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Exploring the Use of Social Media Among Theme Park Guests: A Uses and Gratification Theory Approach

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EXPLORING THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG
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A USES AND GRATIFICATION THEORY APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Theme parks have provided billions of dollars to the local economies of tourist destinations (Blair & Rush, 1998; Warden, 2019). In the digital age, the theme park experience is shared with vast online audiences, so there is a need to understand how theme parks are presented on social media from the guest's perspective. Specifically, it is vital to understand the uses and gratifications of social media use and content creation from guests and influencers within a theme park context.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory serves as a foundational theory for this research to understand the psychological gratifications found through media use. This research utilizes the Uses and Gratifications Theory to conceptually develop an expanded classification, particularly to account for the advancing social media landscape and the role of influencers. Additionally, this research seeks to understand theme park posting behavior from the typical guest perspectives, identifying the location and main topic for creating social content within a theme park setting. Finally, this research investigates the motivations and gratifications of influencer content creation within a theme park context.

The expanded classification addressing the Uses and Gratifications Theory has direct theoretical implications for integrating the new use of media through content creation. Furthermore, results show that guests create social media content showcasing the attraction experience, character meets, and entertainment from their theme park experience, creating knowledge for marketing and consumer insight teams in the theme park industry. Lastly, influencers deeply connect to the park and create content to assist the park and the guests' future trips by showcasing new experiences and sharing knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Amusement parks have influenced tourism destinations since establishing Sea Lion, Steeplechase, and Dreamland amusement parks, which transformed Coney Island, Brooklyn, New York, United States (U.S.), into an electric site of thrills and adventure (Lukas, 2008). Theme parks intertwine a unified theme, such as fantasy at Magic Kingdom, sea life at SeaWorld, or blockbuster movies at Universal Studios. Incorporating theme parks into tourist destinations increases the number of visitors to locations (Anton Clavé, 2007), often acting as the primary reason for city visitation. As a result, theme parks can provide substantial vitality to economic development initiatives by creating jobs, infusion of capital, tax generation, and attracting new investments to a local economy (e.g., Anton Clavé, 2007; Gupta & Sharma, 2016).

Establishing a theme park can contribute to the development of infrastructure and growth in the popularity of a tourist destination overall as a primary attraction (Sun & Uysal, 1994). That is, as theme parks are established, competitors often follow, thus contributing even more to the overall tourism development of the destination (Anton Clavé, 2007; Lukas, 2008). In 2019, it was reported that 73 billion dollars was added to the local economy from Universal Studios Orlando since 1990 (Warden, 2019). The Woods Center for Economic Analysis and Forecasting also estimated that for every $1 billion Disney invests in the Disneyland Resort, it creates 4,000 jobs, as well as providing 11 million in tax revenue and 1.1 billion of economic output after four years (Governor Newsom Celebrates Pride, Highlights Disneyland Resort's Investments in Anaheim, 2023). According to Oxford Economics, Walt Disney World Resort has generated

263,000 jobs across the state of Florida in the last 50 years in addition to generating $40 billion of economic impact in 2022 (*Disney Generates Billions in the Florida Economy. Here's How Much*, 2023).

While theme parks can create economic development, they can also have sizable effects on the local culture and environment. Positively, theme parks contribute to the cultural impacts such as tourist education, integration, and sustainability of the local culture (Anton Clavé, 2007). Theme parks can impact the social aspects of the local community by providing opportunities for family recreation (Lee & Jin, 2021) and engaging in the local community (Milman, 2010). Theme parks have also established environmental initiatives by facilitating and incorporating wilderness preserves, water filtration projects (Anton Clavé, 2007), solar energy farms, electric buses, and water usage limitations (Chieffi, 2022).

However, theme parks' adverse outcomes include increased infrastructure stress, increased real estate prices, and higher taxes (Gal, 2014). Theme parks may also impact the cultural aspects of the community by increasing the influence of globalization, cultural homogenization (Norcliffe, 2001), misrepresentation of individuals, and cultural appropriation (Hitchcock et al., 1998). Theme parks may also be considered exclusive due to the high premium prices that can prevent lower-income families from participating in a theme park experience. In addition, theme parks have been criticized for unfair treatment of employees, including low pay, long commutes to work, and unaffordable housing within the park's proximity (Anton Clavé, 2007). Such massive developments create excessive noise, atmosphere pollution, the disappearance of threatened species, paleontological impact, archaeological heritage impact, deforestation, and natural environment destruction (Anton Clavé, 2007; Langquar, 1991).

Furthermore, theme parks contribute to congestion on roads, which causes disruption to locals' daily activities and increased air and noise pollution (Elmia & Pratiwi, 2019).

With these effects in mind, it can be surmised that theme parks are a social and economic phenomenon that warrants scholars' attention. Further, theme parks are not just experienced in situ: the experience of the theme park is shared online through social media platforms (Jin et al., 2015; Manoharan & Ammaiappan, 2020; Park et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022). In this context, theme park guests can create social media posts to shape the image of a park by sharing their experiences virtually, often referred to as user-generated content creation (Krumm et al., 2008). This online creation of content reflects the theme park experience and subsequently could influence the behavioral intentions of whether the guest will visit or revisit the park (Wang et al., 2022). Thus, it is essential to understand how guests post about the park, sharing their own experiences through social media platforms.

Research exploring social media has noted that overall social media use has provided a sense of gratification (Chen, 2011; Dolan et al., 2016; Johnson & Yang, 2009; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010), which emphasizes the importance of understanding the use of social media within a theme park experience. Specifically, understanding what guests post to social media within the theme park setting provides information on what is being documented and presented online (i.e., the foci of the photos), the sentiment of the position (i.e., positive, negative, neutral), and where the postings are spatially deriving from (e.g., which themed land) which has implications for the understanding of guest behavior, marketing, and park operations. Further, with the rise of *social media influencers*, there is an increasing need to understand the range of posting motivations and gratifications in theme park settings. This understanding has practical implications for

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establishing more efficient influencer partnerships, providing ways to create content that meets influencers' desires to assist the park and assist the guests' future trips.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The behavior of posting on social media platforms can be understood through the uses and gratifications theory (UGT). UGT may help explain how a medium[1] contributes to a human's desired gratifications (Katz et al., 1973ab) and psychological needs (Alrajehi, 2016; Katz et al., 1973ab). This theory is appropriate for studying this phenomenon because it is used from a behavioral science perspective (Katz, 1959) and considers *how people use media* rather than *how media impacts users*. Historically, UGT has been approached as a guiding theory to describe how individuals' needs are satisfied through media use (Katz et al., 1973ab; Hossain et al., 2019). This theory has been utilized across communication literature (e.g., Alrajehi, 2016; Chen, 2011; Dolan et al., 2016; Hossain et al., 2019), technology (e.g., Albarran et al., 2007; Joo & Sang, 2013; Lin et al., 2017), and consumer behavior (e.g., Luo, 2013; Mejía-Trejo, 2021; Sharma & Crossler, 2014.; Silaban et al., 2022). Within the theme park context, this research investigates what guests contribute to social media and the gratifications associated with posting behavior.

UGT has been used in research to suggest that the media provides gratifications through the modes of strengthening, weakening, and escape for the user (Katz et al., 1973b). For example, gratifications could include the ability of users to strengthen credibility, weaken contact, or escape society. Early UGT research listed these gratifications in relation to use of television, radio, newspapers, and magazines. However, in the recent decade, connectivity, cheaper equipment, and expanded opportunities to become popular and generate profit (i.e., "go

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[1] Medium: An instrument of transporting information or shaping reality (Miconi & Marcello, 2019)

viral") have potentially allowed users to find new gratification within media, and specifically social media, through the act of creating. In the current media landscape, individuals do not passively watch or read media; they can now act as creators and create content ranging from photos, videos, podcasts, voice notes, text, images, gifs, Snapchats, notes, blogs, and more. Furthermore, there is a need to better understand the motivations and gratifications of social media influencers' content creation within a theme park context, as their created content directly impacts the image of the theme parks and the visit intention of future guests encountering the content online (Wang et al., 2022). In this regard, a social media influencer is defined as an online individual who can capture the attention (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019) and maintain a trustworthy connection with the audience (Jin et al., 2019), shaping audience perception about brands (Freberg et. al., 2011).

Social media use within theme parks is directly connected to both the physical guest experience and the overall social media image of the park. Thus, the importance of understanding the theme park experience shared online by typical guests and influencers drives the purpose of this study. The following sections will outline key definitions and concepts informing this study and then present the purpose statement and research statements guiding the research.

1.3. Social Media as Leisure

Within the theme park context, guests may use social media as a form of leisure in between the theme park activities, providing a state of mind through digital means that they have not achieved within the theme park. Social media use also provides a communication channel for creating a more positive depiction of the tourism experience, potentially embellishing the reality of the tourist destination (Sharaievska & Mirehie, 2023). In this regard, as a consequence of the

smartphone, social media engagement has not only become commonplace in everyday life, but central to the travel behaviors such as planning, decision-making, and the memorializing of a trip (Kiráľová & Pavlíčeka, 2015; Leung et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2019; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Sharaievska & Mirehie, 2023; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). However, to understand social media use within a theme park, it is essential to consider how social media can be considered a form of leisure outside of the physical theme park experiences to which the user may feel obligated to experience. To understand social media as leisure, concepts of leisure should be defined. Stebbins (2012) defined leisure as an unforced activity accomplished within a specific context. The leisure activity utilizes the resources or abilities of the individual (Olecká et al., 2022), which include the resources of technology, a data plan or WIFI, and the ability of technology knowledge. Leisure activities could bring pleasure and enjoyment in anticipation and provide recreation, personal growth, or service (Kaplan, 1975). In addition, some realms of leisure are illegal or could cause harm (Smith & Raymen, 2018), which can still happen with social media use. Individuals may reach a leisurely state of mind through the use of resources and abilities, in addition to finding pleasure in anticipation, recreational, or personal growth (Nimrod & Adoni, 2012), which could be found in social media use. In addition, social media can meet the qualities of Csikszentmihalyi's (2014) concept of flow, where users can experience deep engagement, creating a sense of immersion in the activity (Olecká et al., 2022).

Using social media can be a leisure activity, providing personal fulfillment without the barriers of time and location. Additionally, leisure can be defined as freely chosen activities during free time, outside of obligated duties (Amoako-Tuffour & Martínez-Espiñeira, 2012; Dalen & Seippel, 2021). Free time is defined as alternation, experience, liberation, and self-development away from mandatory tasks (Dridea & Sztruten, 2010; Tokarski & Zarotis, 2020).

However, free time is challenging to conceptualize within leisure. Individuals can use their free time to enter a state of mind through gardening, or they do not enter the mindset because the activity is mandatory (Dridea & Sztruten, 2010). Furthermore, social media use provides the concept of E-leisure to the guests, which eliminates the barriers of geographical, time, and physical space constraints (Nimrod & Adoni, 2012). The inclusion of leisure within one's life could provide satisfaction and fulfillment, allowing an alternation to everyday activities and obligations (Olecká et al., 2022). Within the theme park context, guests may use social media in a way to find satisfaction and fulfillment (Olecká et al., 2022), chosen separately from the obligated duties they are experiencing during the theme park visit. For example, a teenager may attend the theme park with their family, feeling obligated to participate in the trip. Social media use between rides, shows, and discussions with others provide a sense of leisure through self-fulfillment. In another example, an influencer may find fulfillment through livestreaming their experience within the park, using social media as a state of leisure. In addition, there is potentially a sense of obligation to social media use experienced by influencers as they may try to generate revenue, moving the activity towards becoming a job and obligation.

While social media can provide leisure to the theme park guests between the obligated duties, risks are also associated with leisure (Chéron & Ritchie, 1982), which the users inherit. Risks include cyberbullying (Reid & Weigle, 2014)), cyberstalking, identity theft, social information overload (Goh et al., 2016), sexting, harassment, access to communities promoting self-harm or eating disorders (Reid & Weigle, 2014) thoughts of social comparison (Appel et al., 2016; Chou & Edge, 2012; Manago et al., 2008) and danger to one's own privacy and safety (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). While guests are physically in the theme park, E-leisure participants are susceptible to the risks of social media use.

1.4 Theme Parks

It is essential to identify what separates a theme park from other locations that have similar elements of rides, attractions, and shows (i.e., amusement parks). Theme parks and amusement parks are conceptually different, as they provide different experiences for the guests. From the guest's perspective, theme parks are locations intertwined with a story, with the potential of fulfilling pleasure or arousal through the variety of experiences available (e.g., food, thrill rides, characters) (Bigné et al., 2005). For example, Disney's California Adventure at Disneyland has multiple themed areas for guests to visit, such as Pixar Pier, Avengers Campus, and San Fransokyo. The themed area, Avengers Campus, offers an intertwined story of joining and assisting Marvel's Avengers in various rides, shows, and meet and greets, providing various experiences for guests. In addition, guests can visit specialized food locations that are based on Marvel Avengers movies. The thematic story and potential of pleasure or arousal fulfillment exist, separating it from an amusement park.

Both theme and amusement parks can provide an opportunity for hybrid consumption, which entails multiple ways of consuming the experience through intertwining park options (food, entertainment, hotels, etc.; Bryman, 2004). However, according to Liang and Li (2021), a core difference between theme parks and amusement parks is how they create a thematic identity. Theme parks provide a themed experience, themed rides, a themed environment, and an intertwining story, as mentioned previously. The theme park theme is not limited to cartoons or movies but could also include themes of the ocean or space. Amusement parks do not provide a thematic identity outside of individual rides. The themes inside rides at amusement parks are not as themed as they would be within a theme park due to the smaller size of the ride, smaller creative teams, and budget constraints (Liang & Li, 2021).

Another significant difference between theme parks and amusement parks is the existence of performative labor (Liang & Li, 2021). Theme parks provide performative labor through themed costumes and, at times, through vernacular means. Amusement parks do not provide this performative labor. Theme parks may include multiple subareas or themed areas, such as Avengers Campus or Toy Story Land, while amusement parks categorize their areas based on offerings (e.g., food, thrill rides, or shows). For example, amusement parks may have a section dedicated to thrill rides, such as the Cyclone, Tilt-o-Whirl, and Cyclops. In comparison, Hollywood Studios has a themed area, Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge, which is themed to look like it belongs in the Star Wars Universe. Furthermore, the rides within Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge include Smugglers Run and Rise of the Resistance, which are thrill rides intertwined with the Star Wars stories.

In addition, theme parks focus on crafting thematic elements dedicated to themed areas, while amusement parks do not provide such themed areas (Liang & Li, 2021). The themed area includes defined architecture, costumes, characters, and language that help create the entire experience. Theme parks provide closed spaces that intertwine entertainment and indulgent experiences around core thematic identities (e.g., Tomorrowland, Fantasyland). This ability separates a theme park from an amusement park. This thematic identity provides an oasis, a land, operates as a machine, performs a show, and contributes towards a brand (Lukas, 2008). Overall, the main difference between the amusement park and the theme park is the ongoing narrative of the theme compared to the individual facets that provide singular moments of engagement.

Theming provides a unique experience for the guests, a place where they cannot find anywhere else (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), making them memorable (Gilmore & Pine, 2002). This is important because theming differentiates a park from other competitors and creates attractiveness

to potential guests (Åstrøm, 2019). Theming increases sales by adding value, resulting in higher prices; it also attracts and retains visitors to the experience by connecting the guest with the theme and brand (Åstrøm, 2019; Kim, 2012). In this regard, the implementation of a theme includes the use of narrative storytelling with the land and experiences (Baker, 2023), providing four stages of immersion for guests as they experience the park: spatial-temporal immersion, sensory immersion, conceptual-imaginative immersion, and emotional immersion (Fu et al., 2023). Theming can immerse guests in a world they are familiar with, which cannot be done outside of a theme park (Åstrøm, 2019). For example, a Star Wars theme may give Star Wars fans a world where they know characters, ships, and other designed concepts. The theme is essential as theme parks provide moments of delight, relaxation, self-fulfillment, and gratification (Cabanas, 2020; Ma et al., 2013, 2017; Slåtten et al., 2009, 2011).

Understanding the social media activity of typical guests and influencers may provide an understanding of how the thematic narrative (Baker, 2023) or the unique themed experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) is shared online, which has implications for cohesive brand image and awareness. The shared content is discovered by the social media followers, which establishes the perception of whether the guest had a satisfactory or unsatisfactory experience at the theme park (Park et al., 2020), which leads to the follower's own visit intention (Wang et al., 2022).

1.5 Problem Statement and Purpose Statement

Understanding how theme parks are presented on social media is important because social media posting contributes to visit intention (Wang et al., 2022). In addition, social media can influence the theme park image, which contributes to the perceived value, satisfaction, and brand-switching behavior (Cheng et al., 2016). These practical concerns warrant an investigation of social media behavior within the theme park setting. As such, this dissertation explores a new

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perspective on the Uses and Gratifications theory to include new modes of media gratification. In addition, the research investigates social media-created content derived from guests at Walt Disney World to consider their topical focus in posts, location represented in posts, and sentiment of postings. Lastly, this research seeks to understand the gratifications and motivations of influencers' social media content creation within a theme park context. This full dissertation approaches this research through a multi-method investigation (Hammond, 2005; Seawright, 2016), where the first study (article 1) approaches a conceptual aspect of the work (i.e., extension of UGT), the second study (article 2) employs a content analysis of public social media data that is analyzed through descriptive statistics to identify how typical guests post, and the third study (article 3) utilizes a qualitative approach with thematic analyze them park influencers' motivations for posting. The following sections will address each study in more detail.

1.5.1 Article 1

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) studies how media meets individual psychological gratifications (Alrajehi, 2016; Katz, 1959; Katz et al., 1973ab). UGT has been utilized across various knowledge domains including communication (Katz & Foulkes, 1962; Klapper, 1963; Palmgreen et al., 1985), social media (Alrajehi, 2016; Chen, 2011; Hossain et al., 2019), and consumer behavior (Luo, 2013; Mejía-Trejo, 2021; Sharma & Crossler, 2014.; Silaban et al., 2022). Within the previous research of UGT, findings include multiple definitions of similar gratifications (Katz, 1959; Katz et al., 1973b; Katz & Foulkes, 1962), creating confusion and complicated procedures of gratification identification. Furthermore, upon the development of UGT in the 1940s and 50s, media was created by only a select few based on exclusive access to equipment, job position, and the access to publish information. For example, media was based on who had a radio show or wrote in newspapers, which served as some of the

early UGT studies to identify preferences of media (Lazarsfeld, 1940; Schramm, 1949). Utilizing the Katz et al. (1973b) *Classification of Media-Related Needs*, and the associated factors of mode, connection, and referent, this article seeks to add a fourth mode of "create," incorporating the new social landscape accounting for users' ability to be an active participant of creating content rather than only viewing content.

Through a systematic literature review utilizing the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach (Crowther et al., 2010; Moher et al., 2009), the first article analyzed previous UGT literature, specifically around Katz et al. (1973b) *Classifications of Media Related Needs*. The findings of this article support the modification to account for these new gratifications that did not exist during the establishment of UGT. The purpose of this paper is to provide a new perspective on understanding gratifications within the social media context, accounting for the ability for everyone to create and post media on social platforms. By modifying the existing classification of media-related needs (Katz et al., 1973b), this paper identifies gratifications that could be met through an additional mode of create.

The research identified articles that mentioned a selection of keywords around UGT and gratifications on social media. A total of 94 articles were selected to address the research purpose. Out of the chosen articles, 71 gratifications were identified, which were grouped with similar gratification, forming 15 categories. Two categories of gratifications were identified. Gratifications that are driven by needs for oneself, including the need for presentation, attraction, and branding, in addition to the gratifications that describe the act of engaging in information discourse include gratifications that could include a mode of create. The modification of the classification of media-related needs provides a new perspective where users could create

information for the world or create an emotional experience for their friends, fulfilling a psychological gratification.

This research provides theoretical implications reflective of the rise of influencers and content creators within social media. This research also expands the current theory by taking an outdated classification with 84 gratifications and adding a mode of creation, expanding the classification to 112 psychological gratifications.

1.5.2 Article 2

Guests within the theme park context use social media to share their experiences on social media, which provides social and emotional rewards (Goh et al., 2009). The content shared online impacts the perspective of the theme park experience (Park et al., 2020) and impacts visit intention (Wang et al., 2022). Furthermore, content creation is increasing as more users seek to create content for a living (The Creator Economy 2023 Report, 2023). With the popularity of theme parks growing (Architecture, Engineering, Construction, Operations, and Management [AECOM] & Themed Entertainment Association [TEA], 2023), social media content creation increasing (The Creator Economy 2023 Report, 2023), and more acknowledgment that shared content affects the park experience and visit intention (Park et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022), it is important to understand the content shared within theme parks.

This study focuses on the theme park context of Walt Disney World (WDW) in Orlando, Florida, USA. The property has four theme parks including Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Hollywood Studios, and Disney's Animal Kingdom (Walt Disney World, 2024). This context was chosen as it represents four out of the seven top-attended U.S. theme parks within 2019 - 2022 (Architecture, Engineering, Construction, Operations, and Management [AECOM] & Themed

Entertainment Association [TEA], 2023) (See Table 1.1). The 2022 attendance total of the

selected theme parks is estimated at 47,060,000 visits.

Park	% Increase 2021-2022	2022	2021	2020	2019
Magic Kingdom (Orlando, Florida, U.S.)	35%	17,133,000	12,691,000	6,941,000	20,963,000
Disneyland (Anaheim, CA, U.S.)	97%	16,881,000	8,573,000	3,674,000	18,666,000
Disney's Animal Kingdom (Orlando, FL, U.S.)	25%	9,027,000	7,194,000	4,166,000	13,888,000
Epcot (Orlando, FL, U.S.)	29%	10,000,000	7,752,000	4,044,000	12,444,000
Disney's Hollywood Studios (Orlando, FL, U.S.)	27%	10,900,000	8,589,000	3,675,000	11,483,000
Universal Studios Orlando (Orlando, FL, U.S.)	20%	10,750,000	8,987,000	4,096,000	10,922,000

Islands of Adventure Orlando (Orlando, FL, U.S.)	21%	11,025,000	9,077,000	4,005,000	10,375,000
Disney California Adventure Park At Disneyland Resort, (Anaheim, CA, U.S.)	81%	9,000,000	4,977,000	1,919,000	9,861,000
Universal Studios Hollywood (Universal City, CA, U.S.)	53%	8,400,000	5,505,000	1,299,000	9,147,000
SeaWorld Orlando (Orlando, FL, U.S.)	46%	4,454,000	3,051,000	1,598,000	4,649,000
Top Total		103,116,000	63,705,000	35,417,000	122,398,000

Table. 1.1 *Theme Park Attendance 2019-2022 Source: https ://www.teaconnect.org/tea-theme--museum-index.html*

This study explored the four theme parks within Walt Disney World. Findings provide in-depth knowledge about the guests' created posts and gratifications associated with social media use. The research questions for this study are as follows:

RQ 1: What are the main topics focused on in guests' Instagram contributions/posts (including text, hashtags, photos, captions, reels, and/or videos) within Magic Kingdom, Disney's Animal Kingdom, Epcot, and Hollywood Studios of Walt Disney World parks?

RQ 2: How do guests' Instagram contributions/posts (including text, hashtags, photos, captions, reels, and/or videos) among Walt Disney World guests, differ in terms of main topics across the themed lands of Walt Disney World?

RQ 3: How does sentiment differ in Instagram contributions/posts on Instagram across main topics and themed lands within Walt Disney World parks (Disney's Animal Kingdom, Hollywood Studios, Epcot, Magic Kingdom)?

This article employed a quantitative content analysis (Nimrod, 2010) to understand the topical focus, location, and sentiment of social media posts. Using Sprinklr to gather Instagram posts (Clemson University Social Media Listening Center, 2023) that included targeted keywords, this research analyzed 2,072 posts, representing a .12% sample, which included .01% from every month in 2023. Instagram was the social media platform focused on in this study as it meets the three concepts of social media as defined by Boyd and Ellison (2007), including the ability to create a profile within a bounded system, that profiles can be public or private and can connect with other accounts on the platform, and users can view the connections they make by themselves based on mutual followings, interests, or engagements. Further, this platform offered both textual and visual content that was analyzed for the purposes of this research.

Findings from this research identified that guests shared more about attraction experiences, character meets, and entertainment. The posting behavior identified the most common main topic within each themed land across the four parks of Walt Disney World. Entertainment was more popular on Main Street U.S.A. and Magic Kingdom Hub, while character meets were found at Fantasyland, Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge, and The American Adventure. Analysis of the sentiment identified that the majority of the posts were positive.

The variety of parks within the Walt Disney World property provides opportunities for transferability to other theme parks or experiences. For example, a cultural park such as Epcot provides implications for other cultural parks. Zoos and animal-based parks could consider the implications of Disney's Animal Kingdom. Studio and film-based parks such as Universal Studios or Warner Bros. Movie World could study findings from Hollywood Studios. The benefits of this research would include managerial implications of consumer insights, park operations, and marketing. Marketing can develop strategic marketing materials based on the findings. Operations can identify the most common main topics in the themed lands to ensure the commonly posted park activities in those specific areas are functioning correctly. Consumer insights can gather a deeper understanding of the guests' digital behavior, as it directly impacts the park visit intention (Wang et al., 2022).

