be argued that Disney World, has now become a McDonaldized institute, in which there are many rules and regulations for employees to
follow, in order to make sure that ‘guests’ have an enjoyable experience. It can also be argued that Disney World have opened more Disney theme parks around the world, using the four main principles to remain a successful organisation. They do this by using up to date technology, to keep guests informed of queue times and access fast passes to events and rides. Opposing the McDonaldization theory in the predictability aspect, as mentioned in previous paragraphs, different theme parks, have to adapt to the local cultures so that consumers feel comfortable in the way in which the service is delivered. So, in this view, McDonaldization can be altered to the ‘Disney standards.’

In conclusion, Disney theme parks, are being used a model for Disneyization for other organisations so that consumers can have the best memorable experiences. Moreover, Disney World, uses merchandising and consumption to their profitable advantage, knowing that ‘guests’ would like to take souvenirs home. In another aspect, Disney World is using McDonaldization, to keep their efficiency, predictability, calculability and control by using up to date technology. In doing so, it allows them to run as a successful organisation without, ruining the ideology that “Disney is the happiest place in the world.” Disney World is a mix of both theories in which Disneyization allows it to be the ‘Spectacle’ it is and in which McDonaldization allows it to be as efficient as it is without it affecting the consumers. Managers have to be considerate of local cultures when thinking about event design and event experiences. In doing so, it allows the theme park to be inclusive to all: foreigners and local visitors. The ‘Happily Ever After Fireworks Show’ is one of many events that take place at Disney World, and each is adapted to the local culture, in order to ensure the parks success.

“All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them.” – Walt Disney

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References:


One thought on ““Happily Ever After” | Academic Blog”

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I blog quite often and I really thank you for your information. Your article has really peaked my interest. I will book mark your blog and keep checking for new details about once a week. I subscribed to your RSS feed too. https://mydxadryl.net/
Ac New Leaf Motifs Animal All About Animals. I know I’m not the best designer but I’m so proud of my stargazing sign design. Happily Ever After. June 2009. Academic Emergency Medicine 16(5):387. DOI: 10.1111/j.1553-2712.2009.00411.x. Source. PubMed. Authors: Rebecca Jeanmonod. 37.74. Welcome to the Prime Reads newsletter for February 2012. Happily Ever After. Harriet Evans. Eleanor Bee is a romantic daydreamer who, despite her parents’ messy divorce, believes in true love and happy endings. But when her heart is broken by Rory — her boss and first love — she doesn’t know which way to turn. How could something so wonderful have gone so wrong? Happily Ever After is a self-paced, online premarital course designed by Marriage365 for seriously dating, engaged, and newlywed couples. Within months we realized how underprepared we were in our journey towards ‘Happily Ever After.’ In fact, our marriage almost ended within the first year! Thankfully, through the help of mentors and a lot of learning, we turned our marriage around and have built an amazing life together. A transcript is a retrospective written record of dialogue, and like a script (a prospective record) may include other scene information such as props or actions. In the case of a transcript of a film or television episode, ideally it is a verbatim record. Because closed-captioning is usually written separately, its text may have errors and does not necessarily reflect the true Canonical transcript. For a graduate student, postdoc or any other academic who is not in a permanent position, it seems that “happily ever after” starts once one obtains a tenure-track position or equivalent, a bit like the female protagonist finding a suitable partner in a Jane Austen novel. People outside of the tenure track look on in disbelief as their tenured and tenure-track colleagues grumble about committee work, heavy teaching loads, the lack of accommodation for their spouses, decreasing pension and healthcare benefits, and the decline of wages in real terms. This post originally appeared on The Philosophers’ Cocoon blog. Read more about...