1.5.3 Article 3

The number of influencers has increased over the past decade, which provides new opportunities for brand partnerships and marketing channels for product promotion or market penetration (Bansah et al., 2024; Drenik, 2023; Kim & Kim, 2022; Peng, 2023; Shee, 2023). Influencers are third-party individuals who provide advice on specific topics (Masuda et al., 2022; Peng, 2023), which leads to shaping audience attitudes (Freberg et al., 2011). They can obtain trust, network ties, and shared vision with their followers (Cho, 2014; Jun et al., 2017; Son et al., 2016), capturing and maintaining the attention of their audience (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019). Influencers are also measured by the audience size, status, influence, practices, and market values (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019). Influencer content serves as a mechanism for distributing information in a brand's multi-touch attribution models measuring consumer purchases within a consumer journey (Geyik et al., 2014; Silva & Meyer, 2023; Zhang et al., 2014). As a result of

their influence (power) on purchasing and buying habits, behavioral norms, or actions of others (Freberg et al., 2011; Kim & Kim, 2022; Martineau, 2019; Vrontis et al., 2021), understanding the motivations and gratifications of influencers regarding their content creation is crucial. In this research, the influencers preferred to be referred to as content creators, which will be reflected throughout the article. The research questions are as follows:

RQ 1: How do the content creators identify themselves regarding their content generation and posting within the context of the theme parks**?**

RQ 2: What are the content creators' motivations for content generation and posting in the context of theme parks?

RQ 3: What gratifications do content creators receive from content generation and posting in the context of theme parks?

Influencers/content creators in this study were identified as users who consistently post about the parks and will be measured according to Morteo's (2018) characteristics of influencers. This proposes that influencers should have a minimum follower count between 500 and 10,000 with a 25%—50% engagement rate to be classified as micro-influencers. In addition, macro-influencers had 10,000 – 1 million followers with a 5%—25% engagement rate. Through in-depth interviews with three macro-influencers and two micro-influencers, gratifications and motivations of content creation were identified.

This research proposes a new understanding of influencer behavior based on social media content creation and associated gratifications. This research addresses a gap in the literature by bridging theme park guest behavior (Birenboim et al., 2013; Dalrymple et al., 2020; Fotiadis, 2016; Huang et al., 2020; Ji et al., 2021), theme park guests' social media activity (Park et al.,

2020; Wang et al., 2022), and UGT within social media (Al-Jabri et al., 2015; Ellison et al., 2007; Ozanne et al., 2017; Shao & Kwon, 2019).

Findings from this research identified that content creators are artistic individuals that hold a deep childhood connection to the parks. They seek to be authentic and credible in their created content as they strategize on what content would their unique audience appreciate, generating the most engagement. The content creators seek to create content about new exciting experiences across the park. They are proud of their work as creating content provides self-fulfillment, providing gratifications of assisting the park and assisting the guests' future trips. Implications include opportunities to establish more strategic influencer partnerships through providing knowledge and training materials. Marketing strategies with content creators should focus on creating more informational content through influencer channels and increase the frequency of facilitated influencer-exclusive events. Content creators of all types, follower counts, and engagement rates should be included as they reach unique audiences.

1.6 Research Paradigm

The post-positivism paradigm fits best with this research as it seeks to investigate phenomena from specific groups and "accepts that reality can never be fully understood; but at best, only approximated" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 32). As Mack (2010) identified, there are countless perspectives and interpretations of life, and research contributes to providing a better understanding of the participants' reality (Ernest, 1994). To identify the shared knowledge of theme park guests, this research is framed with the ontological constructivist approach, meaning that individuals and groups create meaning (Cupchik, 2001; Guba & Lincoln, 2005), including the content creator within this research. The park guests share their reality and meaning as they experience and post on social media. A subjectivist interpretation is also required for this

research, which includes applying the researcher's knowledge and understanding of the theme park culture, layout, and consumer behavior. The subjective interpretation approach assisted with formulating findings from the participants (Guba, 1990).

Approaching this research with a post-positivism worldview emphasizes providing research that "leads to prediction and control of phenomena" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). By analyzing the experiences guests share within the theme park, we can understand the portrayal of the park experience that users post on social media. The post-positivism paradigm provided an understanding of guests and influencers within the multiple themed areas. Through utilizing in-depth interviews with influencers, the research discovered the meaning and realities of participants, providing discoveries that contribute to truth (Clark, 1998). This approach provided new opportunities to understand the gratifications of users through their activity on social media.

1.7 Reflexivity Statement

The activity of attending theme parks has a deep nostalgia that sparks memories made with my parents, my brother, my wife, and my kids. My first trip to Walt Disney World was when I was a child. We would visit Walt Disney World, Universal Studios, and other theme parks during our summer vacation. Since then, I have honeymooned there, ran Disney races, attended private parties, watched the Disney Christmas special filming, and befriended countless Cast Members at Walt Disney World. I also work at the company; however, this research is separate from my career there. The data gathered, time spent on this research, methodologies, literature, and research are done through my connection with Clemson University and the Social Media Listening Center. This research does not represent or reflect the company. Furthermore, the data is all public data that is shared online and gathered through my dissertation process at Clemson University.

My personal park visit count is over 50 visits to Disney parks. We all enjoy the roller coasters, the food options, and the resort activities. As a child, I always dreamed of becoming an Imagineer in the creative department of The Walt Disney Company. This lifelong love of the parks sparked my interest in using Walt Disney World as the site for this research.

Regarding my use of social media, I have been involved with digital platforms since 2004. I have been an early adopter of social media platforms and digital technologies. I created my first social media profile on Purevolume and Xanga, which I used to post my favorite music. Since then, I have moved to Myspace, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Vine, LinkedIn, and, most recently, TikTok. I find joy in the ability to connect with others in unique communities. Apart from my interaction with social media, I have also taught social media analytics and led the Social Media Listening Center at Clemson University. I have had the opportunity to share my vision of social media, as well as marketing strategies and marketing research at various academic and industry conferences. My optimistic view and historical involvement in social media have been foundational to my career.

I am very active within the Twitter community that discusses Disney theme parks. I would classify myself as a member of the #DisTwitter community, which is the name of the Twitter users who talk about Disney parks online. With my engagement, there have been a few times I have physically spent time with people I know through social media, including typical guests and influencers. These previous interactions have created a positive perception regarding certain influencers I would consider friends. None of these influencers were used in this research.

With everything considered, ranging from my memories of Walt Disney World to my experience with social media, I am intentional about retaining a critical view. To do so, I reviewed the results of the main topics and final analysis with peers, established inter-coder

reliability, and shared my codebook creation steps to mitigate bias (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). I also addressed bias by implementing member-checking (Doyle, 2007; Merriam, 1998) and reviewed results and findings with peers (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). In addition, I remained transparent about my research process and my thoughts about the analysis and findings, ensuring trustworthy research (Galdas, 2017).

1.8 Operational Definitions

To further understand the concepts mentioned in this research, the terms below are identified and defined to provide foundational knowledge to the readers.

Influencer: This individual uses social media in a way to contribute photos, text, or videos that can impact buying habits, behavioral norms, or other actions of others (Freberg et al., 2011; Kim & Kim, 2022; Martineau, 2019; Vrontis et al., 2021). Influencers within this study have social media accounts focused on creating and disseminating theme park content. Their posting is frequent which depends on their own use of social media. Influencer posting increases followers and provides higher engagement rates compared to a general social media user who is not an influencer. According to Morteo (2018), engagement rates for influencers range from 2% to 50% of their followers engaging with posts. The metrics of followers and engagement rates work together to identify followers. For example, to be classified as a micro-influencer, the account requires a minimum of 500 followers and a 25% engagement rate at minimum. For simplification, they have dedicated social media accounts that frequently share theme park content with large amounts of followers.

Typical guest: This guest visits the park but does not focus all their social content around theme parks. Guests may post about their park experience, but posting is infrequent between their posts

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about their non-theme park lives. They range in followers, engagement rates, and demographics but are classified under the typical guest's name as they do not have theme park-focused accounts.

CHAPTER 2

A PURSUIT OF USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY EXPANSION: A RECLASSIFICATION OF THE MEDIA-RELATED NEEDS WITHIN A SOCIAL MEDIA CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) has been utilized across literature of communication (Katz & Foulkes, 1962; Klapper, 1963; Palmgreen et al., 1985), technology (Albarran et al., 2007; Joo & Sang, 2013; Lin et al., 2017), social media (Alrajehi, 2016; Chen, 2011; Hossain et al., 2019), and consumer behavior (Luo, 2013; Mejía-Trejo, 2021; Sharma & Crossler, 2014.; Silaban et al., 2022) to provide overall understanding of media use (Katz, 1959; Rubin, 2002). However, researchers have continued to apply UGT to research without addressing contextual changes that should be reflected within the theory. New media platforms, such as social media, provide new gratifications sought by users of social media.

With the rise of social media, individuals are not only passive consumers of online information, they are also creators of the content or otherwise active participants in the distribution and sharing of created media online (Lee et al., 2012). Numerous studies have noted that social media can be used by companies for customer engagement (see Brodie et al., 2013; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021), with brands reaching upwards of $930 billion spent on social media advertising since 2017 (MacRae, 2024). However, how content creation can influence the creators themselves is less understood (The Creator Economy in 3D | Deloitte US, 2024).

Creating content is now integrated into jobs as companies expect employees to become influencers in their specialized fields (Cohen, 2023). Creating social media content such as

photos and videos is easier than ever due to eliminated barriers, including cost and connectivity. The relationship between humans and media has changed with a digital age that allows everyone to share content, providing new opportunities for gratification. Previous UGT research investigated what people obtain from the use of media (Alrajehi, 2016; Blight et al., 2017; Chen, 2011; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008) rather than seeing the process of creating content as a possible gratification in itself, similar to the process of creating art, experience, or stylistic expression. The public is no longer just a digester of media but rather a creator of media for others to digest, providing a new mode of gratification that has not been formally identified in previous research.

With the ability to create content online, UGT should be evaluated to discover what gratifications are sought and accomplished through creation. Furthermore, the efforts of Katz et al. (1973b) Classification of Media-Related Needs should be modified to consider the ability to "create" within the modes of gratifications in this theory. UGT research will be expanded in terms of the gratifications offered by including this new mode in the classification. This research aims to provide a new perspective on understanding gratifications within the social media context, accounting for the ability to create and expand the classification of media-related needs, which would provide new psychological gratifications within Katz et al.'s (1973b) original work.

In the following sections, the literature review will consider the past use of UGT theory, specifically the contributions of Katz's Classification of Media-Related Needs. The paper will identify previous gratifications used across UGT and social media literature to provide a systematic literature review. A modified classification of media-related needs (Katz et al., 1973b) is essential to understanding the new media platforms and the gratifications found in creating media. Previously, a user may create a podcast to share online. However, UGT research

would have researched why participants would listen to the podcast rather than understanding the podcast creation as a mode of gratification. A photographer may take a photo and share their photo on Instagram. They may share it online to strengthen their credibility as a photographer, but they may also post it to create an emotional experience for others. The findings of this article support the modification to account for these new gratifications that did not exist during the establishment of UGT. Additionally, this article expands UGT by analyzing the gratifications derived from content creation, reflecting current media usage trends.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) has been applied as a guiding theory to understand how internal needs are gratified through media use (Katz et al., 1973ab; Hossain et al., 2019). This theory has been utilized across the literature on communication (Alrajehi, 2016; Chen, 2011; Dolan et al., 2016; Hossain et al., 2019), technology (Albarran et al., 2007; Joo & Sang, 2013; Lin et al., 2017), and consumer behavior (Luo, 2013; Mejía-Trejo, 2021; Sharma & Crossler, 2014.; Silaban et al., 2022). In addition, UGT has been applied to various studies on social media (Ellison et al., 2007; Hossain et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2016; Ozanne et al., 2017; Shao & Kwon, 2019; Steinfield et al., 2008; Valenzuela et al., 2009). It is important to clarify that while UGT provides an understanding of media-related needs, it is not the study of the media itself. UGT is the study of human needs and gratifications concerning the individual's use of media platforms (newspapers, cinema, radio, etc.), otherwise known as a medium (Katz et al., 1973a). Furthermore, this theory approaches media by acknowledging the different gratifications mediums can provide. Katz & Foulkes (1962) compare media gratification flexibility to alcohol, as people may use the substance to withdraw or come closer to society, similarly to how users

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may use media to withdraw, come together, or for other gratifications. In the social media realm, the use of the medium includes the ability to escape, withdraw, and even create media through the social media platform. The psychological gratifications met using specific media remain dependent on who uses the medium. This theory emphasizes the human perspective and how mediums create their own desired gratifications, according to the originator of UGT (Katz, 1959; Katz et al., 1973b).

Uses and gratifications research started in the 1940s as researchers attempted to understand individual media use and associated psychological gratifications sought by users, though the theory was not firmly established until 1959. During that time, Katz (1959) introduced UGT to simplify and formalize the study of media use. Early UGT research only explored how individuals use media and did not explore the psychological or sociological gratifications met by the use of media (McQuail, 1994; Ruggiero, 2000). Previous research included Lazardsfeld's (1940) work to discover media preferences of choosing between the two popular mediums, newspaper reading or radio listening (Lazarsfeld, 1940). Along with other findings, Lazarsfeld (1940) found that radio listening was a social activity, while reading allows individuals to digest and dwell on the information. Schramm (1949) researched why people read certain news stories. The findings supported the idea that individuals choose stories about someone they know or a situation they could imagine being affected by. However, this research did not investigate the psychological gratifications, only the reasons why people would use certain media over other media.

Katz stated that the mass communication research prior to 1959 had only focused on persuasion, which Katz referred to this research as the study of "campaigns" (1959). Prior literature was focused on how media swayed attitudes and opinions (Katz, 1959). Katz

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encompassed prior communication studies as ways "to sell soap, to reduce prejudice, to induce the enemy to surrender" (Katz, 1959, p.1), which the author stated had temporary effects as findings were short-term, not discovering the psychological gratifications of the individual. Katz (1959) desired to see a social science perspective, moving the focus of the research away from the study of media consumption and towards a more behavioral science perspective.

To describe the vision of the research in more detail, Katz (1959) stated,

> "The direction I have in mind has been variously called the functional approach to the media, or the 'uses and gratifications' approach. It is the program that asks the question, not 'What do media do to people?' but 'What do people do with the media?'" (p. 4).

UGT was developed even more, including internet and computer-mediated communication starting in 1994 (December, 1996; Kuehn, 1994; Morris & Ogan, 1996; Ruggiero, 2000). As computer-mediated communication transformed into various internet platforms, like those of social media, researchers started studying psychological gratifications sought from social media use (Wenzhen Xu et al., 2018) and the gratifications received from each platform (i.e., Instagram, Facebook, X). Boyd and Ellison (2007) shared that social media is defined by the ability to create a profile within a bounded system, connect and bond with other users. Users can view the connections they make by themselves and others. This includes commonly known social media platforms like Instagram, X formerly known as Twitter, and Facebook. Previous UGT research includes Kircaburun et al. (2020), who indicated that Instagram provides self-expression and entertainment gratifications, while Facebook provides informational gratifications (Kircaburun et al., 2020). Whiting and Williams (2013) applied the Uses and Gratifications Theory to group reasons for using social networking platforms into the following categories: social interaction, information seeking, to pass time, entertainment,

relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing, and surveillance/knowledge about others. The gratification from specific platform use could depend on the relationship dynamics within an online community (Holton et al., 2014), the types of content on the platform (Oh & Syn, 2015), or which audience the user is interested in reaching (Jin et al., 2017). The platform's structure has been found to influence the gratifications sought (Holton et al., 2014). For instance, symmetrical platforms are established by mutual following of each other (e.g., Facebook). In contrast, asymmetrical platforms do not rely on mutual following and are based on multiple followers viewing the content of the posting user (e.g., Instagram, Pinterest, X formerly known as Twitter). Based on the design, symmetrical platforms facilitate communication, while asymmetrical platforms provide more information-seeking and information-sharing gratifications (Aubrey & Rill, 2013; Kim et al., 2016). Furthermore, the demographics and personality of the user influence the gratifications sought from social media. At the same time, younger adults may use Facebook for social connections (Aubrey & Rill, 2013) and X, formerly known as Twitter, for status management and entertainment (Pentina et al., 2016). Older users may find social support, companionship, and stress relief through social media use (Leist, 2013). If a platform facilitates user connection between individuals advantageously compared to other platforms, users may be compelled to adopt that platform more than the other social media outlets (Ferris & Hollenbaugh, 2018).

The emphasis of UGT is placed on the psychological needs of the individual using the medium (Alrajehi, 2016; Katz, 1959; Katz et al., 1973ab), which can vary from person to person. Past research has identified gratifications for social media use including communication with others, social interaction, virtual communities, socializing, interaction, companionship, interactivity, and network expansion (Aldamen, 2023; Alajmi et al., 2016; Aubrey & Rill, 2013;

Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Chimenti et al., 2022; Colás et al., 2013; Dayong Zhang et al., 2018; Ferris & Hollenbaugh, 2018; Gezgin & Sen, 2012; Holton et al., 2014; Hsu et al., 2015; Jarman et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2017; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Oh & Syn, 2015; Park & Lee, 2014; Pentina et al., 2016; Quinn, 2016; Rahman, 2022; Rathnayake & Winter, 2018; Riaz et al., 2016; Rubenking & Rister, 2016; Salo et al., 2013; Saridakis et al., 2016; Song et al., 2019; Wenzhen Xu et al., 2018 ; Willis & Ferrucci, 2017). In addition, media can provide entertainment, enjoyment, and sports fanship (Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Cui Di & Huang Guangsheng, 2018; Gezgin & Sen, 2012; Holton et al., 2014; Hsu et al., 2015; Jin et al., 2017; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Mahmood et al., 2018; Oh & Syn, 2015; Park & Lee, 2014; Pentina et al., 2016; Rahman, 2022; Rubenking & Rister, 2016; Saridakis et al., 2016; Song et al., 2019; Willis & Ferrucci, 2017; Yu-Hsun Lin, 2022; Yoon et al., 2014).

Media can also provide the psychological gratifications of information seeking, learning, knowledge, and education (Alajmi et al., 2016; Aldamen, 2023; Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Chimenti et al., 2022; Coduto & Anderson, 2021; Hsu et al., 2015; Holton et al., 2014; Jin et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2016; Oh & Syn, 2015; Pentina et al., 2016; Riaz et al., 2016; Rubenking & Rister, 2016; Saridakis et al., 2016; Song et al., 2019; Willis & Ferrucci, 2017; Yoon et al., 2014). Gratifications also include professional development, work promotion, professional use, work efficiency, commercial efforts (Aldamen, 2023; Holton et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2016; Pentina et al., 2016; Quinn, 2016), self-documentation, status, impression maintenance, self-presentation, reputation, self-expression, social attraction, identity, personal branding, exhibitionism, modality, realism, self-status, appearance feedback, self-disclosure, and peer approval (Aubrey & Rill, 2013; Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Chimenti et al., 2022; Cui Di & Huang, 2018; Dayong Zhang et al., 2018 ; Ferris & Hollenbaugh, 2018; Hsu et al., 2015; Huang et al.,

2018; Jarman et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2017 ; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Liao et al., 2021 ; Mahmood et al., 2018; Oh & Syn, 2015 Park & Lee, 2014; Pentina et al., 2016; Rahman, 2022; Rathnayake & Winter, 2018; Riaz et al., 2016; Salo et al., 2013; Saridakis et al., 2016; Song et al., 2019; Yu-Hsun Lin, 2022).

Additional media gratifications include information sharing, information exchange, altruism, online participation, expressing opinions (Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Coduto & Anderson, 2021; Holton et al., 2014; Jarman et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2016; Liao et al., 2021; Mahmood et al., 2018 ; Oh & Syn, 2015; Park & Lee, 2014 ; Pentina et al., 2016; Quinn, 2016; Rahman, 2022 Salo et al., 2013; Wenzhen Xu et al., 2018; Yu-Hsun Lin, 2022), relationship maintenance, relationship deepening, self-expression, social attraction (Cui Di & Huang Guangsheng, 2018; Dainton & Stokes, 2015; Ferris & Hollenbaugh, 2018; Gezgin & Sen, 2012; Park & Lee, 2014; Salo et al., 2013; Song et al., 2019; Wenzhen XU et al., 2018), passing time, and habitual pastime (Alajmi et al., 2016; Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Ferris & Hollenbaugh, 2018; Gezgin & Sen, 2012; Holton et al., 2014; Jarman et al., 2021; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Liao et al., 2021; Quinn, 2016; Yoon et al., 2014; Yu-Hsun Lin, 2022). Other gratifications are met such as agency, community interest, collective narrative, group identification, sense of affinity, cultural gratifications (Aldamen, 2023; Chan, 2014; Chimenti et al., 2022; Oh & Syn, 2015; Rathnayake & Winter, 2018; Salo et al., 2013), mental accomplishment, self-fulfillment, and self-efficacy (Kim et al., 2016; Liao et al., 2021; Oh & Syn, 2015). Lastly, additional gratifications include coolness, social capital, influence, empowerment (Gezgin & Sen, 2012; Jarman et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2016; Saridakis et al., 2016), remuneration, personal gain, reciprocity (Oh & Syn, 2015; Saridakis et al., 2016), affective feelings (emotions, pleasure), empathy, altruism, relaxation (Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Colás et al., 2013; Oh & Syn, 2015; Quinn, 2016;

Riaz et al., 2016), escapism (Chimenti et al., 2022; Jarman et al., 2021; Quinn, 2016; Riaz et al., 2016), surveillance, voyeur (Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Quinn, 2016; Rahman, 2022), guidance, competition, and navigability (Chimenti et al., 2022; Guangsheng, 2018; Liao et al., 2021; Rahman, 2022; Rathnayake & Winter, 2018). The multi-layer scenario of UGT includes research studying what media does to people, what platforms people use, what types of people use social media, and what people do with the posts encountered. This research has regressed to what Katz (1959) addressed as the study of "campaigns," focusing on how media impacts opinion or attitude instead of psychological gratifications. With platforms, behaviors, demographics, and the evolving culture, UGT should be simplified and expanded. As stated, UGT literature has discovered gratifications for social media use such as entertainment, peer approval, and countless others. However, these broad uses of social media do not answer the psychological gratifications of the individual; they only answer the question of what media provides the user instead of what psychological gratification is met. This complex research around social media has drifted towards analyzing "What do media do to people" instead of staying true to the emphasis of UGT, which is "What do people do with media?"

2.2.2 Classification of Media-Related Needs

In the early UGT literature, there were numerous findings around gratifications of media use that were vast in definitions, but there was no classification or organized way of understanding and discovering the gratifications sought. Katz et al. (1973a) state that previous research from Weiss (1971), Schramm (1949), and Lasswell (1948) work does not reflect the wide variety of gratifications. In response to the need for a list of gratifications of mass media, Katz et al. (1973b) established the classification of media-related needs to assist with clarifying needs sought in UGT studies (Table 2.1). Through building a comprehensive list of gratifications

from previous media literature, Katz et al. (1973b) formed thirty-five groupings of media gratifications. This list was shared with 1,500 interview participants, which allowed the researchers to identify the media gratifications for each medium (TV, radio, newspaper, etc.) of the time. For example, Katz et al. (1973b) asked, "How important is it for you to keep up with the way the government performs its functions" (p.166). These questions were followed by whether specific mediums helped or hindered satisfaction with the media gratification. This approach eliminated specificity on medium-specific gratifications and investigated psychological gratifications. The gratifications discovered allowed five groupings to emerge, which are the following:

"1. Needs related to strengthening information, knowledge, and understanding these can be called cognitive needs;

2. Needs related to strengthening aesthetic, pleasurable and emotional experience-or affective needs;

3. Needs related to strengthening credibility, confidence, stability, and status-these combine both cognitive and affective elements and can be labeled integrative needs;

4. Needs related to strengthening contact with family, friends, and the world. These can also be seen as performing an integrative function;

5. Needs related to escape or tension-release which we define in terms of the weakening of contact with self and one's social roles.

(Katz et al., 1973b, p. 165-166)

To explain the variations of gratifications found, Katz et al. (1973b) developed the classification of media-related needs, generating 84 possible combinations of psychological needs based on three criteria: mode, connection, and referent. The mode refers to the internal

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motivator that is foundational for the use of media. Three modes were established as needs

sought for media use: A1) to strengthen, A2) to weaken, or A3) to acquire. Connection is what is

acquired in the use of media. Four connections were identified: B1) information, knowledge,

understanding, B2) gratification, emotional experience, B3) credibility, confidence, stability,

status, or B4) contact (Table 2.1). The last segment is the referent, which is the audience the

mode and connection are linked to, including C1) self, C2) family, C3) friends, C4) state,

society, C5) tradition, culture, C6) world, or C7) others, and negative groups (others that

disagree with the gratification seeker). For a complete example using the stated classification, a

person may watch news on TV to fulfill the psychological gratification of (A3) acquiring (B1)

information from (C6) the world (Table 2.1).

A. Mode	B. Connection	C. Referent
1. To Strengthen 2. To Weaken 3. To Acquire	1. Information, knowledge, understanding 2. Gratification, emotional experience 3. Credibility, confidence, stability, status 4. Contact	1. Self 2. Family 3. Friends 4. State, Society 5. Tradition, culture 6. World 7. Others, negative reference groups

Table 2.1 *Katz et al. (1973b) Classification of Media-Related Needs*
Source: Katz, E., Haas, H., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). On the Use of the Mass Media for Important Things. American Sociological Review, 38(2), 164–181. https://doi.org/10.2307/2094393

Katz et al., (1973b) stated that this classification skews the list primarily towards the self

and socio-political collectivity, since media is primarily "related either to the self or his relations

with his social environment and society" (Katz et al., 1973b, p 167). This approach is true to the

origins of UGT, as Katz (1959) shared that UGT should focus on how individuals use media

rather than how media affects individuals. With the development of social media, Katz et al.'s

(1973b) groupings and gratifications can be found in more recent UGT research (Falgoust et al., 2022; Hussain et al., 2019). However, the gratifications in the current classification only include the modes of strengthening, weakening, and acquiring the connection in relation to the media used. These gratifications do not account for the ability to create and post online as a mode towards full psychological gratification, which is found in the combination of mode, connection and referent.

This paper aimed to identify a new mode of media-related gratification based on previous research findings, identifying gratifications that can be met through the mode of create, offering a simplification of multiple definitions. To accomplish this research purpose, this research analyzed developments on UGT from early stages to contemporary times (Tricco et al., 2018). By doing so, this chapter provides a foundational understanding of what the original media scholars sought to achieve by developing UGT and how the theory has advanced with time. By investigating the literature around UGT, the paper will expand the theory within the context of modern media, and more specifically, social media use, where individuals can create content rather than being passive consumers of content.

Criticisms of UGT are addressed by expanding the existing classification of gratifications to include the contemporary types of media (Anderson, 1996; Gerson, 1966; Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1982; Severin & Tankard, 2000; White, 1994; Wimmer & Dominick, 1994). Specifically, the criticism that UGT includes multiple definitions of gratifications across the literature (Katz, 1959; Katz et al., 1973b; Katz & Foulkes, 1962) is addressed within this research and provides further understanding and expansion of the theory. To model this, gratifications found across literature have been categorized into common groups to illustrate the commonalities, supporting the criticism but providing a simplification through the classification

of media-related needs. This paper seeks to discover gratifications that could be accomplished by creating to support expanding the classification of media-related needs, identifying create as a mode, which would provide new psychological gratifications.

2.3 Methods

This article is structured as a systematic literature review, which is often used to analyze gaps within the literature, identify the types of given evidence and define key characteristics of the literature (Lockwood et al., 2019; Munn et al., 2018; Tricco et al., 2018). Article selection was established using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach (Crowther et al., 2010; Lockwood et al., 2019; Moher et al., 2009; Tricco et al., 2018).

A Boolean query was used to identify articles with titles that mentioned uses and gratifications theory, UGT, motivations, and gratifications along with social media, social network, social networks, influencers, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter from 2011 to October 2023. The full Boolean search is the following: Title includes (uses and gratifications theory OR UGT OR motivations OR gratifications) AND (social media OR social network OR social networks OR social networking OR SNS OR influencers OR Facebook OR Instagram OR Twitter). Articles in the English language were selected for the literature review, resulting in 242 articles after eliminating duplicate results. Article abstracts were reviewed to identify if they meet the scope of the systematic literature review of uses and gratifications within social media. The earliest article in the selected sample was published in 2011, eight years after the rise of social media in 2003. This year was chosen due to the evolving landscape of social media, covering the last 12 years in social media. This year was chosen due to the increase in popularity of social media between 2010 and 2011, when Facebook reported 1 trillion page views and was

the second highest most-visited site in the United States (Boyd, 2019). In addition, there were

only eight articles that were not included from 2010.

2.4 Databases and Analysis

To gather articles that met the above criteria, the databases Academic Search Premier,

Hospitality and Tourism Complete, and Communication & Mass Media Complete were selected.

The databases that included UGT within a tourism setting were selected to represent the context

of the full dissertation. UGT is a theory often used in communication that supports the selection

of communication databases. The databases were last consulted in November 2023.

Of the 242 articles selected from the databases, 44 were excluded for language barriers,

and 104 were excluded for the wrong context of gratifications or social networks. A common

issue encountered was the discussion of a social network that studied a physical community

network rather than online. There were 94 articles selected for analysis that studied motivations

and gratifications within a social media lens. Gratifications were identified from each analyzed

article and collected into categories with similar gratifications. For example, two articles may

have two separate gratifications, such as "communicating with others" and "social interaction."

These were classified together in the same group.

2.5 Results

In analyzing 94 articles for a systematic literature review, 71 gratifications were

identified, with various names for each category. Similar gratifications were grouped together

based on the similarities in the names, formulating 15 categories (Table 2.2). For example,

communicating with others, social interaction, and virtual community were all found as

gratifications similar in nature (Aldamen, 2023; Alajmi et al., 2016; Aubrey & Rill, 2013;

Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Chimenti et al., 2022; Colás et al., 2013; Dayong Zhang et al., 2018;

Ferris & Hollenbaugh, 2018; Gezgin & Sen, 2012; Holton et al., 2014; Hsu et al., 2015; Jarman et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2017; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Oh & Syn, 2015; Park & Lee, 2014; Pentina et al., 2016; Quinn, 2016; Rahman, 2022; Rathnayake & Winter, 2018; Riaz et al., 2016; Rubenking & Rister, 2016; Salo et al., 2013; Saridakis et al., 2016; Song et al., 2019; Willis & Ferrucci, 2017). Multiple definitions of gratifications can create confusion over UGT (Katz, 1959; Katz et al., 1973b; Katz & Foulkes, 1962), specifically in a social media context. The largest categories in the systematic literature review included categories with similar gratifications that describe the interaction with others through social media and the need for presentation, attraction, and branding. As seen in Table 2.2, there are different terms for gratifications that are similar in meaning. For example, communicating with others and social interaction are similar but are two different terms used in UGT literature. With similar gratification findings across literature, UGT needs to be simplified by applying the modified classification of media-related needs.

Category Description	Gratification	Source
Gratifications that describe the interaction with others through social media.	Communicating with others / Social Interaction / Virtual Community / Socialization / Interaction / Meeting new People / Companionship / Interactivity / Expanding Network / Relationship Maintenance / Deepening Existing Relationships	(Aldamen, 2023; Alajmi et al., 2016; Aubrey & Rill, 2013; Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Chimenti et al., 2022; Colás et al., 2013; Cui Di & Huang Guangsheng, 2018; Dainton & Stokes, 2015; Dayong Zhang et al., 2018; Ferris & Hollenbaugh, 2018; Gezgin & Sen, 2012; Holton et al., 2014; Hsu et al., 2015; Jarman et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2017; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Oh & Syn, 2015; Park & Lee, 2014; Pentina et al., 2016; Quinn, 2016; Rahman, 2022; Rathnayake & Winter, 2018; Riaz et al., 2016; Rubenking & Rister, 2016; Salo et al., 2013; Saridakis et al., 2016; Song et al.,

		2019; Wenzhen Xu et al., 2018 ; Willis & Ferrucci, 2017)
Gratifications that showcase the enjoyment through entertainment of media use and possible media topics (i.e. sports).	Entertainment / Enjoyment / Sports Fanship	(Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Cui Di & Huang Guangsheng, 2018; Gezgin & Sen, 2012; Holton et al., 2014; Hsu et al., 2015; Jin et al., 2017; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Mahmood et al., 2018; Oh & Syn, 2015; Park & Lee, 2014; Pentina et al., 2016; Rahman, 2022; Rubenking & Rister, 2016; Saridakis et al., 2016; Song et al., 2019; Willis & Ferrucci, 2017; Yu-Hsun Lin, 2022; Yoon et al., 2014)
Gratifications that are informing to the media user.	Information Seeking / Learning / Knowledge / Education	(Alajmi et al., 2016; Aldamen, 2023; Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Chimenti et al., 2022; Coduto & Anderson, 2021; Hsu et al., 2015; Holton et al., 2014; Jin et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2016; Oh & Syn, 2015; Pentina et al., 2016; Riaz et al., 2016; Rubenking & Rister, 2016; Saridakis et al., 2016; Song et al., 2019; Willis & Ferrucci, 2017; Yoon et al., 2014)
Gratifications that are commercially driven for the media users' work.	Professional development / Promoting Work / Professional Use / Work Efficiency / Commercial	(Aldamen, 2023; Holton et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2016; Pentina et al., 2016; Quinn, 2016)
Gratifications that are driven by needs for oneself including the need for presentation, attraction, and branding.	Self-documentation / Status / Impression Maintenance / Self-presentation / Reputation / Self-expression / Social Attraction / Identity / Personal Branding / Exhibitionism / Modality Realism / Seek Self-Status / Appearance Feedback / Self-disclosure / Peer Approval	(Aubrey & Rill, 2013; Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Chimenti et al., 2022; Cui Di & Huang, 2018; Dayong Zhang et al., 2018 ; Ferris & Hollenbaugh, 2018; Hsu et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2018; Jarman et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2017 ; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Liao et al., 2021 ; Mahmood et al., 2018; Oh & Syn, 2015 ; Park & Lee, 2014; Pentina et al., 2016; Rahman, 2022; Rathnayake & Winter, 2018; Riaz et al., 2016; Salo et al., 2013; Saridakis et al., 2016; Song et al., 2019; Yu-Hsun Lin, 2022)
Gratifications that describe the act of	Information Sharing / Information Exchange / Altruism / Participation	(Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Coduto & Anderson, 2021; Holton et al., 2014; Jarman et al., 2021; Kim et al.,

engaging in information discourse.	Online / Expressing Opinions	2016; Liao et al., 2021; Mahmood et al., 2018 ; Oh & Syn, 2015; Park & Lee, 2014 ; Pentina et al., 2016; Quinn, 2016; Rahman, 2022 Salo et al., 2013; Wenzhen Xu et al., 2018; Yu-Hsun Lin, 2022)
Gratifications that describe the use of media to pass time.	Passing Time / Habitual Pastime	(Alajmi et al., 2016; Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Ferris & Hollenbaugh, 2018; Gezgin & Sen, 2012; Holton et al., 2014; Jarman et al., 2021; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Liao et al., 2021; Quinn, 2016; Yoon et al., 2014; Yu-Hsun Lin, 2022)
Gratifications that are community driven or provide a sense of belonging.	Agency (Agency-Enhancement, Community building, Bandwagon, filtering) / Community Interest / Collective Narrative / Group Identification / Sense of Affinity / Cultural Gratifications	(Aldamen, 2023; Chan, 2014; Chimenti et al., 2022; Oh & Syn, 2015; Rathnayake & Winter, 2018; Salo et al., 2013)
Gratifications that provide a sense of accomplished state of mind.	Mental Accomplishment / Self-fulfillment / Self-Efficacy	(Kim et al., 2016; Liao et al., 2021; Oh & Syn, 2015)
Gratifications the provide a level of authority to the user.	Coolness / Social Capital / Influence / Empowerment	(Gezgin & Sen, 2012; Jarman et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2016; Saridakis et al., 2016)
Gratifications that describe something gained from the media use.	Remuneration / Personal Gain / Reciprocity	(Oh & Syn, 2015; Saridakis et al., 2016)
Gratifications that describe the emotions experienced during media use.	Affective (emotion, pleasure, feelings) / Empathy / Altruism / Relaxation /	(Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Colás et al., 2013; Oh & Syn, 2015; Quinn, 2016; Riaz et al., 2016)
Gratifications that provide a moment of escape from the users' physical world.	Escapism	(Chimenti et al., 2022; Jarman et al., 2021; Quinn, 2016; Riaz et al., 2016)

Gratifications that provide a way of knowledge of others.	Surveillance / Voyeur	(Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Quinn, 2016; Rahman, 2022)
Gratifications that did not fit in the other categories.	Misc.: Guidance / Competition /Navigability	(Chimenti et al., 2022; Guangsheng, 2018; Liao et al., 2021; Rahman, 2022; Rathnayake & Winter, 2018)

Table 2.2 *Gratification Categories in UGT Research*

To simplify UGT, the identified categories of gratifications within the systematic literature review were organized with a corresponding classification of media-related needs combination (Table 2.3), identifying the mode and connection that could be applied broadly to the categories and the associated gratifications. The example in Table 2.3 does not address the referent in the classification as it relies on distinct psychological gratifications of the media user. For example, one may seek gratification from the referent of friends, state, culture, or world, which depends on an individual's relationship and specific gratification of media use, forming a unilateral relationship with media. This exercise provides an example of simplifying the found gratifications, such as classifying them to strengthen credibility or to weaken contact. Rethinking gratifications as strengthening, weakening, and acquiring a connection from a referent provides a structure to UGT that identifies a deeper psychological gratification. Instead of thinking about UGT research as "individuals watch media for entertainment," the classification proposes a thought of "individuals watch media to weaken contact with the world."

Gratification	Classification of Media-Related Needs
Gratifications that describe the interaction with others through social media.	Strengthen (A1) Contact (B4)
Gratifications that showcase the enjoyment through entertainment of media use and possible media topics (i.e. sports).	Weaken (A2) Contact (B4)
Gratifications that are informing to the media user.	Acquire (A3) Information (B1)
Gratifications that are commercially driven for the media users' work.	Strengthen (A1) Credibility (B3)

Gratifications that are driven by needs for oneself including the need for presentation, attraction, and branding.	---
Gratifications that describe the act of engaging in information discourse.	---
Gratifications that describe the use of media to pass time.	Weaken (A2) Contact (B4)
Gratifications that are community driven or provide a sense of belonging.	Strengthen (A1) Contact (B4)
Gratifications that provide a sense of accomplished state of mind.	Strengthen (A1) Emotional Experience (B2)
Gratifications the provide a level of authority to the user.	Strengthen (A1) Credibility (B3)
Gratifications that describe something gained from the media use.	Strengthen (A1) Credibility (B3)
Gratifications that describe the emotions experienced during media use.	Acquire (A3) Emotional Experience (B2)
Gratifications that provide a moment of escape from the users' physical world.	Weaken (A2) Contact (B4)
Gratifications that provide a way of knowledge of others.	Strengthen (A1) Information (B1)

Table 2.3 *Gratifications with Classification of Media-Related Needs Codes*

The classification example in Table 2.3 illustrates how a deeper understanding of the psychological gratifications could identify that the individual seeks to weaken contact with the referent instead of only passing the time, a gratification used in prior literature. In the gratification categories discovered (Table. 2.3), two categories have the potential to have a new mode of create within them. The mode of create is essential for the associated gratifications represented by the selected categories. Though not all gratifications in the categories would fit within the create mode, the new mode addresses a crucial part of the categories. The select two groupings include the first category of gratifications driven by presentation, attraction, and branding, which consist of the individual gratifications of self-documentation, status, impression maintenance, self-presentation, reputation, self-expression, social attraction, identity, personal branding, exhibitionism, modality realism, seeking self-status, appearance feedback, self-

disclosure, and peer approval (Aubrey & Rill, 2013; Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Chimenti et al., 2022; Cui Di & Huang, 2018; Dayong Zhang et al., 2018 ; Ferris & Hollenbaugh, 2018; Hsu et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2018; Jarman et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2017 ; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Liao et al., 2021 ; Mahmood et al., 2018; Oh & Syn, 2015 Park & Lee, 2014; Pentina et al., 2016; Rahman, 2022; Rathnayake & Winter, 2018; Riaz et al., 2016; Salo et al., 2013; Saridakis et al., 2016; Song et al., 2019; Yu-Hsun Lin, 2022). The second category includes gratifications that describe the act of engaging in information discourse which group the gratifications of information sharing, information exchange, altruism, participation online, and expressing opinions (Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Coduto & Anderson, 2021; Holton et al., 2014; Jarman et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2016; Liao et al., 2021; Mahmood et al., 2018 ; Oh & Syn, 2015; Park & Lee, 2014 ; Pentina et al., 2016; Quinn, 2016; Rahman, 2022 Salo et al., 2013; Wenzhen Xu et al., 2018; Yu-Hsun Lin, 2022). The mode of create facilitates the gratifications within the categories to take place, where broad categories of presentation, branding, and information discourse require creating content to take place, fulfilling new psychological gratifications of creating information, creating an emotional experience, creating credibility, or creating contact within the classification of media-related needs. Specific gratifications found in the identified categories include self-presentation, personal branding, self-documentation, expressing opinions, and information sharing, all of which have potential modes of create within a modified classification of media-related needs. Creating is the foundation for several of the chosen gratifications, which should be represented to account for the new use of media.

The classification of media-related needs was established in 1973 before users could create and share content on social media. Historically, people had to have a position that granted them authority to create media, such as a radio talk show host or a journalist. Furthermore, in

1973, people had to have equipment and distribution channels to share media. Creating media was only available to those with authority who could cover the costs and had specialized equipment and training. As a result, media was created by a selected few and digested by the public masses. In the contemporary world, anyone can digest, create, and interact with media, building a multifaceted relationship between professional, semi-professional, and amateur stakeholders who use social media platforms. This change in media engagement has moved individuals from a passive audience to active creators of the media.

The classification of media-related needs helps classify and simplify gratifications but has an outdated perspective of the public's use of media. The classification should be expanded to include a new mode of create associated with the new use of media. The create mode is separate from sharing a post, as that could fulfill another gratification, such as strengthening credibility or acquiring status under media-related needs. Creating and sharing media online as an authored post fulfills a specific psychological need separate from sharing already posted media. Creating could include authoring a variety of mediums, such as videos, images, and text. However, the psychological gratifications identifies the placement on the modified classification of media-related needs. One may post text, but the psychological gratification is to strengthen credibility. Furthermore, one may create a post asking a question, but the gratification is to acquire information. Thus, this research seeks to establish a new classification to fit within the contemporary context of social media, staying true to the UGT foundation (Katz, 1959; Katz et. al., 1973ab).

The two categories identified previously, which are gratifications driven by the need for presentation, attraction, and branding, and the gratifications for engaging in the information discourse, have a possible mode of create in the classification of media-related needs

combination. For example, the gratification of self-presentation or self-expression in the first category could utilize the mode of create. In addition, the gratification of information exchange or expressing opinions found in the second category, could have the mode of create. By revisiting the original classification and adding create as a mode, all gratifications found in the systematic literature review could be found within the new classification (Table 2.4).

A. Mode	B. Connection	C. Referent
1. To Strengthen 2. To Weaken 3. To Acquire 4. To Create	1. Information, knowledge, understanding 2. Gratification, emotional experience 3. Credibility, confidence, stability, status 4. Contact	1. Self 2. Family 3. Friends 4. State, Society 5. Tradition, culture 6. World 7. Others, negative reference groups

Table 2.4 *Revised Classification of Media-Related Needs (Revised from Katz et. al., 1973b. p. 166)*

This new classification simplifies the definition of gratification but also expands gratification in the context of social media. Instead of looking at 71 different gratifications, as seen in the systematic literature review, this classification provides the potential mode, connection, and referent combinations that discover a deeper psychological gratification. One may create information for their friends or an emotional experience for the world, providing psychological gratification. This new classification also moves towards individual gratifications rather than platform gratification and use. For example, UGT research should include how individuals use social media platforms to create knowledge, not only focusing on how individuals use X, formerly known as Twitter, for information sharing. If UGT research focuses on a specific platform rather than individual gratifications, the research will become obsolete if the platform becomes inactive or shuts down (e.g., MySpace, ello, Google+, Periscope, Vine,

Friendster). Having a generalizable classification across all platforms allows researchers to discover the psychological gratification users seek to gratify, pursuing new understanding in social sciences rather than how media impacts users.

A difference needs to be clarified between the four modes in the new classification. Strengthen (A1) includes building from the connection (B) on something already present. For example, one may use social media to strengthen one's credibility on top of one's already acquired credibility. Weaken (A2) includes the ability to pull away or decrease the connection. For example, one may want to use media to weaken contact as a sense of escape. Acquire (A3) means obtaining something from the connection that was not present. This would include acquiring knowledge or understanding on an unresearched topic. Lastly, the create mode (A4) includes the psychological gratification of creating and distributing across media, which places the gratification on one's actions on media rather than obtaining gratification from media digestion, which is done through the modes of acquire, strengthen, and weaken. The mode of create has a wide variety of applications where combinations may include individuals' ability to create (A4) information (B1), emotional experiences, gratifications (B2), credibility (B3), or contact (B4) across the referents. This research does not seek to define every gratification found in the mentioned categories as a mode of create but rather illustrates the possibility of this gratification through the classification categories. The classification combination relies on the personal gratification of the user rather than how they use media.

With the new mode of create, social media users can establish personal branding and share information about themselves (Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Kircaburun et al., 2020). Information exchange online allows users to create, acquire, and engage with digital relationships (Esen et al., 2021; Riaz et al., 2016), meeting the gratifications of information

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sharing and information seeking. For a social media platform to work effectively, a community of the exchanging of ideas should be facilitated, where the mode of create is necessary in order for this digital ecosystem to survive.

As users create content, other users seek to find said content or follow people who create desired media (Song et al., 2019). Created posts may include self-relevant content (Song et al., 2019), news within a cultural context (Coduto & Anderson, 2021), and daily life or products/services (Cho et al., 2015). The creation online also establishes a reputation based on self-presentation (Cho et al., 2015; Mahmood et al., 2018) and personal branding (Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019). Furthermore, users desire to share with others what is happening in their lives (Cho et al., 2015; Magro et al., 2013). Journalists' online activities fulfill the need to provide information online through media, which could provide self-fulfillment gratifications through the mode of creating information in the form of posts, news reports, videos, and more (Kim et al., 2016). Gratifications could also range due to different types of social users.

There are different types of users online, which include content consumers, content contributors, and content creators (Saridakis et al., 2016). Content contributors engage in conversations about brands, uploads media referencing brands, and rates products online (Saridakis et al., 2016). Content creators have a more authoritative position as they post media and publish product reviews (Saridakis et al., 2016). The key difference between the two would be the interactivity a content creator provides that a contributor may not. One may be a contributor, but they don't engage with the audience, limiting them from being classified as a creator. Saridakis et al. (2016) found that personal identity and empowerment motivations are important for content contributors, while similar motivations, in addition to social interaction, are important for the content creator. Furthermore, personal identity, social interaction, and

empowerment were not present in the case of a content consumer.

In the modified classification of media-related needs, not every post created should be classified as a mode of create. Media creation could fall on any of the modes as it depends on the individual's sought gratification, including strengthening, weakening, acquiring, or creating. This modified classification is not a description of how users interact online; rather, it is a classification of psychological needs. Questions should be asked to identify if the user posted out of the gratification to create, acquire, strengthen, or weaken any of the connections (i.e. 1. Information, knowledge, understanding, 2. Gratification, emotional experience, 3. Credibility, confidence, stability, status, and 4. Contact) towards the referent. Created examples may include a user posting about their trip to a tourist destination because they desire to create information about their experience. For example, a post may say, "I had a great time at Universal Studios! If you go in the future, you need to try the Butterbeer!" One may post their authored poetry, as they want to create an emotional experience for others, as an artistic expression, such as posting a poem about a passing parent. In addition, an influencer may create and post a humorous video as a creative outlet, which could have the psychological gratification of creating an emotional experience. This new classification allows understanding that create can be a mode of gratification, deriving from the media user's desire to create content without any return. It becomes an act of creating, creative expression, and artistic endeavor. However, one may post the same way to strengthen contact or acquire credibility. This classification seeks to further understand psychological gratifications from using social media, accounting for the new opportunities to engage with media.

2.6 Conclusion

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Adding the create mode in the modified classification allows more gratifications to be discovered, reaching up to 112 possible needs to be met through media involvement compared to the 84 needs found in the original classification of media-related needs. By using a modified classification, the vast number of gratifications could be simplified under generic language, moving the emphasis toward Katz's (1959) statement about UGT: "It is the program that asks the question, not "What do media do to people?" but "What do people do with the media?" (p. 4). Previous UGT research around social media had countless gratifications, which complicated the gratifications studied. The previous research mostly studied what media does to people, which Katz (1959) urged the theory to eliminate. Furthermore, platforms rise and fall in popularity. In some cases, researchers have done UGT research that discovers gratifications of now obsolete platforms. Through approaching the UGT research through an updated classification with the perspective of media as a place of engagement, creation, and media consumption, researchers can now discover more psychological gratifications individuals seek in their media use, regardless of media choice and use.

Within the new classification of UGT, this research provides theoretical implications reflective of the rise of influencers and content creators within social media. Furthermore, the new classification addresses the issue of multiple definitions of gratifications and provides a new perspective on understanding psychological gratifications through the mode, connection, and referent. Additionally, future studies of social media and UGT can be streamlined with the core foundation of these 112 gratifications. From the discovered gratifications in the review, gratifications are driven by needs for oneself including the need for presentation, attraction, branding and gratifications that describe the act of engaging in information discourse may utilize a mode of create within the classification. The modified classification of adding a mode of create

expands the possible gratifications to a new culture of internet users, content creators, influencers, and online personalities. To address the specific gratifications in the chosen categories, the mode of create in the modified classification of media-related needs could address self-presentation, self-documentation, personal branding, information exchange, participation, and expressing opinions. Each gratification addressed could find a corresponding combination within the modified classification of media-related needs through discovering the true psychological gratifications of the individual using media.

For future research, gratifications could be simplified by using the modified classification instead of having multiple definitions for similar gratifications of media use. A few examples will be provided to illustrate the utility of the modified classification of media-related needs. Individuals may use social media to create (A4) information (B1) for the world. The act of creating information becomes gratifying for the individual. Furthermore, one may create (A4) an emotional experience (B2) through all aspects of creating a video narrative, including storyboarding, producing, editing, and posting. Future research could also include discovering the gratifications sought from different types of audiences within the social media culture. Platforms like video streaming sites (e.g., Twitch) have creators who engage with their audiences by actively creating content. Gratifications of creators and this specific audience should be discovered within this new classification.

Limitations of this research exist as the literature review only analyzed literature within three journals ranging back to 2011. The selected literature included the Boolean query search terms within the title, not within the body of the text itself. This research included literature in English, eliminating gratifications that were found in articles in other languages. More

gratifications may exist with the use of other platforms that are not popular within the United

States.

CHAPTER 3

SHARING THE EXPERIENCE:

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE THEME PARK GUEST SOCIAL MEDIA

CONTRIBUTION

3.1 Introduction

Social media provides an outlet for users to create content to share across their digital platforms. Users take on the role of content creators, distributing posts across their platforms which provide social and emotional rewards (Goh et al., 2009). There is also an increase in individuals who moved into content creation as a full-time job, with a 314% increase of individuals between 2021 and 2023 (The Creator Economy 2023 Report, 2023). This is premised on the idea that content creation and sharing online serves as an extension of a user's physical experience itself, influencing theme park consumer behavior of guests (Coleman, 1990; Luoma-aho, 2016; Fromm, 2023; Martín, 2022; Sánchez-Arrieta et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022). In addition, younger generations continue to take part in theme parks more than older generations (Fromm, 2023; Roen, 2017). In 2014, Eventbrite discovered that 82% of millennials attended events or live experiences such as parties, concerts, festivals, performing arts, races, and themed sports, compared to 70% of the older generation, which is reflective of the theme park attendance demographics (Fromm, 2023; Roen, 2017). Thus, understanding how experiences are shared online remains important as culture has changed with upcoming generations. Regarding theme park literature, limited research has studied the social media behavior of theme park guests (Manoharan & Ammaiappan, 2020; Park et al., 2020; Slatter, 2015; Wang et al., 2022).

Understanding the created content on social media within the theme park context provides understanding of how typical guests share their experience online, providing new

findings to the theme park industry and academic literature. There is a need to explore the content, main topics, sentiment, and location from where typical guests are posting to understand how the theme park experience is shared online. This research will provide a unique perspective as it bridges the gap between social media usage and the theme park experiences.

To understand the topical focus, location, and sentiment of social media posts, the researcher adopted a quantitative approach and employed a content analysis (Nimrod, 2010). Regardless of when guests post (e.g., home, work, the theme park), the main topic of the created content and the location of where the media was taken remains the same. Social media posts, specifically Instagram posts, were gathered through Sprinklr social media listening software and categorized into main topics based on the main subject in the media and captions, analyzing both media and text from the posts (Bateman, 2014; Kreis, 2017; Kruk et al., 2019). Both the caption and the media were analyzed to discover the main topics. The content analysis was performed to answer three research questions: First, the researcher sought to identify the main topics found in guests' Instagram contributions/posts during their time in Walt Disney World theme parks, which include Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Hollywood Studios, and Disney's Animal Kingdom. Second, it sought to understand how guests' Instagram contributions/posts among Walt Disney World guests differ in terms of main topics across the themed lands of Walt Disney World. Lastly, this research investigated how sentiment differs across main topics and themed lands within Walt Disney World.

The created social media posts are part of the purchase cycle; in this case, purchasing is the decision to visit or revisit a theme park. Created posts contribute as earned media and peer observation of the experience, adding an additional touchpoint on a multi-touch marketing channel, influencing the guests' brand intention (Baxendale et al., 2015). This research

contributes to understanding posts that potential guests encounter online that possibly lead to visit intention. Social media users contribute knowledge to potential guests' attitudes toward theme parks, which influences visit intentions (Godovykh & Baker, 2022; Wang et al., 2022). The proposed research will contribute to consumer research literature (Luo et al., 2020; Niu et al., 2019; Park et al., 2020; Sanfilippo & Shvartzshnaider, 2021; Torres et al., 2021), marketing (Albayrak et al., 2021) and the use of big data to study behavior (Albayrak et al., 2021; De Mauro et al., 2016; Luo et al., 2020; Niu et al., 2019; Park et al., 2020; Torres et al., 2021). Further, this research will contribute to the understanding of park guest behavior, with potential opportunities to contribute to consumer emotions and marketing perspectives.

Findings contribute to park operations, marketing strategy development, and the understanding of consumer behavior. Park operations can understand the focus of social media activity within themed lands of Walt Disney World parks (Disney's Animal Kingdom, Epcot, Hollywood Studios, Magic Kingdom). Park operations can understand how sentiment differs across the themed lands and parks and know the hotspots of social media activity. Implications for marketing include understanding how the theme park experience is shared by the guests. Lastly, consumer behavior is informed by this research as managerial decisions on how guests interact and what they post online provide insights into park behavior.

3.2 Literature Review

3.2.1 Defining Social Media

Social media has provided a new method of connection that was nonexistent three decades ago, a time when connections were built on their engagement in the physical community. Since the creation of the World Wide Web in 1989, online platforms started emerging in 1995-1997 with the creation of Classmates and Six Degrees (Ngak, 2011). Both

websites provided a social network to connect and socialize with others. In 2003, popular social media platforms LinkedIn and Myspace were created, followed by Facebook in 2004. Since then, more platforms emerged, such as Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Instagram, providing unique ways of platform interaction. For example, users could "pin" ideas on Pinterest, or users could post a story on their Instagram Stories. While all platforms mentioned have different ways of interaction, all platforms are systems that provide connection for users (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Social media platforms evolve and fluctuate in popularity. For example, between 2017 and 2018, Twitter and TikTok switched places in popularity rankings, with TikTok becoming more popular in 2018 (Ortiz-Ospina, 2023). This popularity was a result of the acquisition of the popular social media app Musical.ly, merging with TikTok (Jennings, 2019). Though platforms may vary in adoption, the main purpose is to create a form of communication between users. Users may not adopt every platform but will choose the platform that fits their needs, which could include discovering new relationships (Dalen & Seippel, 2021). Boyd and Ellison (2007) shared that social media is defined by three concepts. The first defining characteristic is the ability to create a profile within a bounded system. Profiles could be public or private, but they can connect with others within the platform. Such ability of users to connect and bond with other users of the platform was named as the second defining characteristic of social media (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Lastly, the third defining characteristic of a social media platform is that users can view the connections made by themselves and by others. As the connections are made, further connections can be established through mutual followings, interests, or engagements (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Among some examples of social media platforms, based on this definition, are Facebook, X formerly known as Twitter, and Reddit. Users can create a profile,

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connect with others, and view connections. In these platforms, socialization occurs through contributed content within online communities.

Social media platforms continually reflect new trends, influences, and social norms that evolve with culture. Within the theme parks, new trends or social norms can be established based on contributed posts from that specific context. For example, if a new product is released at the park, contributing content online may discuss the product, generating a desire from other users to purchase the same product and influencing consumer behavior through trend establishment. Social media use is widespread and frequently adopted, justifying the need for this research. In 2021, seven in ten U.S. adults stated they use social media, which at that time, was stable compared to the last five years (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Social media use can provide a variety of gratifications. Certain individuals can use social media to fulfill a sense of self-presentation while others can find knowledge (Al-Jabri et al., 2015). As mentioned in Katz et al. (1973ab), each media platform has various structures providing multiple gratifications, dependent on the specific gratifications sought by the individual.

3.2.2 Social Media as Leisure

The use of social media can provide a leisure experience by meeting the defining characteristics of leisure, which include reaching a state of mind and self-fulfillment outside of obligated duties (Amoako-Tuffour & Martínez-Espiñeira, 2012; Dalen & Seippel, 2021; Nimrod & Adoni, 2012; Olecká et al., 2022). Advances in technology provide moments of leisure in sporadic bursts through normal daily activities, separate from obligated duties (Olecká et al., 2022). Browsing and posting on social media platforms could provide moments of leisure, with 24/7 access to the platforms (Nimrod & Adoni, 2012). Social media platforms are integrated within our work activities and could be considered work itself (e.g., LinkedIn). Social media as

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leisure requires minimal skill and a device connected to the internet, as the signup process and curated newsfeed tries to remain simple for everyone. This allows the leisure activity of social media to be incorporated anywhere, without the bounds of geography or time (Nimrod & Adoni, 2012).

As individuals engage with social media platforms, it is imperative to recognize the inherent risks and benefits of use. Use of social media platforms has been found to provide beneficial and harmful psychosocial outcomes (Harmon & Duffy, 2023; Valkenburg, 2022), with specific demographic groups being more susceptible to certain risks and benefits (Elhai et al., 2018; Hormes et al., 2014; Rasmussen et al., 2020; Reid & Weigle, 2014; Vajda et al., 2014; Valkenburg, 2022; van Deursen et al., 2015). Among some risks explored by previous research are a loss of productivity, cyberbullying (Reid & Weigle, 2014), cyberstalking, identity theft, social information overload (Goh et al., 2016), sexting, harassment, and access to communities promoting self-harm or eating disorders (Reid & Weigle, 2014). Those who use social media may also experience social and psychological damage by being drawn into social conflict or by jeopardizing their privacy and safety (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Lastly, social media use can create thoughts of social comparison (Appel et al., 2016; Chou & Edge, 2012; Manago et al., 2008) and could impact emotion regulation within adults (Elhai et al., 2018; Hormes et al., 2014; Rasmussen et al., 2020; Vajda et al., 2014; van Deursen et al., 2015). Though security and privacy have been discussed within social media use (Fuchs, 2021; Noble, 2018), social media platforms provide the illusion of anonymity, which could provide a sense of security for some (Nimrod & Adoni, 2012).

The benefits of social media use should be addressed as well. Social media use could provide social connectedness (Keum et al., 2022; Lizzo & Liechty, 2020). Keum et al. (2022)

found that social media users can find meaning in life by searching the wealth of information and developing connections that help formulate their thoughts about life. Social media use could also provide stress reduction, relaxation (Chang et al., 2014; Olecká et al., 2022), social relationship creation, individualistic expression (Alrajehi, 2016), and increase bonding social capital (Williams, 2019). It was also found that an increase in social capital also reduces social isolation (Cho, 2015).

Further, within the development of online leisure, a new classification had to be defined to address the cyberspace of online leisure activities. With the wide use of online spaces and their increased use for leisure purposes, more leisure scholars became interested in this area of research. Due to novelty of online leisure experiences, different researchers used various terms to discuss these activities, including digital leisure, online leisure, technology-based leisure, cyber leisure, or E-leisure (Nimrod & Adoni, 2012). Moreover, little effort was put into defining what online leisure is. Nimrod and Adoni (2012) made the first attempt to not only define E-leisure but also compare it to traditional forms of leisure. Through such comparison, the authors helped the audience to see why E-leisure can be defined as leisure and what makes it a unique category of leisure. The development of E-leisure identifies online leisure as meeting the criteria established for leisure but without the limitations affiliated with offline leisure (Nimrod & Adoni, 2012).

E-leisure eliminates the boundaries of time, geography, and physical space, and thus, fosters social connection, flexibility, and the opportunity to engage at any moment (Nimrod & Adoni, 2012). Nimrod and Adoni (2012) identified four characteristics of E-leisure, which include synchronicity, interactivity, anonymity, and virtual reality. Contact and contagion are established between participants of E-leisure. Contact is the social network between users, while

contagion is accomplished through the bond built with each other online (Dalen & Seippel, 2021). As contact and contagion are met within E-leisure, users experience homophily, finding others with similar interests and communities (Dalen & Seippel, 2021).

3.2.3 Social Media and Theme Parks

The evaluation of created posts can provide an understanding of how guests share the theme park experience, as the posts directly impact the theme park image. Discussing a theme park as a brand (Lukas, 2008), social media contributes to the positive or negative brand association social media users disseminate online to users without geographical boundaries (Ron & Nimrod, 2017). Theme park guests are influenced by what they see on social media platforms to build their expectations for their experience at the park, which further influences consumer behavior and visit intention (Slatter, 2015; Wang et al., 2022).

Within the theme park experience, guests may interact and use social media between different attractions and experiences without geographical, time, and physical space constraints, using the platform as a form of E-leisure (Nimrod & Adoni, 2012). Culture has also evolved as experiences like theme parks have become more popular with younger audiences, who are also more regular users of social media (The Global State Of Digital In October 2022, 2022). For example, there is an increase in millennials within theme parks (Roen, 2017), and Gen Z was found to be more excited to return to theme parks during the Covid-19 reopening procedures (Shevenock, 2021). However, the social media platform chosen to use may differ for each guest as different features are offered across the platforms. Age, the reason for using social media platforms, ease of use, the owned digital device, and the content style all influence which platform is chosen for content creation. This research will contribute to a better understanding of

what, why, and when different types of guests are posting, including typical guests and influencers.

Social media allows for posts to be shared and viewed from anywhere (Kandara & Hamza Çelikyay, 2017), resulting in the dissemination of what guests interact with, photograph, and how they behave within the park. As seen on social media platforms, merchandise items shared through created viral videos increase in popularity and scarcity (Martín, 2022). With the above examples provided, social media can be seen to influence behavior and experience interaction (Fromm, 2023). In the theme park context, users post content about the park on social media, which provides perceived enjoyment (Park et al., 2020) or dissatisfaction about the experience (Golmohammadi et al., 2021). In previous theme park literature, there has been limited research that has utilized social media data to understand guest behavior within the park (e.g., Manoharan & Ammaiappan, 2020; Park et al., 2020). Manoharan and Ammaiappan (2020) used TAGS V6 to gather tweets within a theme park and place them in four emotional quadrants, finding that guests use more pleasure and high-arousal words within social media posts. Park et al. (2020) collected tweets posted from Disneyland and classified them through emotional classification and GIS spatial analysis. The tweets were then used to create the 'Disneyland Happy Course' that provided a high arousal and high pleasure route through the park. Park et al. (2020) also identified emotional quadrants around each hotspot across the park, contributing to park guest behavior.

3.2.4 Theme Park Literature

Theme parks have been explored in previous literature through multidisciplinary efforts (Anton Clavé, 2007). Researchers have sought to understand theme parks through the perspective of economic development, consumer research, and operations. The most substantial

developments from theme park literature focus on the consumer (Anton Clavé, 2007; Braun &
Milman, 1990, 1994; Gupta & Sharma, 2016; Sun & Uysal, 1994). This research line includes
findings about attitudes, behavior, constraints, demographics, emotions, loyalty, satisfaction, and
revisit intention.

This research provides a new perspective to the guest segments that are engaging with the
park and contributing posts online. Posts disseminated are engaged with by other users outside
the park leading to visitation and driving business revenue (Wang et al., 2022). As guests
continue through their theme park visit, certain experiences contribute to satisfaction and revisit
intention (Lee et al., 2020). In Torres et al. (2018), it was found that theme park guests were
disgruntled over value propositions, long wait times, and poor customer service. Positive value
perception and limited wait times were factors of delighted guests.

Satisfaction was also measured as a main contributor to revisit intention (Aziz et al.,
2012; Lee et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2017). Zhang et al. (2017) discovered that theme park
attendance negatively influenced the number of attractions visited by the guest, the experience
value per attraction, and overall satisfaction. Satisfaction has also been measured by the
influential factors of meeting social needs, involvement with thrilling rides, escape from daily
life, desire to try something new, and using the theme park as a place of fun (Ryan et al., 2010).
Other important factors influencing satisfaction were the physical environment, interaction with
the customers, and interaction with the staff (Ali et al., 2018). Satisfaction is important for a
theme park as it can lead to willingness to pay more (Bigné et al., 2005; Milman et al., 2020;
Wilkinson, 2022), increase word-of-mouth promotion, and increase one's intention to revisit
(Aziz et al., 2012; Milman et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2018). In addition to
satisfaction, loyalty has been investigated through theme park literature as it leads to higher

revenue and revisits (Aziz et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2020; Milman et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2018).

Ali et al. (2018) discovered that customer delight and customer satisfaction influence the loyalty of the guests. Park visitation is influenced by satisfaction, loyalty (Aziz et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2017), safety awareness, and pricing sensitivity (Godovykh & Baker, 2022; Xie and Luo, 2021). Along with the factors that influence the choice of a theme park, researchers have identified constraints to visitation of theme parks. For example, a study by Tan & Huang (2020) revealed that money, time, distance, and coordination were all constraining factors that stopped potential guests from visiting a theme park. The consumer research literature related to theme park experiences provides managerial and research implications for marketing, operations, park design, and tourism. This research contributes to the consumer research area of study as it seeks to understand guest behavior.

Understanding the variables that contribute to satisfaction, loyalty, and revisit intention is important for this research. The main topic of each themed land and park provides an understanding of what guests expect to enjoy in each area, leading to meeting satisfaction or providing reasons for visit/revisit intention. Furthermore, the use of social media within theme parks has only been identified in limited literature, which identifies a gap in the literature this research can fulfill (Manoharan & Ammaiappan, 2020; Park et al., 2020).

3.3 Research Problem

Within the theme park context, guests often post their experiences on various social media platforms. There is a need to understand the content, main topics, and location from where they are posting to understand what role social media contribution plays in the guests' theme park experience. This is premised on the idea that content creation serves as an extension of the

experience itself, influencing theme park guest behavior (Coleman, 1990; Luoma-aho, 2016; Sánchez-Arrieta et al., 2021). The created content online impacts the visit intention of the guest (Wang et. al., 2022). Limited research has studied the social media behavior of theme park guests (Park et al., 2020). This work impacts marketing strategy, park operations, and understanding consumer behavior.

3.4 Methods

3.4.1 Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to understand the uses and gratifications of social media posts among the guests of the Walt Disney World parks. More specifically, the study will aim to answer the following three research questions:

RQ 1: What are the main topics focused on in guests' Instagram contributions/posts (including text, hashtags, photos, captions, reels, and/or videos) within Magic Kingdom, Disney's Animal Kingdom, Epcot, and Hollywood Studios of Walt Disney World parks?

RQ 2: How do guests' Instagram contributions/posts (including text, hashtags, photos, captions, reels, and/or videos) among Walt Disney World guests, differ in terms of main topics across the themed lands of Walt Disney World?

RQ 3: How does sentiment differ in Instagram contributions/posts on Instagram across main topics and themed lands within Walt Disney World parks (Disney's Animal Kingdom, Hollywood Studios, Epcot, Magic Kingdom)?

3.4.2 Research Design

A quantitative research approach was used to understand social media posts contributed by typical guests that display the theme park experience within Walt Disney World. The

researcher utilized social media listening software (Sprinklr) and the Clemson University Social

Media Listening Center (SMLC) for data collection and sampling procedures. Previous research

includes a study that used the SMLC to explore college-athlete-led social media activism by

gathering tweets with the hashtag #NotNCAAProperty (Stokowski et al., 2023). In Stokowski et

al.'s (2023) findings, many of the social media interactions were supportive of the NCAA

athletes.

Sprinklr's data mining software allowed the researcher to gain access to over 350+

million sources of online data, with full access to Twitter API, Reddit, Facebook and Instagram

posts (Clemson University Social Media Listening Center, 2023). The Instagram platform was

chosen specifically for this research because it requires a form of visual media (photos, videos)

to be uploaded with optional text (caption, hashtag).

3.4.3 Sampling Procedures

Literature using Twitter as a data source has stated studies only need a 1% sample of the

full data stream to achieve 90% accuracy (Wang et al., 2015, 2020; Xu et al., 2020). However,

Hu et al. (2014) used 20% of their full data set of Instagram photos in a specified time frame to

thematize and code, coding only 200 posts of 1,000. Using Instagram will eliminate the issue of

a high frequency of retweets often found in Twitter analysis (Xu et al., 2020). The Instagram

platform is used daily or weekly by 56% of 18–34-year-olds, 42% of 35–54-year-olds, and 21%

of users 55+. Compared to other platforms, Instagram leads with 33% of 18–34-year-olds and

24% of 35–54-year-olds posting frequently or occasionally (Jones, 2023). Instagram is the

platform of choice when the user aims to create content rather than search for information or

connect with other people (Jones, 2023; The Global State Of Digital In October 2022, 2022).

Simple random sampling was used (Daniel, 2012), inputting keywords that reference

Walt Disney World shows, attractions, names of parks, names of themed lands, or hashtags.

Social listening software obtained a .01% sample of Instagram posts that mention targeted

keywords for every month in 2023. The keywords were only located in the posted caption rather

than the media itself, such as a voice or text on a video clip. The total number of posts in 2023 is

1.8 million Instagram posts. With the quantitative thematic approach to identify common main

topics (Hu et al., 2014), the researcher started with a .01% sample (Wang et al., 2015, 2020; Xu

et al., 2020), of each month to gather and analyze until identifiable themes emerge. Upon

sampling, a total of .12% of 2023 Instagram posts was collected. The data was downloaded as a

CSV file that included the posted text caption, direct URL of the Instagram post, visual media

type (photo, video, card), and the author-coded sentiment. A lexicon or a dictionary was not used

for the sentiment analysis; it relied on the author's interpretation of both the media and the

caption. A lexicon would only analyze the text in the caption, which this research focused on

both text and media. Due to the identifying information gathered from the social media data

mining, IRB approval was sought (National Science Foundation, 2023). Social media posts used

and mined through the Sprinklr software were all public posts and did not require interaction

between the poster and the researcher. Limitations include the lack of demographic information,

followers, engagements, and usernames within the platform. The posts investigated were treated

as public content, similar to public websites (Cornell University Office of Research Integrity and

Assurance, 2013).

The full list of keywords has been listed in Table 3.1. Overarching keywords include the

account name of Disney parks and affiliated hashtags users may have in their text. The keywords

are used to fully identify posts contributed from the park. Users may post a photo of the

attraction, Jungle Cruise, which is why Jungle Cruise is on the keyword list. The table shares

keywords of rides, shows, and themed lands that exist at Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Disney's

Animal Kingdom, and Hollywood Studios. Several keywords have been excluded due to double-

meaning phrases that are both attraction names at Walt Disney World parks and popular films or

TV shows. To eliminate park confusion, the keywords #Disneyland and #CaliforniaAdventure

have been included in the exclusion criteria since they are not within the Walt Disney World

property (Table 3.1).

Overarching	@Disneyparks OR #WaltDisneyWorld OR #DisneyWorld OR "Disney World" OR "Walt Disney World"
Magic Kingdom	"Tiki Room" OR "Big Thunder Mountain Railroad" OR "Thunder Mountain" OR "Country Bear Jamboree" OR "Splash Mountain" OR "Hall of Presidents" OR "Haunted Mansion" OR "Liberty Square Riverboat" OR "Cinderella Castle" OR "Enchanted Tales with Belle" OR "It's a Small World" OR "Mad Tea Party" OR "Mickey's PhilharMagic" OR "Peter Pan's Flight" OR "Pete's Silly Sideshow" OR "Prince Charming Regal Carousel" OR "Seven Dwarfs Mine Train" OR "The Barnstormer" OR "Under the Sea: Journey of the Little Mermaid" OR "Walt Disney World Railroad" OR "Astro Orbiter" OR " Space Ranger Spin" OR "Monster's Inc. Laugh Floor" OR "Space Mountain" OR "Tomorrowland Speedway" OR "TRON Lightcycle / Run" OR "Peoplemover" OR "Carousel of Progress" OR "Tomorrowland" OR "Fantasyland" OR "Liberty Square" OR "Frontierland" OR "Adventureland" OR "Main Street, U.S.A" OR "Disney Enchantment" OR "Happily Ever After" OR "Magic Kingdom" OR "Disney Castle" OR #MagicKingdom OR #HappilyEverAfter
Epcot	EPCOT OR #EPCOT OR "Drinking around the world" OR #DrinkingAroundTheWorld" OR "Spaceship Earth" OR "Journey in Imagination" OR "Disney & Pixar Short Film Festival" OR "Mission: Space" OR "Test Track" OR "Cosmic Rewind" OR "Guardians Coaster" OR "Living with the Land" OR "Soarin'" OR "The Seas with Nemo & Friends" OR "Turtle Talk" OR "Gran Fiesta Tour Starring the Three Caballeros" OR "Frozen Ever After" OR "Ratatouille Adventure"
Disney's Animal Kingdom	"It's Tough to Be a Bug" OR "Flight of Passage" OR "Na'vi River Journey" OR "Kilimanjaro Safaris" OR "Festival of the Lion King" OR "The Animation Experience" OR "Expedition Everest" OR "Kali River Rapids" OR "Finding Nemo Musical" OR "Disney's Animal Kingdom" OR #DAK OR #DisneysAnimalKingdom

Hollywood Studios	"Star Tours" OR "Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular" OR "Frozen Sing-Along" OR "Frozen Singalong" OR "Frozen Sing Along" OR "Muppet Vision 3D" OR "Muppetvision 3d" OR "Smugglers Run" OR "Rise of the Resistance" OR "Toy Story Mania" OR "Slinky Dog Dash" OR "Alien Swirling Saucers" OR "Disney Junior Dance Party" OR "Tower of Terror" OR "Rocking Roller Coaster" OR "Rock 'n' Roller Coaster" OR "Fantasmic" OR "Hollywood Studios" OR "#HollywoodStudios" OR Batuu OR #Batuu OR "Galaxy's Edge" OR #GalaxysEdge OR "Star Wars Land" OR "Toy Story Land"
Did Not Search:	"Dumbo the Flying Elephant" OR "Pirates of the Caribbean" OR "Jungle Cruise" OR "The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh" OR "Dinosaur" OR "Voyage of the Little Mermaid" OR "Beauty and the Beast" OR #Disneyland OR #CaliforniaAdventure

Table 3.1 *Keywords Used In Data Search*

3.4.4 Data Collection Procedures

A quantitative content analysis was utilized with the data gathered (Nimrod, 2010). This approach defined the main topics identified from guests' Instagram posts using a multi-modal approach of looking at both the text caption and image to identify the main topics of the post (Bateman, 2014; Kreis, 2017; Kruk et al., 2019). That is, the researcher considered both the textual (text caption and hashtags) and visual data (photos and videos) simultaneously to interpret the subject of the post.

In terms of processing for analysis, a CSV file of the sample was kept in a secure drive on the author's computer. The CSV already held the direct URL, and the caption of the Instagram post was derived from the social media data mining gathered from Sprinklr. In the sample, the author clicked on the direct URL and was directed to the contributor's post for further data collection, including the number of followers and following/follower ratio. Data collected included the full message in the Instagram post, also known as a caption. The search terms provided above were found in the caption.

After the photo and caption were examined for the main topic and added to the codebook established, the sentiment was then identified based on positive or negative keywords (Bateman,

2014; Kreis, 2017; Kruk et al., 2019; Park et al., 2020). Since Sprinklr content analysis only

relies on text, the multi-modal approach provided more accurate data (photo + text). This data

allowed the researcher to identify the most positively or negatively expressed topics and areas

within the theme park. The author identified emotionally charged words within the post to

manually code the post as positive or negative. Though Sprinklr can code large amounts of data,

the software cannot code main topics by evaluating the image and the text. In addition, lexicons

may assist with textual sentiment, but the multi-modal approach (text + visual media) and

understanding of internet language are important for deriving true sentiment since the software is

unable to identify sarcasm or colloquialisms. Posts that remained absent of emotional language

were coded as neutral, as they are neither positive nor negative. The number of followers and the

number of accounts the contributor was following at the time were gathered by reviewing the

user's social media profile. This information assisted with understanding the potential reach that

each post has. This data also assisted with knowing the following/follower ratio.

     A binary 'Yes' or 'No' was used to code whether the username reflects a theme park

property/concept. For example, MagicAndPixieDustWill would be noted as a theme park name

while the researcher's own name, willhenderson would not. The amount of likes for each

contributed post at the time of analysis was identified. This allowed the researcher to recognize

which posts are most engaged with as they pertain to this research. The engagement rate was

calculated by dividing the number of likes by the number of followers and multiplying the result

by 100. Within Instagram contributors, one metric measured to determine influence is the

following/follower ratio (Tech Media Today, 2022). Using the number of followers and

following provided in the data, each post was classified under one of three classifications based

on their following/follower ratio. Using Tech Media Today's (2022) guidance, the following

classifications will be determined per post.

- **Good Follower Ratio: 5:1 - For every five followers, the account follows one.**

- **Average Follower Ratio: 2:1 - For every two followers, the account follows one.**

- **Bad/Spam Follow Ratio: .05 < 0 - For every one follower, the account followers two or more.**

Each post was classified as originating from Magic Kingdom, Disney's Animal

Kingdom, Hollywood Studios, or Epcot. Deriving evidence from the text and media, the land

was identified as to which park the post is from. With the expertise of the researcher, each media

was classified in the respective land within the theme park (e.g., Tomorrowland, Fantasyland,

Pandora, etc.). The context of the media, which shows the architecture, attractions, and theming,

was used as context clues of where the post derives from.

Each post gathered provided data, including whether the post is a photo, video, or

carousel (multiple photos) within the Instagram platform. The various forms of media on the

platform required new approaches to analyze the different types. Users can upload three types of

media on Instagram (photos, videos, and carousel). Photos are static images that do not move.

Photos were classified as one piece of media in the sample. Carousels, also called cards, are

multiple images and videos in one post. As Instagram users engage with the carousel, they swipe

the post to the side to move from one piece of media to the next. Videos range from short-form

media that only focuses on one location to edited videos that include media ranging in location

and focus. Within carousels and videos, each media clip was treated as separate posts since they

ranged in topic and location. Lastly, the date the post was created was gathered.

Upon identifying the main topics of the post, the researcher used ArcGIS online to establish a geospatial map to discover hotpots in the parks, frequencies of topics in relation to the park location, common sentiments, and highly liked posts within themed lands of a park. Each post was positioned on a GIS map of Walt Disney World property by using the author's knowledge from architecture or background recognition in the photo, in addition to text, location, and other identifying methods. If the media was focused on a human or an object and the background was unclear, a team of theme park practitioners was used to determine the location. If they could not determine the location, the post was deemed unusable. Upon recognition, the researcher placed the data points on a map of all four Walt Disney World parks.

GIS has previously been utilized within theme park literature. For example, Ji et al. (2021) used GIS to study the spatiotemporal behavior of visitors' interaction, discovering that mixing the mundane concepts with other experiences can be interruptive for the guests' geospatial behavior. Birenboim et al., (2013) also discovered that behavior patterns exist within a theme park based on the length of the visit and the budget of the trip.

3.4.5 Coding Process and Analysis

To ensure trustworthiness within the research, the researcher applied validity checks. In addition to constantly comparing the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Morehouse, 1998), the author applied intercoder reliability to assist with the establishment of the coding propositions (Memon et al., 2017; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). The researcher identified two other coders that assisted with the data collection and coding process. One coder had a PhD and was the director of the Clemson University Social Media Listening Center, where the data was gathered. The other coder was a Clemson University Social Media Listening Center research assistant and has assisted with other social media research projects.

The three coders, the researcher and two other coders, went through two rounds of coding. The first round provided the coders 100 random posts from the entire sample. Posts were coded independently, and the results were compared and evaluated over a meeting, revising the list of codes observed from the data. The first round of coding compiled the three coders' codebook and simplified the discovered codes, providing a codebook for the second round. The second round included independently coding a new random sample of 100 posts from the entire sample with the revised list of codes and creating new codes if needed. A total of 200 posts were coded across three researchers to establish the codebook.

Disagreements were found among the researchers regarding what is classified as active engagement and an attraction experience. Other coding disagreements were found between posts of the icon or architectural design. Most disagreements were due to a need for knowledge of attractions, entertainment, and the park's structure at Walt Disney World.

The second round provided inter-coder reliability, reaching an acceptable Krippendorff alpha reliability of .77 (Krippendorff, 2004, 2011). After accuracy checking, the final codes were fully defined in a codebook and provided propositional rules (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), which can be found in the appendix. The data continued to be analyzed throughout the sample until completion. After establishing the rules, comparisons of all the categorized posts were evaluated to ensure they were coded correctly. Broad categories were defined to gather common elements (Memon et al., 2017). This process was furthered by combining categories into topics that are similar in meaning (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The codes were categorized with a frequency chart for each land and each park at Walt Disney World, as suggested by Memon et al. (2017). Cross analysis provided how each land in the Walt Disney World parks differs in main focus and sentiment.

Upon coding the data, the posts, direct URL, caption, and main topics were pinned on a GIS map overlaying the Walt Disney World parks for visual presentation purposes. A content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019) identified the frequency of derived main topics within each land and park, answering the first question of what emerging main topics are derived from the typical guest social media posts about Walt Disney World. Data was compared across each of the theme lands of the parks. For example, in Magic Kingdom, the main topics discovered in Tomorrowland, Fantasyland, and Frontierland were analyzed to discover how guests post in each land. This analysis answers research question two: How do typical guests' Instagram posts (photos, captions, reels) differ in terms of main topics across the different themed lands of Walt Disney World? Lastly, a frequency chart of sentiment was categorized per park and land within the park. Sentiment was compared across all four parks and across the lands in each park. This analysis answered research question three: How does sentiment differ regarding the main topics and themed lands within Walt Disney World?

3.5 Results

In 2023, there was a total of 1,767,277 Instagram posts mentioning the targeted keywords. June was the lowest month with a total of 61,915 public posts, which is much lower as compared to the other months with an upwards of 150k+ posts. The researcher analyzed 2,072 posts, which provided a .12% sample from the entire year.

The sample consisted of 2,072 pieces of media that were identified to their respective location within the Walt Disney World parks (Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Hollywood Studios, and Disney's Animal Kingdom) and the themed lands within the parks. Magic Kingdom had the highest number of posts with 830 pieces of media created within the park, accounting for 40% of the sample studied. The full distribution, along with the contributing percentages, is in Table 3.2.

Magic Kingdom	Epcot	Hollywood Studios	Animal Kingdom
830	649	361	232
40%	31%	17%	11%

Table 3.2 *Theme Park Frequency*
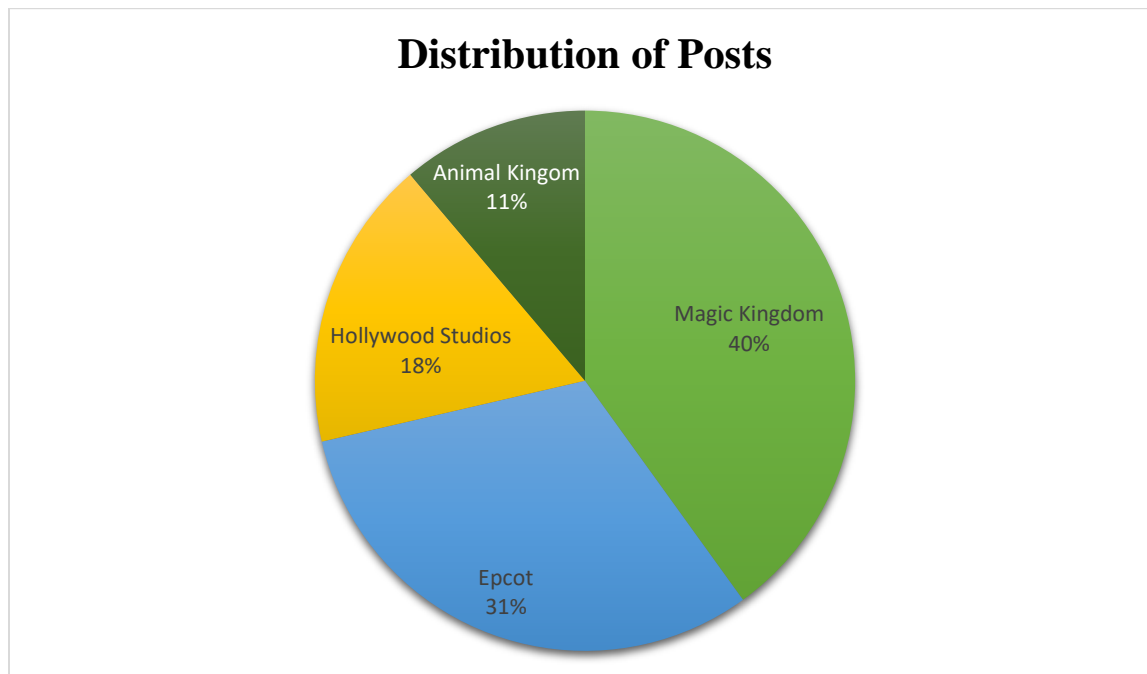
Figure 3.1 *Theme Park Frequency*

3.5.1 RQ1

Main topics of the guests' Instagram contributions

Eighteen codes were identified in the sample. The first twelve include attraction experience, character meet, entertainment, food/beverage/restaurant, scenery, icon, experience active engagement, architectural design, holiday/festival decorations, merchandise, misc., and informative signs. Four codes are similar in nature but are separated to identify one's individual experience in the park compared to a group's collective experience. These codes are self-photo, group-photo, self/icon, and group/ion. A self-photo classifies one's experience through a selfie or a posed photo where they are the main focus with the location as a backdrop for the photo. A group photo is a group of two or more people with the location as the backdrop of the photo. This is important to note as the social posting shares one's individual experience as a self-photo

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compared to a group's experience. Furthermore, the same separation was used to identify

self/icon and group/icon to account for the sharing of the individual or the group experience.

Self-photos with or without the icon are more posed, often drawing attention to their outfit, while

group photos are more native in the park context. Lastly, two codes focused on large and small

items that did not classify as an architectural building or scenery. These codes were classified as

large and small props. A full frequency chart is found in Table 3.3.

Main Topic	# of Posts	% of Total
Attraction Experience	292	14.1%
Character Meet	236	11.4%
Entertainment	223	10.8%
Food/Beverage/Restaurant	187	9.0%
Group-photo	146	7.0%
Self-photo	131	6.3%
Scenery	119	5.7%
Icon	110	5.3%
Experience Active Engagement	100	4.8%
Group/Icon	94	4.5%
Architectural Design	91	4.4%
Self/Icon	81	3.9%
Holiday/Festivals Decorations	81	3.9%
Merchandise	72	3.5%
Large Prop	42	2.0%
Small Prop	32	1.5%
Misc.	30	1.4%
Informative Sign	5	0.2%
Total	2072	100%

Table 3.3 *Distribution Across Codes*

Across the four parks, Magic Kingdom had 830 posts, with certain categories more

frequently found than others. In Magic Kingdom, 130 attraction experience posts and 158

entertainment posts were more frequent than others (Table 3.4). At Epcot, 103 posts were coded as food, beverages, or restaurants. Hollywood Studios had 65 attraction experience posts and 61 character meet posts. Hollywood Studios was also a frequent location for self-photos with 52 posts. Animal Kingdom had the lowest number of posts, with 230 posts, compared to the other parks, but the most prominent category was the attraction experience, with 53 posts (Table 3.4). If the group/icon and self-icon photos were combined in each park, the totals would still not be the most frequent main topic in either park.

| | | Theme Park | | | Count of Posts Per Cate |
Main Topic	Magic Kingdom	Epcot	Hollywood Studios	Animal Kingdom	1 158
Architectual Design	32	21	15	23	
Attraction Experience	130	44	65	53	
Character Meet	93	72	61	10	
Entertainment	158	37	17	11	
Experience Active Engagement	48	43	7	2	
Food/Beverage/Restaurant	35	103	41	8	
Group-photo	31	60	33	22	
Group/Icon	51	17	7	19	
Holiday/Festivals Decorations	26	43	5	7	
Icon	55	39	2	14	
Informative Sign	1	4			
Large Prop	2	19	16	5	
Merchandise	27	31	14		
Misc.	1	20	1	8	
Scenery	38	38	19	24	
Self-photo	38	31	52	10	
Self/Icon	51	21	2	7	
Small Prop	13	6	6	7	

Table 3.4 *Distribution of Main Topics Across Parks*

The top three themes across all four parks were attraction experience, character meet, and entertainment, which accounted for 36% of all posts sampled. These three categories were found with >200 posts each and were considered top contributors in this analysis and investigated

further in the geospatial map. As seen in Table 3.5, the primary locations of the attraction

experience showcase the most popular attractions shared from each Magic Kingdom in

accordance with the colored circle. These locations found high frequency posting behavior found

through binning the geospatial points of the posts on ArcGIS.
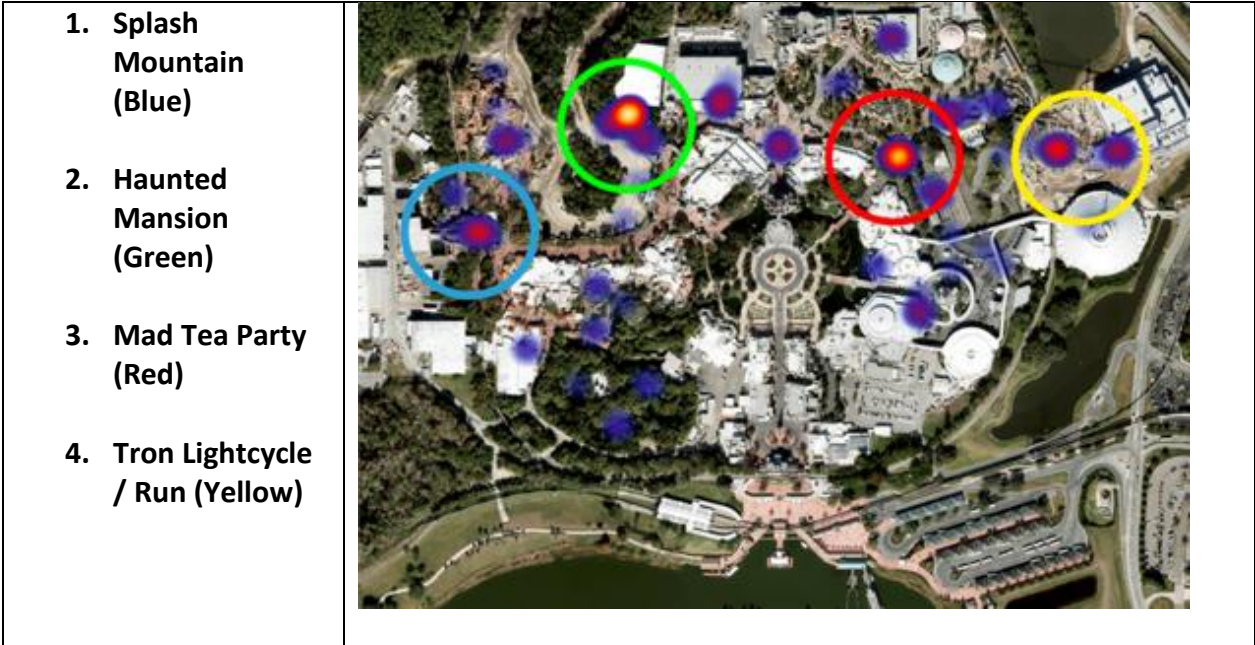
Table 3.5 *Attraction Experience Hotspots at Magic Kingdom*

To illustrate the differences between the parks, further analysis of the frequently posted

areas (hotspots) provides a further understanding of park behavior. Magic Kingdom had a total

of 64 posts regarding attraction experiences within the four hotspots (Table 3.5), with a total of

130 attraction experience posts in the park. Epcot had 21 attraction experience posts within the

three attraction hotspots (Table 3.6), with a total of 44 attraction experience posts. The two

attraction experience hotspots at Hollywood Studios had a total of 38 attraction experience posts,

with a total of 65 similar-coded posts throughout the park. Lastly, Disney's Animal Kingdom

had a total of 24 posts within the two attraction experience hotspots in the park, with a total of 53

attraction experience posts throughout this park. A full breakdown of the attraction experience

hotspots can be found in Table 3.6. Contribution is calculated as the specific location of all coded

posts across four parks. The hotspots identified are 53% of all attraction experience posts across

the four parks.

Park	Attraction	# of Posts	% Contribution
Magic Kingdom	Splash Mountain	10	3%
Magic Kingdom	Haunted Mansion	25	9%
Magic Kingdom	Mad Tea Party	14	5%
Magic Kingdom	Tron Lightcycle / Run	15	5%
Epcot	Journey Into Imagination With Figment	4	1%
Epcot	Guardians of the Galaxy : Cosmic Rewind	21	7%
Epcot	Frozen Ever After	4	1%
Hollywood Studios	Millennium Falcon : Smugglers Run	15	5%
Hollywood Studios	Star Wars : Rise of the Resistance	23	8%
Disney's Animal Kingdom	Avatar Flight of Passage	6	2%
Disney's Animal Kingdom	Kilimanjaro Safari	18	6%
Total		155	53%

Table 3.6 *Frequency of Attraction Experiences*

The second highest code was categorized as character meet, with a total 236 posts. In a

similar method, binning the density of character meet posts was used in ArcGIS to identify the

hotspots of the specific main topic places in the park. The hotspots do not account for all

character meets but only highlight the hotspots within the park that character meets are most

frequent.

Further analysis of the frequently posted areas (hotspots) provides specific insights into

character meet locations. Magic Kingdom had a total of 58 posts regarding character meets

within the four hotspots, with 93 total posts categorized as character meets across the park. Epcot

had 15 posts coded as character meets within the two hotspots, with a park total of 72 character

meet posts. The two hotspots at Hollywood Studios had a total of 28 posts coded as character

meet, with the park total of 61 posts. Star Wars Galaxy's Edge was the hotspot due to the entire

land filled with characters walking around, providing frequent opportunities for guests to engage

and take photos or videos of character meets. Lastly, Disney's Animal Kingdom had a total of

six character meet posts within the two hotspots in the park, with ten posts across the entire park.

A full breakdown can be found in Table 3.7. Contribution is calculated as the specific towards all

coded posts across four parks. The hotspots found consist of 45% of the full character meet posts

across all parks.

Park	Attraction	# of Posts	% Contribution
Magic Kingdom	Pete's Silly Sideshow	11	5%
Magic Kingdom	Princess Fairytale Hall	15	6%
Magic Kingdom	Crystal Palace	14	6%
Magic Kingdom	Town Square Theatre	18	8%
Epcot	Royal Sommerhaus	8	3%
Epcot	American Pavilion	7	3%
Hollywood Studios	Star Wars Launch Bay	9	4%
Hollywood Studios	Star War's Galaxy's Edge	19	8%
Disney's Animal Kingdom	Tusker House Restaurant	2	1%
Disney's Animal Kingdom	DinoLand USA Characters	4	2%
Total		107	45%

Table 3.7 *Frequency of Character Meets*

Lastly, entertainment was the third category that contributed the most to the four parks.

This category includes stage shows, fireworks, and performers found across the various themed

lands. A total of 223 posts were found across the four parks. ArcGIS geospatial locations will not

be shared here due to most entertainment posts being found at Magic Kingdom. Magic Kingdom

had a total of 158 entertainment posts, followed by Epcot (37), Hollywood Studios (17), and

Disney's Animal Kingdom (11).

3.5.2 RQ2

How do guests' Instagram posts among guests differ in terms of main topics across the themed lands of Walt Disney World?

Across four parks, 2,072 posts were categorized into 18 categories. Each park has several themed lands, which were identified as the location of the posted media. This section will share the results park by park, finalizing with a comparison across all themed lands. Furthermore, geospatial data provides more detail about where the hotspots are within the most engaged themed land per park.

Magic Kingdom

Eight themed lands are identified within Magic Kingdom. This park had 830 posts categorized into 18 themes. Themed lands were identified using the map of Magic Kingdom as a guide. The Magic Kingdom Hub is located at the center of the park, providing entry into five different themed lands. Boundaries of certain themed lands were established by identifying the borders of themed attractions.

The Magic Kingdom Hub and Main Street, U.S.A. were the areas with the most postings. A total of 438 posts were found across the two themed lands (Magic Kingdom Hub & Main Street, U.S.A.). The lowest posted themed lands were Adventureland and the entrance to Magic Kingdom. The totals of posts and the corresponding themed land are found in Table 3.8.

Themed Land	# of Posts	% of Contribution
Magic Kingdom Hub	223	27%
Main Street, U.S.A.	215	26%
Fantasyland	145	17%
Tomorrowland	67	8%
Liberty Square	65	8%
Frontierland	56	7%
Adventureland	32	4%
Entrance – Magic Kingdom	27	3%
Total	830	100%

Table 3.8 *Themed Lands # of Posts – Magic Kingdom*

A distribution chart across main topics and themed lands is provided in Table 3.9. The darker the color, the more frequently the main topic (column) was found in the themed land (row). This section will identify the most prominent main topics in each area. Main Street, U.S.A., had 69 posts that were entertainment focused. The Magic Kingdom Hub area had 58 entertainment posts. Both areas total 80% of the entire park's entertainment posts. Tomorrowland's highest main topic was attraction experience, with 32 posts. Fantasyland's highest main topics were character meets and attraction experiences, with 43 and 41, respectively. Liberty Square's highest topic was attraction experience with 24 posts. Lastly, Frontierland's and Adventureland's had 19 and 12 counts of attraction experiences, respectively. Furthermore, Frontierland had 15 posts coded as entertainment. Cinderella's Castle, which is the icon of the Magic Kingdom, was a frequently posted topic. Combining the topics self/icon, icon, and group/icon, guests posted 106 times from Magic Kingdom Hub alone, accounting for 13% of the entire park posts across categories. The main topics remain separated due to the difference in the focus of the pictures (self, group, or icon individually).

Main Topic

Themed Land	Entertainment	Character Meet	Attraction Experience	Self/Icon	Icon	Group/Icon	Experience Active Engagement	Food/Beverage/ Restaurant	Small Prop	Group-photo	Self-photo	Scenery	Architectural Design	Holiday/ Festivals Decorations	Misc.	Merchandise	Large Prop	Informative Sign
Entrance – Magic Kingdom							5			9	2	5	5	1				
Main Street, U.S.A	69	22		12	11	10	8	12	2	7	8	11	4	21		17		1
Magic Kingdom Hub	58	14	2	37	36	33	11	8	7	4	3	3	3	2	1	1		
Tomorrowland	6	2	32			2	2	2		4	5	6	5	1				
Fantasyland	5	43	41	2	7	3	15	2	3		11	2	9	1			1	
Liberty Square	4	2	24		1	2	2	6		1	6	7	1			9		
Frontierland	15	3	19			1	3	1	1	5	1	4	2				1	
Adventureland	1	7	12				2	4		1	2		3					

Magic Kingdom
1   6

Table 3.9 *Distribution of Main Topics Across Themed Lands – Magic Kingdom*

As seen in Table 3.9 attraction experience is widely distributed across the park, only representing 130 posts, contributing 16% of the posts within Magic Kingdom. Attraction experience is the prominent topic in four of the themed lands (Tomorrowland, Liberty Square, Frontierland, and Adventureland). As seen in the geo-spatial map (Image 3.1), entertainment is highly concentrated across Magic Kingdom Hub and Main Street, U.S.A.

Image 3.1 *Main Topics Across Magic Kingdom*

Epcot

Epcot has eighteen themed lands identified and one entrance classified as a land on the map. This park had 649 posts categorized into 18 themes. Themed lands were identified by using the map of Epcot map as a guide. This park includes the World Showcase, a collective of country-specific themed lands surrounding the large body of water at the park's lower center.

World Celebration was found to be the area with the most postings. A total of 116 posts were found across World Celebration, contributing 18% of the entire park's posts. This area is the location of Spaceship Earth, which is a combination of the park's icon and an attraction. The entrance to this area also provides unique self and group photo opportunities. In the world showcase, the France-themed land had a higher frequency of posts (49 posts) compared to all the other countries. The totals of posts and the corresponding themed land are found in Table 3.10.

Themed Land	# of Posts	% of Contribution
World Celebration	116	18%
World Nature	89	14%

World Discovery	70	11%
France	49	8%
World Showcase Entrance	45	7%
The American Adventure	42	6%
Germany	33	5%
China	31	5%
Italy	26	4%
Norway	24	4%
United Kingdom	23	4%
Canada	20	3%
Japan	18	3%
Imagination Pavilion	17	3%
Mexico	17	3%
Morocco	9	1%
International Gateway	8	1%
Entrance – Epcot	6	1%
Outpost	6	1%
Total	649	100%

Table 3.10 *Themed Lands # of Posts – Epcot*

A distribution chart across main topics and themed lands at Epcot is provided in Table 3.11. The darker the color, the more frequently the topic (column) was found in the themed land (row). This section will identify the most prominent main topics in each area. World Celebration was a highly posted location with the most frequent topic as Icon with 29 posts, followed by group/icon and self/icon posts. World Nature was a frequent location for experience active engagement with 17 posts and 16 miscellaneous posts, which mostly included posts of aquatic animals in Sea Base, Epcot's aquarium experience. Attraction experience was the most common main topic in World Discovery. This themed land includes the newest attraction in the park, Guardians of the Galaxy : Cosmic Rewind. As seen in Table 3.4, Epcot had a total of 103 food, beverage, or restaurant posts. This is due to the ongoing festivals and themed food booths around the park. A high concentration of food booths is found at the World Showcase Entrance, which

has a posting frequency of 18 food-related posts. The American Adventure's highest main topic was entertainment, which was found to be 22 posts. Lastly, China was a frequent location for merchandise compared to other themed lands.

Main Topic — Epcot (color scale 1 – 29)

Themed Land	Icon	Group/Icon	Self/Icon	Holiday/Festivals Dec..	Scenery	Merchandise	Experience Active Engag..	Group-photo	Food/Beverage/Re..	Entertainment	Character Meet	Self-photo	Small Prop	Misc.	Informative Sign	Attraction Experience	Architectual Design	Large Prop
World Celebration	29	14	11	10	8	8	8	5	5	5	4	3	2	1	1	1	1	
World Nature	3	1		7	9		17	4	5		8	5		16	1	7	4	2
International Gatew..	3			2				1		1	1							
World Discovery	1			1	1	2	6	9	8		3	5				25	2	7
Italy	1		8	1	1			1	3	6	2	2						1
Imagination Pavilion	1			1		1	4				7					3		
Entrance - Epcot	1											4						
World Showcase En..				8	2			2	18	3	6	5						1
United Kingdom				5	3			1	2		3		3				3	
The American Adve..							1	3	7	22	7				2			
Outpost					1				5									
Norway			1					1	4	2	2	8				4	1	1
Morocco					3		1	1	2		2							
Mexico			1		2		1	2	3	1	3					2	2	
Japan								5	6	1	1			1				4
Germany		1		1	5	1		2	11		7	2			1		1	1
France		1	1	5	3		2	7	10	2	6	3				2	6	1
China						18		3	3		4	1	1					1
Canada				1				7	9			1			1		1	

Table 3.11 *Distribution of Main Topics Across Themed Lands – Epcot*

The geospatial map in Image 3.2 provides an illustrative representation of where the main topics derive from. As mentioned, the 103 food-related posts can be identified from around the park as illustrated in the light green symbols, particularly around the World Showcase. Food-related posts are the main theme that emerges out of this park. In addition, the posts categorized as Icon can be seen in the center of the map in the World Celebration land. Lastly, the attraction experience posts can be identified further as the geo-spatial location, which is located at the newest attraction, Guardians of the Galaxy : Cosmic Rewind, compared to the two other attractions in this specific themed land.

Main Theme Coded
- Attraction Experience
- Character Meet
- Entertainment
- Food/Beverage/Restaurant
- Group-photo
- Self photo
- Scenery
- Icon
- Experience Active Engagement
- Group/Icon
- Other
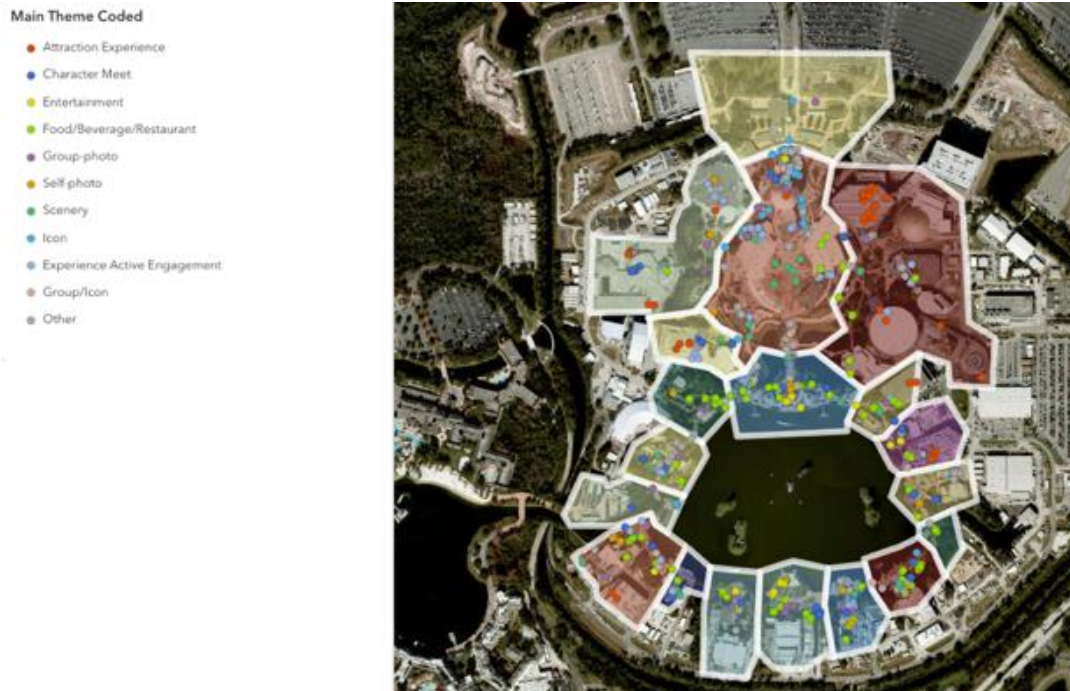
Image 3.2 *Main Topics Across Epcot*

Hollywood Studios

Hollywood Studios has eight themed lands and one entrance that is classified as land on the map. This park had 361 posts categorized into 18 themes. Themed lands were identified by using the map of Hollywood Studios map as a guide. This park includes two of the newer themed lands, Toy Story Land and Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge, which opened in 2018 and 2019, respectively.

Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge contributed toward 52% of all Hollywood Studios postings, with a total of 188 posts. This area provides a combination of character meets, attractions, large props, small props, and experience active engagement that provides frequent media creation opportunities. Toy Story Land had 49 posts, followed by Hollywood Boulevard (38 posts) and Sunset Boulevard (32 posts) (Table 3.21). The two most recent additions to Hollywood Studios are the themed lands with the highest number of posts.

Themed Land	# of Posts	% of Contribution
Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge	188	52%
Toy Story Land	49	14%
Hollywood Boulevard	38	11%
Sunset Boulevard	32	9%
Echo Lake	22	6%
Animation Courtyard	14	4%
Commissary Lane	9	2%
Pixar Plaza	5	1%
Entrance – Hollywood Studios	2	1%
Grand Avenue	2	1%
Total	361	100%

Table 3.12 *Themed Lands # of Posts – Hollywood Studios*

Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge has two common main topics: attraction experience with 38 posts and self-photo with 35 posts. This themed land is followed by highly posted character meet (32) and food-related posts (24). Toy Story Land has a high number of posts on attraction experience, with 17 posts. Furthermore, Animation Courtyard and Hollywood Boulevard have lower posting frequencies within the themed lands. The emerging topic in Animation Courtyard is the character meet, totaling nine posts. Hollywood Boulevard's most frequent main topic is nine merchandise posts. Echo Lake has the highest frequency of character meets with six posts. Lastly, Sunset Boulevard's highest main topics are self-photo and architectural design, with seven posts on each topic (Table 3.13).

Themed Land	Architectural Design	Attraction Experience	Character Meet	Entertainment	Experience Active Engagement	Food/Beverage/Restaurant	Group-photo	Group/Icon	Holiday/Festivals Decorations	Icon	Large Prop	Merchandise	Misc.	Scenery	Self-photo	Self/Icon	Small Prop
Animation Courtyard	1	1	9												3		
Commissary Lane			2			6		1									
Echo Lake		1	6	4			3		3		1	1		1			2
Entrance - Hollywood Studios	1				1												
Grand Avenue							1								1		
Hollywood Boulevard	3	3	3	3		3	2	5	1	1		9		1	2	2	
Pixar Plaza			4				1										
Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge	2	38	32	2	5	24	16	1			12	4	1	13	35		3
Sunset Boulevard	7	5	1	5		1	5							1	7		
Toy Story Land	1	17	4	3	1	6	6				3			3	4		1

Table 3.13 *Distribution of Main Topics Across Themed Lands – Hollywood Studios*

The geospatial map is provided in Image 3.3 to illustrate the frequencies of the codes in their respective locations. As seen in Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge (bottom of the map) and Toy Story Land (above Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge), there is a high amount of attraction experience posts in the themed lands. The most frequently posted attraction in Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge was Rise of the Resistance, as noted by the group of red symbols in that area (near the bottom center). Toy Story Land had a large posting from Slinky Dog Dash (far left red cluster). The map also shows the distribution of character meet posts across Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge, Toy Story Land, and Animation Courtyard. While the Animation Courtyard has a large meet-and-greet area with characters, a large frequency of character meet posts was found with Star Wars characters, which are found in the Star Wars Launch Bay in the Animation Courtyard.

Image 3.3 *Main Topics Across Hollywood Studios*

Animal Kingdom

Lastly, Disney's Animal Kingdom has seven themed lands identified and one entrance classified as a land on the map. This park had 232 posts categorized into 18 themes. Themed lands were identified using Disney's Animal Kingdom map as a guide. This park includes Pandora – World of Avatar, which opened in 2017. This themed land is home to two attractions that are popular with the park experience. Furthermore, this park has Kilimanjaro Safaris in the Africa-themed land, which can be seen in the large red section of the map.

Unlike Hollywood Studios, the newest themed land in this park was not the leading theme land of post frequency. Discovery Island, which is the location of the icon of the park, Tree of Life, was the main location with 55 posts, contributing to 24% of the total posts. Africa had 54 posts, contributing 21%, and Pandora – World of Avatar had 48 posts, contributing 21% to the entire park posts. A full breakdown of each themed land and contribution can be found in Table 3.14.

Themed Land	# of Posts	% of Contribution
Discovery Island	55	24%
Africa	54	23%
Pandora – World of Avatar	48	21%
Asia	37	16%
Entrance – Animal Kingdom	16	7%
DinoLand U.S.A.	15	6%
Oasis	6	2.5%
Discovery River	1	.5%
Total	232	100%

Table 3.14 *Themed Lands # of Posts – Animal Kingdom*

Within Discovery Island, 19 posts were found to be a group/icon photo, and 12 were icon photos. The most common main topic within the park was attraction experience posts. Africa had a total of 30 attraction experience posts, contributing 13% to the entire park's posts. Pandora – World of Avatar's emerging theme was scenery with 19 posts. This area is a scenic area where guests were sharing wide-angle media to capture the vastness and landscapes of the area. The other lands in the area were scattered across the main topics (Table 3.15).

Animal Kingdom Frequency

Themed Land	Architectural Design	Attraction Experience	Character Meet	Entertainment	Experience Active Engagement	Food/ Beverage/ Restaurant	Group-photo	Group/Icon	Holiday/ Festivals Decorations	Icon	Large Prop	Misc.	Scenery	Self-photo	Self/Icon	Small Prop
Africa	1	30	2	4	1	2	4					3	2	4		
Asia	6	8		2		1	5			3	1	4	1	2	1	3
Dinoland U.S.A	2	4	5			1	2				1					
Discovery Island	6		2	4		1		19	3	12	1				6	1
Discovery River			1													
Entrance - Animal Kingdom	6			1		1	4		4							
Oasis							3					1	2			
Pandora - World of Avatar	2	11			1	2	4				2		19	4		3

Table 3.15 *Distribution of Main Topics Across Disney's Animal Kingdom*

Africa is the most frequent location of attraction experience posts, as Kilimanjaro Safari is a popular attraction spanning a large portion of the park real estate (Image 3.4). Attraction Experience posts can be found across the major attractions such as Expedition Everest, Dinosaur, and Avatar – Flight of Passage. In Pandora – World of Avatar, Scenery posts can be seen scattered throughout the land, not centralizing to one location. These are the most posted attractions from within the park and within the themed lands.

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Image 3.4 *Main Topics Across Disney's Animal Kingdom*

3.5.3 RQ3

How does sentiment differ in social media contributions/posts on Instagram across main topics and themed lands within Walt Disney World parks?

Out of 2,072 posts, the analysis found 1,186 positive posts, 844 neutral posts, and 42 negative posts. See the full breakdown according to each park in Table 3.16. Disney's Animal Kingdom did not have negative posts within the sample collected. Each post's media and caption were evaluated to identify emotional words referencing positive or negative sentiment. A large percentage of posts did not include any sentences in the captions or had audio in the media; rather, they used a long list of hashtags. These posts were categorized as neutral.

	Magic Kingdom	Epcot	Hollywood Studios	Animal Kingdom
Positive	557	282	207	140
Neutral	245	358	149	92
Negative	28	9	5	-

Table 3.16 *Sentiment Across Walt Disney World Parks*

Magic Kingdom had 557 positive posts and 28 posts coded with negative sentiment. Liberty Square had the highest frequency of negative posts (Table 3.17). Sentiment was coded individually by the researcher through identifying positive and negative keywords, along with the media attached. All negative posts were not truly negative; they were only negative through the keywords identified. Certain posts mentioned negative reactions about stormy weather but still made the most out of the day. Other posts mentioned the excitement of a new attraction but said that they would miss the old attraction. Lastly, users posted that they miss working in the parks or that they miss meeting certain characters, but they are still excited about new characters in the park. Most negative posts were found on one side of the park, but several can be found in localized areas due to carousels or cards in the Instagram media format. Positive sentiment is found across the park, but with high frequency within the Magic Kingdom Hub and Main Street, U.S.A., where guests post icon, group/icon, and self/icon photos.

	Positive	**Neutral**	**Negative**
Magic Kingdom Hub	172	49	2
Main Street, U.S.A.	153	59	3
Fantasyland	92	51	2
Tomorrowland	46	20	1
Frontierland	41	8	7
Entrance – Magic Kingdom	20	5	2
Adventureland	18	14	-
Liberty Square	15	39	11

Table 3.17 *Sentiment Across Magic Kingdom*

Epcot had 282 positive posts and nine negative posts. World Celebration had a total of 55 positive posts (Table 3.18). France had one negative post. World Showcase Entrance had seven negative posts, followed by Imagination Pavilion with one negative post. Similarly to Magic Kingdom, the negative posts are not negative but include keywords that are negative in connotation. For example, one post mentioned that they are sorry they can't attend plans with friends, but they will be going to the theme parks instead. Another post mentioned asking if a hug from Mickey Mouse could help them feel better about the ticket price. Positive sentiment posts were scattered across the themed lands, with a high concentration at World Celebration, in front of Spaceship Earth. This location is where guests take icon, self/icon, self-photos, group-photo, and group/icon photos.

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
World Celebration	55	61	-
France	29	19	1
World Discovery	26	44	-
World Nature	25	64	-
World Showcase Entrance	24	15	7
China	20	11	-
Italy	17	9	-
Canada	13	7	-
United Kingdom	12	11	-
Germany	12	21	-
Mexico	10	7	-
Norway	9	15	-
Japan	8	10	-
Entrance – Epcot	6	-	-
The American Adventure	5	37	-
Imagination Pavilion	5	11	1
Outpost	3	3	-
Morocco	3	6	-
International Gateway	-	8	-

Table 3.18 *Sentiment Across Epcot*

Hollywood Studios had 207 positive posts, 149 neutral posts, and five negative posts. Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge had 100 neutral posts and 85 positive posts (Table 3.19). Three of the negative posts were found in this area as well. One negative post mentioned their disappointment in their phone dying during their park experience. Another negative post mentioned the attraction breaking down. Other negative posts across the park included guests posting captions about being emotional, saying that they must go back to work or that they are missing an entertainment feature at the park.

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Star Wars : Galaxy's Edge	85	100	3
Toy Story Land	411	8	-
Hollywood Boulevard	27	10	1
Sunset Boulevard	23	8	1
Echo Lake	12	10	-
Commissary Lane	9	-	-
Animation Courtyard	6	8	-
Pixar Plaza	3	2	-
Grand Avenue	1	1	-
Entrance – Hollywood Studios	-	2	-

Table 3.19 *Sentiment Across Hollywood Studios*

Disney's Animal Kingdom had 140 positive posts and 92 neutral posts and did not have negative posts within the themed lands. Africa had 38 positive posts that were found throughout the Africa-themed land and across Kilimanjaro Safari. A full breakdown of themed lands and sentiments is found in Table 3.20. Clusters of positive posts are found at the entrance, in front of the icon, and in Pandora – World of Avatar.

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Africa	38	16	-
Pandora – World of Avatar	29	19	-
Discovery Island	23	32	-
Asia	21	16	-
Dinoland U.S.A.	13	2	-
Entrance – Animal Kingdom	12	4	-

Oasis	3	3	-
Discovery River	1	-	-

Table 3.20 *Sentiment Across Disney's Animal Kingdom*

In other metrics, 506 Mickey ears were identified in this research, with Magic Kingdom having 236 Mickey ears, Hollywood Studios with 167, and Epcot and Disney's Animal Kingdom <60. The engagement rate ranged from 10.7% - 3.9%, with the codes in respective order, Experience Active Engagement (10.7%), Self/Icon (8.1%), Self-Photo (7.2%), Merchandise (6.7%), Attraction Experience (6.2%), Group-photo (6%), Icon (5.4%), Architectural Design (5.4%), Misc. (4.7%), Food (4.7%), Scenery (4.7%), Large Prop (4.6%), Group/Icon (4.3%), Small Prop (4.1%), Holiday/Festival Decorations (4.1%), and Informative Sign (3.9%). Users who were not travel agents or had Disney-specific usernames had higher engagement rates across Epcot, Hollywood Studios, and Magic Kingdom.

3.6 Discussion

This research provided an image of what a guest may experience for each park and themed land. Magic Kingdom was symbolized by the entertainment in the park, which had the highest number of posts in the category. Food-related posts were most popular in Epcot. Attraction experience posts were most common in Hollywood Studios and Disney's Animal Kingdom. Frequent main topics on social media emerged through all themed lands. For example, entertainment was found on Main Street U.S.A, Magic Kingdom Hub, and The American Adventure. Character Meets were found at Fantasyland, Star Wars : Galaxy's Edge, and Animation Courtyard. Attraction Experiences were found at Fantasyland, Tomorrowland, Liberty Square, Frontierland, Adventureland, World Discovery, Africa, Star Wars : Galaxy's Edge, and Toy Story Land. Icon photos, which included self/icon, group/icon and icon photos

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were at the Magic Kingdom Hub, World Celebration, and Discovery Island. Experience Active

Engagement was found at World Nature. Food/Beverage/Restaurant posts were more popular at

World Showcase Entrance, Germany, France, and Star Wars : Galaxy's Edge. Merchandise was

found at China. Lastly, Scenery was found at Pandora – World of Avatar.

The majority of the posts in this research were classified as positive the identifying

emotional keywords. This supports the research of Park et al. (2020), where more posts in

Disneyland were found in the high arousal and pleasure quadrant. Limited research has sought to

understand the guests' digital behavior, where this research provides a methodology that can be

applied to future research.

3.7 Implications

There are a wide range of implications this data will impact in both academia and

industry. Within marketing, the content analysis discovered that guests want to show more of

their own unique experience within the park rather than the park itself. This can provide a

strategy for theme parks as they develop marketing material, providing guests' experience rather

than the features of the park. Guests post their attraction experience, which provides their point

of view and, at times, provides notoriety for accomplishing a high score on gamified games, such

as Toy Story Mania and Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin. Character meets are another

example of how guests show their own unique experiences at the parks, where every experience

is different. Furthermore, guests posted more with the icon through group/icon or self/icon posts

rather than the icon by itself. Guests should be included in all photos to showcase the experience

influencing park visitation. Even in several of the food-related posts, the media was of the action

of eating or drinking. The posts became a documentation of the guest's escape from the outside

world. The content shared online directly impacts the visitation intention of future guests. As

found in Wang et al. (2022), created social media posts influence the receiving user's intention to visit the theme park.

Furthermore, the engagement rate of the codes was calculated to identify the most engaged codes. Experience active engagement has a 10.7% engagement rate and self/icon has the second highest engagement rate at 8.1%. While other codes were prominent in frequency, the most engaged posts were not the most frequent. The top five highest engagement rate main topics had four topics where guests engaged with the experience in some way (Experience Active Engagement, Self/Icon, Self-Photo, Merchandise, Attraction Experience), while the last three topics were of scenic items (Small Prop, Holiday Decorations, Informative Decoration). Social media users engage with the posts where the posting user is involved in some way rather than the design or characteristics of buildings. Marketing could use this data to influence what the company posts and utilize geospatial data to identify familiar locations where guests commonly post.

Branding has direct implications by creating the commonly posted main topics as the identity of each themed land. Guests may go to certain parts of the parks because they have seen the frequent number of posts describing said attraction or food. The branding of the entire company is identified in this research, as the most frequent code provides guests with an example of what they can experience. Park operations are impacted by this research by identifying the most locations in the park. This would identify the highest concentrations of social media activity, which could result in the highest populated area. By deploying employees to hotspot locations, park operations can maintain crowd control and guest traffic flow.

The social media activity within the theme parks contributes to the understanding of E-leisure, as guests may flow into a leisure state of mind at any time through the contribution of

social media posts. This adds a new dimension as guests may already be in a leisurely state of mind during park experiences. Understanding the use of social media within an experience contributes to communication, tourism, and marketing literature, providing context to what social guests post within themed experiences. Applying theme park literature to this study, posts shared concepts that were mentioned previously that influenced guests' satisfaction, such as thrilling rides, escape (Lee et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2010), number of attractions visited, attraction satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2017), experiential quality (Wu et al., 2018), physical environment (Ali et al., 2018), access, and entertainment experiences (Milman et al., 2020). As guest satisfaction increases, revisit intention is impacted (Aziz et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2021).

3.8. Conclusion

This research sought to understand the behavior of guests who were posting at the Walt Disney World theme parks. There is a need to understand this content, main topics, and the location of the mentioned post to fully understand how and what is shared from the guests' social media posts as an extension of the experience. This research identified that parks have developed an identity of experience expectancy within the park and within each land. Magic Kingdom is a park for entertainment, while Epcot is a park for food. Hollywood Studios and Disney's Animal Kingdom are parks of attraction experiences. Furthermore, themed lands create an identity, such as how Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge has high frequencies of attraction experience posts and self-photos. These created posts display what a Walt Disney World trip experience is like. Sentiment across the parks was positive overall, with the negative posts being false negatives.

Limitations include the sampling timeframe, which only includes the year 2023. Posting behaviors differ year after year due to the popularity of attractions or characters. In addition, the

popularity of competing theme parks has a share of voice within the industry, pulling in guests who may have different posting behaviors. This research only focuses on four parks, and while vastly different, they are not representative of every theme park experience. The sample may also come from a younger generation as millennials spend more money on experiences and engage in certain platforms, like Instagram. Public profiles are gathered through this research, limiting the understanding of a large percentage of guests who post that have private profiles. This research only gathers posted content on Instagram, excluding Instagram stories that are only visible for 24 hours after the user uploads them. Positivity bias may occur in the posted social media activity where guests post positive videos of their experience seeking approval from their followers (Yau & Reich, 2019). The research only evaluates prominent platforms in the United States. The inclusion of other platforms that are popular with older generations or international audiences was not evaluated., such as Facebook or Weibo.

Future research should investigate the use of social media within theme parks through surveys and in-depth interviews. Future opportunities for research include time spent browsing theme park content, the type of theme park influencers followed, and the engagement with theme park companies' social posts. Lastly, future research should investigate how theme park social media content exposure impacts theme park trip planning.

CHAPTER 4

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONTENT CREATORS' SOCIAL MEDIA

CONTENT CREATION WITHIN A THEME PARK CONTEXT

4.1. Introduction

Social media influencers (henceforth, *influencers* and *content creators*[2]) has grown over the past decade, providing new opportunities for brands entering the market through influencer content providing product recommendations (Bansah et al., 2024; Drenik, 2023; Kim & Kim, 2022; Shee, 2023). Influencer partnership marketing channels are unique as they connect the target audience to the influencer through perceived friendship, loyalty towards the influencer, and psychological well-being (Kim & Kim, 2022). These connections between the influencer and the user (or follower) are unique to influencer marketing channels and are not found in other paid media. Endorsements and reviews from influencers impact companies by shaping the audience's perception of brands, products, and experiences (Freberg et al., 2011; Gorry & Westbrook, 2009).

During the consumer journey, there are multiple moments of brand exposure and digital experiences before making a purchase decision, known as multi-touch attribution (Geyik et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2014). As one encounters an influencer's posts or other media, it is one of many other digital touchpoints that lead to product purchasing (Geyik et al., 2014; Silva & Meyer, 2023; Zhang et al., 2014). Other points of the multi-touch attribution model may include a brand's social content, direct mail, or a paid advertisement.

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[2] The term "social media influencer," or influencer for short, has been predominant in past research and will be used in the literature review for this article. However, the participants in this research prefer to be called "content creators." Out of respect for reflecting their reality and language, this research will use the term "content creator" when describing the participants and their relationship within social media influencing.

Within the theme park context, the influencers' created content disseminated online plays an important part in the visit expectancy process and could lead to visit intention (Wang et al., 2022). Compared to the brand's typical channels, influencer content provides a further reach and is less expensive compared to typical marketing channels (Drenik, 2023; Shee, 2023). While brands' goals are established from influencer partnerships, it is essential to understand the influencers' perspective, including motivations and gratifications. As such, this study investigates influencers' motivations and gratifications for content creation in the theme park context, a topic that has not yet been explored. Understanding the influencers' content creation process and motivation is important as it plays a crucial role in online purchasing behavior.

This research is informed by a constructivist worldview to discover shared meaning, culture, and behavior (Fusch et al., 2017) among influencers and content creators. This research perspective reflects that language and other forms of communication construct shared knowledge. Realities are diverse and created between individuals' world interactions.

Limited research has studied the social media behavior of content creators within a theme park context. This research provides a unique perspective as it bridges the gap in knowledge between social media content creator behavior and theme park experiences. Thus, the research questions guiding this study are as follows:

RQ 1: How do the content creators identify themselves regarding their content generation and posting within the context of the theme parks**?**

RQ 2: What are the content creators' motivations for content generation and posting in the context of theme parks?

RQ 3: What gratifications do content creators receive from content generation and posting in the context of theme parks?

4.2 Literature Review

4.2.1 Social Media Influencers

The rise of influencers has transformed social media marketing, providing novel ways to connect with and engage audiences. Social media influencers are defined as "independent third-party endorsers who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and other social media platforms" (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 1). According to Morteo (2018) influencers are identified by the following/follower ratio and engagement rate of their account. Influencers contribute photos, text, or videos that can impact buying habits, behavioral norms, or actions of others (Freberg et al., 2011; Kim & Kim, 2022; Martineau, 2019; Vrontis et al., 2021). The influencers have gained perceived expertise in their field, providing advice on their specific endorsed topics (Masuda et al., 2022; Peng, 2023). For example, a fitness influencer may provide guidance on nutrition, exercise regimens, and more. Both positive endorsements and negative reviews can impact any company the influencer mentions (Freberg et al., 2011; Gorry & Westbrook, 2009).

The global influencer market grew exponentially from 1.7 billion to 13.8 billion between 2016 and 2021. Additionally, the United States influencer market grew from .9 billion to 3.7 billion within the same timeframe (Peng, 2023). Demographics are widespread with influencers, allowing people of all ages and all genders to become influencers if they find a connection and build trust with a specific audience. According to Global Web Index Influencer Marketing Report (2019), Instagram is the top platform to stay connected to influencers. Though there is no standard guide to becoming an influencer besides the requirements of posting and connection with the audience, the transition to influencer relies on whether the influencer can stand out and capture the audience's attention, leading to potential commercialization (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019). Influencers are defined by a variety of metrics, which makes it difficult to create a standard for

all influencers. Metrics of influencers include audience size, status, influence, practices and market values (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019). Cint Research identified that 53% of consumers look for influencers that align with personal values, with 47% of consumers looking for authenticity (*Influencer Marketing Report 2024*, 2024). Follower counts were not significant qualities for the large consumer body. However, 47% of Gen Z stated that follower count was an important quality, while 35% stated authenticity was important (*Influencer Marketing Report 2024*, 2024). Through constant posting, relatability with the audience, and authenticity, one may transition into influencer status as they meet the perceptions of trust, shared interest, and interaction with their audience.

Individuals perceive a personal relationship with guides (Horton and Wohl, 1956; Rubin 2002), which is modeled through followers obtaining similar perceptions with their online guides, also known as influencers (Tsai & Men, 2017). The relationship is due to shared interests, verbal and nonverbal cues, and interaction frequency between the follower and influencer (Bansah et al, 2024; Kim & Kim, 2022; Tsai & Men, 2017). Furthermore, the perception of friendship results in high levels of trust, personal network ties, and shared vision influencers develop with their followers (Cho, 2014; Jun et al., 2017; Son et al., 2016). The findings of Freberg et al. (2011) support that two major attributes of influencers were that they were turned to for advice and they gave advice.

Influencers create themselves as a brand, and as they accrue followers, they obtain the ability to shape culture (Kim et al., 2021) and impact consumer behavior (Chopra et al., 2021; Vrontis et al., 2021). As influencers promote brands, their followers may develop loyalty towards the promoted entity (Kim & Kim, 2022). It is essential to recognize that not all influencers affect consumer behavior at the same level, especially if they lack credibility in the

brand's specific domain (Ki & Kim, 2019). For example, an influencer who is a marathon runner has more influence in the running domain than someone who is known for being knowledgeable in the cooking domain. This is why influencers often focus on a niche or specialty domain where they build their identity and perception of expertise in that area (e.g., makeup, tools, humor).

Wiedmann et al., (2010) created a typography that provided further understanding of influencer classification. As they increase in social capital, they increase in social access to followers. Likewise, as they increase in individual capital, they increase in high personal motivation. A "Top Influential" has high social capital and high individual capital as they have social access to many and high personal motivation. They "actively offers well-founded referrals based on his knowledge and involvement." Morteo (2018) also identified profiles of the different types of influencers along with the main source of influence. For example, an opinion leader profile includes activists, analysts, and journalists, though leaders whose main source of influence is the reputation of their work. Further profiles and sources of influence include experts with organizational positions, consumers with their experiences, social media luminaries with their content quality, celebrities and their personalities, trendsetters and first-hand knowledge, blogger and their unbiased opinion, and potential influencers with high trust. As such, influencers focused on in this study are those that have established themselves as a certain type of theme park influencers: a Disney Influencer.

4.2.2 Theme Parks

Theme parks are physical locations that are intertwined with a story through a variety of experiences, including the characters, the attractions, shows, and the vernacular. (Bigné et al., 2005) As stated at the entrance to the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World, guests "enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow and fantasy," providing the theme of the entire park: A kingdom

where guests could embrace the fantasy of fairy tales or explore space and futuristic concepts in Tomorrowland. This concept of theming separates the theme park from amusement parks where there is not consistent theming through the guest experiences.

In 2022, the total attendance for North American theme parks reached 140.5 million guests, .2 million higher than the attendance of 104.8 million guests in 2021. Within the top 25 amusement/theme parks in the world, in 2022, Florida was the highest location in the United States, with 68.8 million guests across 6 parks. Compared to international theme parks, France's 2 parks held 15.3 million guests and Japan served 38.7 million guests across four parks. Florida remains the highest location of theme parks and the highest guest frequency (AECOM & TEA, 2023).

From a guest's perspective, theme parks provide moments of delight, relaxation, self-fulfillment, and gratification (Cabanas, 2020; Ma et al., 2013, 2017; Slåtten et al., 2009, 2011). Guests use theme parks as an opportunity for education opportunities and appreciation of the aesthetics of the park, leading to high satisfaction (Lee et al., 2020). For example, educational opportunities exist about animal conservation within the boundaries of Disney's Animal Kingdom. Furthermore, the appreciation of the environment within the theme park provides emotional satisfaction. Lastly, theme parks provide an escape from the real world, which leads to revisit intention (Lee et al., 2020).

4.2.3 Theoretical Background

The uses and gratifications theory (UGT) provides an underlying theory to this research, as it seeks to understand the psychological gratifications found within media use (Katz et al., 1973ab; Hossain et al., 2019). This theory provides an understanding of human needs and how mediums contribute to their own desired gratifications rather than how people use media (Katz et

al., 1973ab). Gratification is the fulfillment of the psychological need that individuals seek, regardless of media use (Cantril, 1942; Katz et al., 1973ab).

Stafford et al. (2004) established that UGT studies consist of three categories: content gratification, process gratification, and social gratification (Chen, 2011; Stafford et al., 2004). Process gratifications are met using the platform, such as surfing the web, while content gratifications are met through exposure to the medium, such as education and research (Alrajehi, 2016; Cutler & Danowski, 1980; Stafford et al., 2004). With the rise of social media platforms, social media gratifications provide new perspectives in UGT. Social media platforms' complex network and utility fulfill social gratifications, such as interactions with others (Stafford et al., 2004).

Certain social media platforms may provide more opportunities for different gratifications over others, based on their structure. For example, motivations of Facebook use may include habitual passing of time, relaxing entertainment, escapism, companionship, relieving boredom, distraction from stresses, creating social capital (Paracharissa & Mendelson, 2011). entertainment, communications, habitual diversion (Krause et al., 2014), interpersonal connection, self-expression, entertainment (Krause et al., 2014), passing time, showing affection, following fashion, sharing problems, demonstrating sociability, and improving social knowledge (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). X, formerly known as Twitter, can be used as private or professional to share content, providing information gathering, relaxation, and mobile accessibility (Lin & Rauschnabel, 2016; Johnson & Yang, 2009; Coursaris et. al., 2010). X also provides camaraderie, a connection between users through tweets and replies (Chen, 2011). Instagram can be used to share content with private or professional audiences (Lin & Rauschnabel, 2016) for the gratifications of self-expression, social interaction,

surveillance/knowledge, documentation, coolness, and creativity (Lee et al., 2015; Sheldon &

Bryant, 2016).

Identification of the social media platforms remains important but should not be the focus

of UGT studies. Much like earlier research, where the media would include radio, newspaper,

TV, or magazines, the emphasis was not on the media itself but on the desired gratification to be

fulfilled. Katz et al. (1973a) shared that media provided gratifications through books,

newspapers, and cinema, resulting in the author's discovery of radio, newspapers, and television

similarities in fulfilling the desire for information.

The UGT consists of both motivations and gratifications within the theory. Motivations at

external and internal factors that lead the individual to behave the way they do (An & Kerdpitak,

2023; Chavez et al., 2020; Davis et al., 1992). Gratifications are the psychological needs

individuals hope to fulfill through media use (Katz et al., 1973ab; Hossain et al., 2019). This

research aims to identify both the motivations and gratifications of the content creators,

discovering their shared meaning and behavior.

4.3 Methods

4.3.1 Sampling

Approval was obtained from IRB to facilitate in-depth interviews with content creators in

the theme park context. In the search for content creators, theme park reporters, podcasters, and

those who owned e-commerce/retail stores were all excluded from the selection. This removal

ensured that participants were not posting content to drive direct sales outside of the online

platform, which does not fit within the definition of an influencer as defined by Freberg et al.

(2011). Influencers were selected based on the number of followers, follower/following ratio,

and the level of engagement, which had to meet a minimum of 500-10,000 followers, with an

average follower ratio of 2:1 and a 25% - 50% engagement rate (Morteo, 2018). The potential

participants were contacted through Instagram or email to schedule a Zoom video interview. All

content creators were provided $25 for their time through a private Zelle/Venmo transaction.

Participants were selected through identification in an online article sharing the top 90

Disney influencers and the researcher's knowledge of content creators in the theme park culture.

The participants' follower counts were 2.3K, 10K, 12K, 52K, and 87K. Average engagement

rates across the five content creators ranged from 4% to 105%. Participants included two macro-

influencers and three micro-influencers. Macro-influencers are defined as having between 10,000

and 1 million followers and a 5-25% engagement rate. and micro-influencers have between 500

to 10,000 followers and a 25-50% engagement rate (Morteo, 2018). Theme park mega

influencers were not included, as very few can be identified. Two content creators are full-time,

making money from partnerships outside of Disney. For example, other companies, such as

theme parks or travel agencies, may pay the content creators in exchange for content about their

own company. The other three content creators have full-time jobs outside of creating content:

one is a vacation planner in the theme park industry, another is a social media director, and

another assists with content editing. The five participants included four white males and one

white female, ranging in age from 21 to 30 years old. Three content creators are single, one is

engaged, and one is married. Four of the five live near the Walt Disney World parks in Orlando,

Florida.

4.3.2 Data Collection Procedures

At the beginning of every interview, the influencers – who prefer to be referred to as content

creators – were informed of their rights as study participants, clearly describing what the

research sought to study. An interview guide was developed to answer the identified three

research questions. The following are examples of the questions asked. Do you have a childhood connection to the Walt Disney World parks? Do you plan out what media you will create when getting ready for your Walt Disney World visit? Would you call yourself an influencer, and why? What motivates you to post in general?

The interviews lasted an hour on average. They were recorded and transcribed through the Zoom transcription feature. The transcripts were evaluated to ensure accuracy and to make notes of inflections, behavior, and pauses. Further, member-checking was utilized as the transcriptions were sent to the participants to ensure further accuracy (Doyle, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). All transcripts were uploaded to NVivo 14.

4.3.3 Coding Process

After transcripts were uploaded to NVivo 14, the data underwent a thematic analysis that began with inductive coding, then refinement of codes, and then the development of themes (Saldaña, 2021).

First, data went through a familiarization round of 'pre-coding' (Saldaña, 2021). During this coding round, the researcher read all the interviews to familiarize themselves with the data. The second round was open coding, where the researcher started to identify concepts and ideas from transcript quotes related to the study's objectives but was purposefully approached to remain open to any direction the data might move the researcher (Charmaz, 2006). The third round was focused coding, where the researcher compared the quotes to start combining codes from statements. A final round of thematic coding occurred as the codes were grouped into four themes (Hahn, 2008). In sum, the analysis generated 11 codes and 17 subcodes; the codes were categorized into four themes.

4.4 Findings

The analysis identified four themes: *content creator identity, creation process, motivations*, and *gratifications*.

The content creator identity theme included the discussion about conflicting identities where the content creators battled with the identifying term and realization of being called an influencer. They also expanded on their fandom of the park. In addition, the negative aspects of being a content creator were identified. The creation process included how the content creator planned the topics they would discuss, verifying authenticity and credibility for their own targeted audience. Motivations include the goals the content creator seeks to achieve in addition to their desire to obtain frequent and positive engagement from their followers, hoping for a sense of community. Lastly, gratifications include creating content and connecting to the park by assisting guests or the company.

4.4.1 Content Creator Identity

The participants in this study discussed their identity as content creator, including conflicting thoughts on using the term "influencer," their deep connection to the park, and some negative aspects of being a content creator and a public figure. All participants in this study were hesitant to label themselves as an influencer due to the negative connotation this term acquired over the years. For example, Participant 1 stated:

> *I view myself more as a content creator because I feel like there's a lot of influencers, there's a lot of bad around the word influencer. And I just like to view myself as someone who creates content.*

Another content creator (Participant 3) explained:

I don't consider myself an influencer as in I'm not trying to promote like a specific

product of like, Oh my goodness, look, this is this lipstick and it's like my favorite thing.

Lastly, Participant 2 did not want to be called an influencer or a content creator.

And I don't want to really call myself an influencer… I don't think the word, the term

content creator is that great of a term either? I like being, like, Oh, I'm a, I'm a

video[maker]. I make videos like that's really it. Cause I don't take photos. I don't. The

content or the influencer thing is very associated with photos and like posing for a thing.

Interestingly, despite disliking the label of an influencer, the participants continued to

discuss that they do influence people, create influencing content, and desire the benefits of

influencer partnerships. As Participant 3 explained:

I'll get you know, DM's [direct messages] or messages or comments and saying like 'hey,

I tried this out. You know, on my last trip, I tried your tip out, and thank you so much.'

As a part of their identity as a content creator, each participant discussed a *deep*

connection to the park that started in their childhood. This connection to the theme parks

influenced the way they approached their content creation. Participant 1 explained further:

I just have loved Disney since I was a kid, and it's kind of turned into this, you know,

content creation now. But my dad took me on into [It's A] Small World [ride] when I was

two, out of Disneyland. We were staying at Grand Californian and I kind of tie

everything back to that.

Participant 4 discussed their countless trips to the parks:

My parents went to Disney World on their honeymoon. I went to Disney World starting at

like two months old, and it's been that repeat, that same pattern over and over again with

my family.

The connection expanded from their own childhood memories into other types of connection with the parks. The participants shared about family members who worked for the company and their experiences as former employees or participants of the college program. Participant 3 shared about their experience in the college program:

My aunt who had worked for Disney for 35 plus years. She was like, Hey, would you be interested [in the college program]? ...And I was like, no, she hit me on my sophomore year. I said, no, I'm not going to do it. And then one of my buddies did it, and he came back, and he was like dude, he was like, it was the most fun I've ever had.

The parks hold sentimental value with the content creators. They are not only content creators but also fans of the theme park at the center of their created content. Their deep knowledge of the history of the products and the parks themselves, the development of particular attractions, and even the work of individual Imagineers was a result of life-long connection and fandom of the theme parks, which eventually inspired them to share acquired information with others. Participant 4 explained:

We are a Disney family. Social media just happened to be an addition on top of that. But at first, I am a fan.

Participant 1 further explained their love for a specific Imagineer's work within Hollywood Studios:

I get emotional attachments to these attractions before they open, just following all the little details. And Kevin Rafferty is one of my favorite Imagineers, and he worked on McKinley's Runaway Railway. He's pretty much had a part in everything at Hollywood Studios. So, I've, I love that attraction just because of like the vibe it has.

As proof of their deep connection to the parks, the content creators in this study discussed that these spaces are often visited by them during their leisure time to hang out with friends, experience their favorite attractions, and experience a sense of community, where they can connect with other content creators and followers. Participant 1 stated:

I can only go to the park so many times to go on rides, but the things like getting to talk to people who were there and meeting people is the unique thing that kind of stands out with me.

Participant 3 shared that they will go to a park to try a new attraction, food, entertainment, or simply relax:

Sunset Boulevard is my favorite just because of the atmosphere, the music playing, just, you know, sometimes I'll just go sit out there and go sit on one of the benches and just, you know, people watch, get a snack, get a drink, and just, you know, hang out.

Despite multiple benefits of content creating, the participants of this study discussed some *negative aspects* to being a public figure. Too much time on technology, the desire to create the best content possible, criticism and negative comments, and the attention they receive while visiting the parks are some of the challenges discussed by the participants. For example, Participant 1 shared:

I think just being on social media so much, quite honestly, like I'm always on my phone, which I'm doing for the right reason, but I also don't love being on my phone nonstop.

Participant 5 explained how they can't go to the park like all the other guests:

The downside being is that I cannot go to the park with my family the same way as I used to. I'm too recognizable, like… which is so funny… My family actually currently is trying

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> *to think of ways of how we can go to the park and enjoy the parks like normal, without me*
>
> *getting stopped all the time.*

Participant 2 also experienced recognition but through an experience where they noticed from a distance that people were following them around the park. They did not feel threatened but did feel uncomfortable at the presence of the individuals:

> *I've had some people follow me around the parks before for hours at a time. And it's very*
>
> *obvious. ... but luckily, I'm in a position where that doesn't happen very often.*

The content creators have dealt with rude comments and feedback on their videos. When the content goes viral, expanding to a larger audience than just the theme park community, comments may include more negative feedback. Participant 1 shared:

> *When I hit certain audiences and stuff like that, I have to be aware that I'm going to get a*
>
> *lot of mean comments.*

Participant 2 further explained:

> *Sometimes negative comments or, you know, negative direct messages can kind of get to*
>
> *you. Like I said, I just kind of try to ignore those if they're not anything serious.*

The act of creating content and sharing it online often made participants in this study nervous about the responses they may receive from their audience and people around them. For example, Participant 2 shared:

> *Although I've been on camera consistently for three years talking, filming something in a*
>
> *very public place, even if it's happening all over the place, even if these people that came*
>
> *into the parks have seen eight other influencers doing the same thing, it still is different*
>
> *from sitting in front of a computer in my office.*

Participant 4 explained:

I actually get really worried of, nervous of, like, Oh, are people going to accept this

information?

Participant 5 shared that their stress came from a blurred line between real life and content creation. They felt pressure to make content, which took away from their theme park experience.

…All the pressures that you don't see, but that like just fills the brain, and you're like, I

got to post, I got to post, but you really don't enter real life into like, Oh, could this be for

content?

Participant 3 also shared that the act of creating content can be stressful due to the desire to produce something of interest to others and having to adjust based on the practical limitations:

But actually doing it (creating content) can be sometimes stressful because things might

not go according as planned as you had in your head when you're going to film a video

or something like that.

4.4.2 Creation Process

The participants shared the process of content creation, discussing how they get inspired, make decisions about the topics, implement step-by-step processes, and ensure authenticity and uniqueness of their content to connect with the targeted audience. Regarding the *topics covered* in the created content, the participants aimed to present their unique perspectives that reach their own respective target audiences. The content from the content creators' social media was not similar in style but similar in content. Participant 1 shared that their dad *"always talks about how there's so many radio stations… so it's like us creators. It's like a radio station. Everyone is going to tune into who they want to tune into."* The variety of styles provides opportunities to learn from their favorite content creator's personalities or storytelling methods.

Inspiration for content derives from the activities within the park, such as new attractions, food offerings, or attractions closing. For example, Participant 3 shared that new experiences guided their content:

> *So for Magic Kingdom, it typically has to be something new going on there. So obviously, with Tiana's opening up, that's going to be a big, big thing coming up soon.*

Participant 4 shared historical facts about items, attractions, merchandise, and the company in general. Participant 4 explained:

> *I know something about that plate up there. Maybe I'll film something about that plate up there and I'll just film the video real quick.*

The participants also discussed that their *creative process* consisted of a combination of strategic planning and spontaneous creative experiences. As Participant 3 shared,

> *And sometimes it's just off the top of my head. I'll be there, and I'll be like, Ooh, cool. I can create a video or, you know, a post about this. So, it depends. It's a day-to-day thing. Sometimes, I go in fully planned. And some days I go in just, random, and I'll be like, Oh, cool. This would be a fun thing to make a video about.*

The participants of this study desired to create *relatable* content yet remain *credible and authentic* to who they are. For example, Participant 1 discussed the need to stay informed of other online content to stay relevant:

> *I follow pretty much everyone's style of content from Walt Disney World, just because I like to be knowledgeable on what I'm talking about.*

Participants also discussed the importance of authenticity, "being real," and presenting unique content. For example, Participant 2 shared the following regarding how they create content:

I think that the standard viewer on social media, regardless of the platform, can kind of tell when something is, you know, …, you could feel that it's authentic, like passion for something when somebody is talking about it.

Participant 5 further explained that their point of view provides authenticity and a unique perspective:

I think one thing that, like, will always be different is my point of view and my own experience. Talking about my own experiences, my own likes and dislikes will always be different than people …I don't think about it that much sometimes like I do want to make sure that I'm not copying people.

Similarly, Participant 4 shared:

People want to know more about me and see if I'm a real person. So, a lot of my behind-the-scenes videos are doing very well. And one of my behind-the-scenes videos I did here recently was me getting ready for Dapper Day. And I start off the video with saying, I don't have any makeup on. I have my hair up in a messy bun, which is not (influencer name) normal.

In addition to authenticity, Participant 2 shared that credibility is important, which was ensured by checking their sources, verifying with other content creators, and sharing only accurate information. Participant 2 explained:

"That part of it is also credibility, because if I'm talking about history stuff and they want to come to me for that, or, I'm doing, … Any type of, … news stuff or anything like that, I'm not just going to go out there and be like, I heard this is happening, or I have a secret opening day that has not been announced yet or anything like that because when I'm

wrong, people are going to remember that and they're going to be like, okay, well, He

was not accurate."

Target audiences and those who engaged with the influencers were well known. The author of the created content knew what types of people commented, sent messages, and engaged the most. Participant 2 explained:

"I would have to say my target audience is theme park fans for sure, but mainly,

probably like the 18 to 49 demographic. Because a lot of the videos that I do, I don't try

to gear towards like families."

At the same time, Participant 3 aimed to inform a larger audience about the joy of theme parks,

"It's mainly showing those experiences that, you know, 17 to about the 35 range can

experience in a theme park. Cause obviously a lot of people are like, Oh, you know,

theme parks are just for kids, and it's really cool to show that, you know, theme parks are

for everyone."

4.4.3 Motivations

Participants sought to achieve a level of success in follower metrics and financial returns. They were motivated to create a high level of engagement on the posts, custom tailoring each piece of content to relate to their audience. Through their online efforts, they seek to establish a sense of community and build on potential partnerships with other brands. Motivations inspire the participants to create content, while gratifications are what is obtained. The participants shared that one of the motivations for creating content for their social media profiles is to *achieve a certain level of success* or a respected status. In the digital culture, followers and views are important key performance indicators (KPIs) used to evaluate the health of a brand or a channel.

These metrics can provide a sense of accomplishment for the content creators, as well as generate opportunities to monetize their creativity.

As Participant 1 described:

> *I would love to have 10,000 followers on Twitter and hit 100,000 on YouTube. 100,000 on YouTube is something that I'd have to put a lot of time into, but it's kind of like one of those things as a kid, when you see like people getting ... the silver play button, it's like, Oh, that'd be cool to have one day.*

Participant 5 was motivated by the desire to make money with content creation to where they don't have to have a job outside of creating content:

> *I think before it was like, oh, I want to get like 10,000 followers on Instagram or things like that, or I want to get a video that gets a million views… And I think now, … I want to do this full-time.*

In addition to the number of followers, the engagement from the audience is another important key performance indicator (KPI) of certain statuses and levels of success on social media. Thus, the participants of this study referred to engagement as something that motivated them to create content. The participants shared that with time, they learned more about what specific content generates the most engagement and used this information to be more strategic about their content creation.

For example, Participant 2 explained:

> *I guess my main type of content that generates the most type of clicks or views and stuff like that is a lot of the stuff where I'm just telling a joke within the parks if it hits the right way.*

Similarly, Participant 3 shared:

I'll create videos where Here's my …ranking of, you know, top five rides in Walt Disney World or top five rides in this park or…, my rankings of the parks. Like I said, I put Magic Kingdom dead last, and then that's what gets, you know, people engaging.

Based on their desire to generate the most engagement from the largest group of people, the participants created different content to address the needs of different target audiences. While some content was focused on a larger audience, the participants also enjoyed creating unique and highly specialized content to appeal to a small part of their audience. Participant 5 shared further:

Sometimes, I will keep it (content) pretty general, sometimes just so that it hits a bigger audience, because I know if I make something super niche, it might not do as well, but I also like doing things that are super niche. Cause I know it'll hit a certain audience that'll really connect with it.

One of the motivations discussed by the participants was *the potential for partnerships*. Several theme parks and hospitality brands have recognized the online efforts of the content creators and provided various perks, including exclusive events and hotel stays, in exchange for created content on the creators' channels. As Participant 5 shared,

I'm like two summers ago. I pitched myself. It was like, hey, I'm coming down. Would you be interested in doing a little collaboration? They said yes, which was really cool. So cool. I had seen the other creators have also had also been doing collaborations with them. So it's like, okay, I know they are working with people and said yes. I made two videos for them in exchange for, I think, two nights.

Participant 4 shared that they were invited to exclusive events:

I was invited to an event in Marceline, Missouri, at Walt Disney's Boyhood Town. And this was an event through Citizen, and I was allowed to go to this event because of

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Citizen saying, 'No, no, no, Disney, we want her. She's the nerd. She, this is something

that she's going to geek out about. She needs to come to this event.' And so it was, I love

it when brands ... go above and beyond to be like, 'no, we genuinely want her here.'

That's very affirming to me that I'm doing something correct. Another fun opportunity

here recently. I don't know if I'll actually be going to it, but I was recently reached out by

the US Marines.

Participant 3 shared a similar experience where they partnered with another theme park:

I went to Busch Gardens for Howl O' Scream. That was a lot of fun just, you know, doing

that for the first time showcasing that, Hey, there's other stuff to do for, you know, the

Halloween season.

Interestingly, while the content the content creators post about the most is from the Disney theme

parks, all of the partnerships discussed in this study were from other theme parks or other

companies. Partnerships discussed by the participants included retail stores, resorts, restaurants,

or other themed experiences.

Lastly, the study participants are motivated by a *sense of community* created within the

comment section and with other creators. As Participant 2 shared:

I also think other reasons I post from the parks originally was because I wanted to make

friends. I thought that when we, when me and my partner originally moved down here, we

did not have a lot of friends, and we actually found our best friends through doing it, me

doing content. So, I guess that was originally part of the motivation is to be able to find

other people that are either doing what I'm doing or just find other cool people that have

the same interests as me. And that's very easy when you're posting about theme parks.

But that was a big motivation originally.

*4.4.**4 Gratifications***

The content creators discussed various gratifications they received from creating and posting content related to theme parks. The gratifications vary by the type of content created, the way they use media, and the personal lives of the participants.

The participants shared creating content provides self-fulfillment and appreciation that they can have content creation as a creative outlet. Creating is an artistic outlet, with social media platforms acting as a gallery for their work, providing an area where they can showcase the work they spent hours on, providing a sense of accomplishment. While there is content that they don't share, the published content reflects the desire to share the creation with others. Participant 1 shared a unique perspective, where their content was focused on archiving photos of the theme parks.

> *I am extremely detail-oriented, extremely observant, and kind of like an amateur archivist at this point. I love having stuff to look back on because, like events that Disney does, whenever I have seen stuff that they've shared, like, from the past 50 years in the parks at Walt Disney World and the past, you know, almost 70 years at Disneyland now, I've always loved looking back at the historical side of things.*

Participant 2 had a sense of pride in their content:

> *I'm going to do this, and then it's my name attached to it, and it's something that I created. It's great. And although I'm not an Imagineer, it's a little snippet of highlighting that stuff, but also creating something that I could put out there and that people will eventually see again.*

Participant 4 shared that creating was an artistic expression in addition to their physical media efforts. They continued to share that they admire their work and think it's "beautiful," also aware that not everyone will like it:

> *For me, …, before being a content creator, I am an artist like illustrator, watercolor, all these other types of things. So video making, I see, is another form of making art. It is. Creating something, making a video, no matter what the context is.. And you put a little bit of yourself into it, just like you do art and you're putting it out there into the world. And some people are going to like it. Some people are not going to like it just as it is with art. So when I put that, that out there into the world, it's that feeling of, okay, I've contributed my part. I've done, I've done my thing. I've created something that I think is beautiful.*

The content creators find self-fulfillment as they share their knowledge and are appreciated by the audience. Participant 5 shared at the end of the interview:

> *I think it's like a creative outlet that I'm lucky to have…. I think there's a lot of facts. Like I'll just say facts because like I post a lot of facts. That I just. I think are so interesting that people, I want people to know about and that I think would make great videos.*

Another gratification discussed by the study participants was *enhanced connection to the park*. All of the participants in this study were fans of the theme parks and had various connections to the parks. As a result, being able to showcase the theme park and its employees in a positive way through content was viewed as maintaining and enhancing such connection. This feeling of being a part of the team was rewarding for many participants. For example, Participant 1 shared:

So, I know that when I am posting content about what they are working on, I am directly

representing them, and I feel that I represent them and want to represent them in a, in a

professional and respectful way, because if I was in their shoes, that's what I would want.

A quote by Participant 2 showcases participants' admiration and desire to share their passion for

the company and their work with others:

[to] be able to showcase the, like, literally beautiful costumes that are put together by the

Walt Disney Company and these characters that are beloved by everybody.

Similarly, Participant 4 wanted to share the Disney theme park experience with people who can't

make it to the park:

I created this relationship with people, which we know is called a parasocial relationship

of people that were reaching out to me and were following me for my content because

they could not get to Disney World. And they had no way of being able to get to Disney.

Some participants viewed themselves as a part of the team and described their content as a way

to help out with park operations. For example, Participant 4 described the gratification from

being able to assist the operation by sharing information about the changes in the park:

I will go up to, because of my relationship with cast members and how many cast

members specifically follow me, I'll go up to them, and I'll go up to a location. For

example, here recently, there were a lot of old videos that were trending about Merida,

Princess Merida, and her location and where you can meet her. And so, I walked up to a

group of blueberries, also known as character attendants, that I know follow me. And I

was like, 'Hey girl, hey. Okay, tell me the tea. What's actually happening? What do you

want me to let social media know?' And they said, (redacted Influencer name), praise be,

here's our laundry list. And I'm like, 'Okay, I can clarify. I will make a video about this.

And just to really clarify, say, hey, Merida is not meeting here anymore. This news was accurate as of January. It's now April. This has totally changed. Let's get this straightened out.' So that way new information was going out. And immediately I heard back from entertainment and those cast members being like, thank you. You have no idea how much this helped our operation within 48 hours. And I was like, that's fantastic. So again, it's, it's a lot of spur of the moment and whether or not that information I feel like is needed.

In addition to helping the company, the participants felt a sense of gratification from assisting the guests through creating content. As Participant 1 shared:

I've literally had people DM me and be like, I've learned so much information about this attraction for you, and I'm excited because of it. And I'm like, wow, that's crazy. I would never expect that.

The findings suggest that the content creators in this study have a deep connection to Walt Disney World through professional roles (college program) or through relational connections to the park (childhood memories), furthering their desire to share their created content online, maintaining credibility and authenticity. Furthermore, the content creators desire to cater their content to their target audience through strategically crafting content to meet their engagement goals and long-term plans while, at times, fostering partnerships with other companies to continue their creative efforts. Finally, the content creators find gratification in sharing their created content online, finding self-fulfillment in their "beautiful" work.

4.5 Discussion and Implications

Content creators are found to be artistic individuals who have a deep childhood connection to the park. The parks provide a place of leisure where they can find a sense of

community and a location to connect with others. Though they have influence online, they do not want to be called an "influencer" due to negative connotations around the term but prefer to be called a content creator. The content creators experience negative aspects of their role where they feel as if they spend too much time on technology, have a constant desire to create the best content possible, are faced with criticism or negative comments, and seek to create boundaries across a blurred line between their personal life and content creating. In addition, they are faced with recognition within the parks from people talking to them directly or having other guests follow them. They create content about the new and unique experiences within the parks with the goal of remaining credible and authentic in their published work, emphasizing the importance of "being real" for their followers. They are motivated to achieve a level of success through meeting goals of follower metrics or to transition to where they get paid a livable wage through content creating. Strategies have been developed to keep their audience engaged through a deep understanding of who is in their audience and what works best leading to high engagement, further fostering a sense of community with the followers and other content creators. They are also motivated by the partnership opportunities they have been providing through other companies outside of Disney, providing them with financial returns. Lastly, the content creators find self-fulfillment in creating content where they are able to showcase content they are proud of or they believe is "beautiful." While aware that it may not be appreciated by everyone, they continue creating content for their audience. They seek to provide a connection to the park by showcasing the park and employees in a positive light, eliminating their followers' inaccessibility to the park through digital means. Furthermore, they find gratification in assisting guests with their future trips by providing information impacting future park itineraries.

Content creators invest in online relationships by providing resources and content that they know their target audience desires, creating a parasocial relationship, as Participant 4 shared, supporting the findings of Bansah et al. (2024) that loyalty and perceived friendship are fostered between influencers and followers. The content creators desired this relationship with their followers and sought to maintain the same authenticity online and offline. The perceived friendship is not only online; rather, it becomes a reality as content creators and followers may meet in real life due to the specific context of Walt Disney World parks. Authenticity provides a personal connection between the influencer and the follower, which supports Chopra et al. (2021) finding that influencers create relationships with followers that large corporate brands cannot establish and maintain themselves. A theme park is a company that sells an experience for a guest while influencers cultivate their relationships leading to influencing the guests' trips. Content creators are more intentional and relational in the way they craft their social media accounts and content. Furthermore, content creators are highly knowledgeable in the field of theme parks, endorsing and creating content that shapes audience attitudes and impacts guests' trips, which supports Freberg et al. (2011) findings that influencers often give advice or are turned to for advice. The gratifications found that they are not just asked for advice, but creating content allows them to provide unsolicited advice, relying on the social media algorithms to deliver to the users who may be most interested, expanding further beyond their own followers. Moreover, the findings of Bansah et al. (2024) are expanded upon as they state companies should not adopt a "one-size-fits-all strategy" (p.56) regarding the influencer partnerships brands establish. Bansah et al. (2024) further share that brands should be strategic in identifying the influencers that meet their business goals with the customer goal in mind. The findings from this data expand this by showcasing the different types of content creators and the variations of how

they create content, how they foster community, their motivations, and the gratifications they seek. This research provides a new understanding of social media behavior within the theme park context. Building on Park et al.'s (2020) geospatial map of posts within Disneyland and Wang et al.'s (2022) findings that TikTok posts lead to visit intention, the findings provide an understanding of gratifications and motivations regarding the social media content creation within the park. Lastly, the findings in this research will contribute novel literature on influencer gratifications and motivations within a theme park context to previous influencer literature (Anđelić, 2021; Chopra et al., 2021; Freberg et al., 2011; Ki & Kim, 2019; Kim & Kim, 2022; Vrontis et al., 2021; Yaman & Çakin, 2021).

There are risks associated with being a content creator. They seek to create content sharing the experience, which includes the potential for receiving negative reviews. Content creators within the theme park context share reviews of food, attractions, shows, and exclusive events. However, the content creators may embellish the experience in hopes of establishing formal partnerships with the company in the future, impacting the authenticity they share they hope to achieve through their content. Though not thoroughly explored in this research, several content creators in this study did have negative reviews of park offerings across their social media content, including food they did not like. In addition to negative reviews, personalities, and human behavior are risks associated with content creators. The personal lives of content creators are more in the public eye. If illegal or immoral behavior of creators becomes public, it may reflect poorly on a theme park if a partnership is formally established. However, this is the case with hiring an employee with social media as the company takes on the same risk.

Based on the findings of this study, there are several practical implications. First, since the findings suggest that content creators seek out new experiences, I recommend increasing the

frequency of exclusive events for content purposes and expanding to a larger range of content creators. Since their content is focused on assisting the park or guests, providing an opportunity to try new foods, new attractions, or meet a unique character would share first-hand experiences across the content creators' social channels. Second, since the participants of this study sought community within the park and through their social channels, I recommend providing network opportunities for the content creators. This opportunity would facilitate future collaborations, sharing advice, fostering friendships, and providing the sense of community they desire. Third, theme parks should create exclusive informational material that discusses the changes within the park, new items, and upcoming announcements that content creators may want to include in their content in the future. In addition, the material would include best practices of how to achieve authenticity, remaining creative, posting strategies, training, and FAQs about content creation. If not already established within a theme park, industry practitioners should formalize content-creator partnerships. When a theme park posts social media content, it reaches only a percentage of its social media accounts' followers. However, utilizing content creators to share the same information expands the number of followers who encounter the desired information. Furthermore, the content creators provide advice on their content through engaging with their audience that the theme park brand may not have the free labor to do so.

Findings from this research further contribute to creative development, developing marketing strategies, and assisting with facilitating influencer partnerships. Creative development can identify how to best provide the resources influencers need for content creation. Marketing strategies are informed by the process of content creation, motivations, and gratification, informing their own marketing content and creating better partnerships with influencers. The proposed research will contribute to influencer marketing (Alvarez-

Monzoncillo, 2022; Chopra et al., 2021; Freberg et al., 2011; Ki & Kim, 2019; Kim & Kim, 2022; Langner et al., 2013; Morteo, 2018; Vrontis et al., 2021; Yaman & Çakin, 2021), consumer research literature (Luo et al., 2020; Niu et al., 2019; Park et al., 2020; Sanfilippo & Shvartzshnaider, 2021; Torres et al., 2021), and theme park marketing (Luo et al., 2020; Park et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022; Wong & Cheung, 1999).

In addition to the important contribution of this study, future research should investigate the content posted by the content creators within the theme park context. Additionally, future studies should identify how guests use the content creator posts to plan their trip to the theme parks. An approach investigating the influence between content creator posts and theme park posts should be considered as one may trust a content creator's content more compared to the brand's content (Chopra et al., 2021; Freberg et al., 2011). Finally, more information is needed about how the online content shared influences the brand perception. As social media users are exposed to content about the parks, they may build a perception of the theme park, the experiences, and whether they will visit in the future.

As any research project, this study had several limitations. First, the size of the participant pool was relatively small. While many content creators focus on theme parks, a large percentage of them are theme park tourism reporters or small business owners of online theme park retail stores. The ones selected for this study were not reporters nor held a financial interest in an online store as they do not meet Freberg et al.'s (2011) definition of an influencer which include "independent third-party endorser(s) who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media" (p. 90). Reporters or online store owners are not independent third parties, as they create content to generate clicks to new stories or shop visits. The researcher attempted to contact other content creators through Instagram direct messages, emails, and

snowball sampling. Marketing leaders in the Orlando area were also consulted to assist with identifying content creators who would be interested in an in-depth interview. Still, expanding the number of content creators in the research could also provide further insight into the unique approaches and experiences to content creation in a theme park setting.

Additionally, it should be noted that the content creators are also biased towards the parks as they were represented by the fans of the parks and held fond childhood memories and other connections to the park. Finally, the participants were also primarily white males in their 20s and 30s, who were also annual passholders and had the freedom to attend the park when they desired. Future studies should focus on exploring the experiences of the influencers of diverse backgrounds, including those who are married, older, family-focused, or of different gender or ethnic and racial backgrounds, as well as of different socio-economic status.

4.6 Conclusion

This research sought to understand the influencer identity and creative process, as well as their motivations for and gratifications from the content creation within a theme park context. Through in-depth interviews, the findings support that content creators seek to use their connection to the park to share content meeting gratifications of assisting the park and guests with trip planning. Implications of this research. Future research should investigate the use of the created content to impact future guests' trips.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Research Findings

This dissertation utilized a multi-method approach to understand social media contributions/postings of guests and social media influencers/content creators, through the theoretical lens of the uses and gratifications theory within a theme park context. Past research has established that social media provides a means to psychological gratification fulfillment (Alrajehi, 2016; Chen, 2011; Dolan et al., 2016; Hossain et al., 2019), and importantly, created content can have a direct impact on to theme parks (Wang et al., 2022). Thus, the three dissertation articles worked to further the understanding of social media use in the theme park context. The first article identified that the mode of create plays a part in many gratifications, modifying the *Classification of Media-Related Needs* (Katz et al., 1973b) to the current culture where everyone can create media. The second article explored how guests post within the theme park context, identifying the frequent main topics, the locations within parks they represent, and sentiment of the post. The third article identified the motivations and gratifications of influences/ content creators within a theme park context, supporting the gratifications found from creating content.

The first article identified 71 gratifications of social media found in previous uses and gratifications literature. Terms were identified to be similar in meaning and categorized. The classification of media-related needs (Katz et al., 1973b) was proposed to provide simplicity to the gratifications found, moving towards identifying gratifications through the mode, connection, and referent. However, this classification was created before the new forms of media where everyone can create content. The classification was modified to expand the modes from three to

four modes, which include strengthen, weaken, acquire, and create. Media users may use media to create (A4) information (B1) for the world (C6), fulfilling potential psychological gratifications for users.

The second article adopted a quantitative approach and employed a content analysis of created social posts within Walt Disney World parks. Instagram posts were gathered, coded, and placed on a GIS map to establish the location of the post within the park. Attraction experience posts counted for 14.1% of the created posts, with character meets accounting for 11.4%. Within the four parks, the most frequent main topics included entertainment at the Magic Kingdom, food at Epcot, attraction experience and character meets at Hollywood Studios, and attraction experience at Disney's Animal Kingdom. Within Magic Kingdom, Main Street U.S.A. and Magic Kingdom Hub had the highest posting frequency across the park, with the highest amount of entertainment posts. World Celebration had the highest number of posts in Epcot, with the highest level of icon posts. However, the overarching code of Epcot was about food. Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge at Hollywood Studios had the highest frequency of posts, with attraction experiences, self-photos, and character meets. Lastly, Disney's Animal Kingdom's Discovery Island had the highest number of posts, with group photos of the Tree of Life being the most frequent in that area. Sentiment was found across all the parks to be positive, with a few negative posts that were false negatives.

The third article utilized in-depth interviews to discover the influencer identity, motivations, and gratifications of influencers' created content within a theme park context. Five influencers were interviewed to better understand how and why they create content surrounding theme parks. With a deep childhood and family connection to the theme parks, the influencers use social media to share concepts and experiences from a company they are passionate about.

Though they did not like the term influencers, they did acknowledge that they do influence guests' trips. Their motivations included long-term goals of follower counts and partnerships. Gratifications included the act of creating, connecting with the audience, assisting the park, and assisting guests with information.

Within the three articles, the act of creating content was intertwined through the story of sharing the experience within theme parks. With the original classification of media-related needs, all the combinations of modes, connections, and referents were self-serving, eliminating the idea that people could use media as an outlet. The modified classification with create as a mode provides a new perspective to articles two and three. While guests may create content through posting to acquire (A3) gratification (B2), a gratification exists where they may desire to create (A4) knowledge (1) for others to witness. This furthers the discussion that the most frequent hotspots in the parks, most posted main topics, and sentiment are what the guest decides to create content about and share online, fulfilling a myriad of psychological gratifications, which include creating as a mode of gratifications.

The modified classification of media-related needs was supported during the influencer in-depth interviews. All five influencers discussed that creating content is part of their artistic endeavors. One participant shared, *"Video making, I see, is another form of making art. It is creating something, making a video, no matter what the context is."* They went further to state that they thought their content was *"beautiful."* While there are times in their social media journey or even with specific videos that they seek to strengthen (A1) credibility (B3), gratifications exist within influencers that they seek to create. Applying the modified classification of media-related needs to the influencer gratifications, the gratifications of create (A4) information, knowledge, and understanding (B1) towards the world (C6) exist with the

influencers' media use. One influencer participant had a unique approach to their content, which was through humor. This gratification under the modified classification could be labeled as create (C4) gratification, emotional experience (B2), to the world (C6). They seek to create content as an opportunity to garner laughter or joy.

Psychological gratifications were not evidenced by the typical guests but rather by the influencers. Typical guests posted what they were experiencing within the theme park. Posts include them or their family groups in front of the icons of the park, the food they ate, the character interactions, or showing that they rode a ride. It is self-serving and focuses on the individual who uses social media to obtain a connection through strengthening or acquiring in the modified classification. Regarding influencer posts, the content topics discussed were crafted to assist others in planning their own trips by sharing new experiences or providing information about the park. As mentioned, the influencers sought to assist the park and the guest through their created content.

5.2 Future Research

Through the work of this research, future research opportunities exist. The application of modified classification of media-related needs provides an updated approach to the Uses and Gratifications Theory. With the rise of content creators on social media, the classification provides guidance on discovering psychological gratifications. Research opportunities also exist to differentiate how guests and influencers post within themed experiences. Other themed experiences should be considered as they have different concepts, themes, and experiences. Future research could include in-depth interviews with typical theme park guests to further understand their gratifications and behavior within the theme park. Furthermore, the typical guest park planning process should be researched to discover where they obtain ideas to include in

their trip itinerary. Guests could gather information through formal corporate social channels, influencers, or from other friends. However, statistical weights could be applied to each media variation to identify what has the most impact.

The content created by influencers has an impact on guests who visit the park. Future research should investigate why guests follow the influencers and why certain types of posts are engaged with more than others. Guest segmentation could be analyzed by splitting influencers based on macro and micro-influencers, potentially providing different levels of influence to the potential guest watching the content. The theme park online communities provided research opportunities as well. In the online communities, there are more influencers, theme park journalists, small business owners who specialize in theme park merchandise, and fans involved in the discourse about theme parks. This community commonly discusses the new attractions, events, and operations of the parks, which could contribute to public sentiment or trust in the brand. An in-depth analysis of this community would provide intriguing results that would benefit this research.

5.3 Implications

5.3.1 Theoretical Contributions

The first article proposes a fourth mode, create, should be established to Katz et al., (1973b) Classification of Media-Related Needs to include the new use of media as a content creator. Creating differs from the other modes of strengthening, weakening, and acquiring, as these modes are driven by personal decisions about what one hopes to receive rather than what one hopes to give. However, there may be an overlap of giving and receiving. For example, creating content could strengthen credibility; therefore, it becomes subjective to the posting individual and the core gratification of the post. This research contributes to the literature that

identified gratifications of self-documentation, status, impression maintenance, self-presentation, reputation, self-expression, social attraction, identity, personal branding, exhibitionism, modality, realism, seek self-status, appearance feedback, self-disclosure, peer approval (Aubrey & Rill, 2013; Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Chimenti et al., 2022; Cui Di & Huang, 2018; Dayong Zhang et al., 2018 ; Ferris & Hollenbaugh, 2018; Hsu et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2018; Jarman et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2017 ; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Liao et al., 2021 ; Mahmood et al., 2018; Oh & Syn, 2015 Park & Lee, 2014; Pentina et al., 2016; Rahman, 2022; Rathnayake & Winter, 2018; Riaz et al., 2016; Salo et al., 2013; Saridakis et al., 2016; Song et al., 2019; Yu-Hsun Lin, 2022), information sharing, information exchange, altruism, participation online, and expressing opinions within media use (Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Coduto & Anderson, 2021; Holton et al., 2014; Jarman et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2016; Liao et al., 2021; Mahmood et al., 2018 ; Oh & Syn, 2015; Park & Lee, 2014 ; Pentina et al., 2016; Quinn, 2016; Rahman, 2022; Salo et al., 2013; Wenzhen Xu et al., 2018; Yu-Hsun Lin, 2022). The first article provides a foundation to furthering UGT to a new cultural context, impacting future literature around content creators, marketing, and media use.

Social media uses and gratifications have not been applied within the theme park context. This research contributes to Baker's (2023) work discussing narrative storytelling within theme parks. Article two also contributes to Wang et al. (2022) and Park et al. (2020) as it identifies how guests create content through their actions of sharing their park experience. This research provides a new perspective on how narrative concepts are shared online. Furthermore, the theme park shared online builds on Åstrøm (2019), and Kim's (2012) work that states theming attracts and retains visitors.

Gratifications found through the content creator interviews in article three provide new findings to UGT, contributing novel literature of influencers finding gratifications through creating content rather than using media to acquire information. This research contributes to the literature of gratifications that discuss community (Aldamen, 2023; Chan, 2014; Chimenti et al., 2022; Oh & Syn, 2015; Rathnayake & Winter, 2018; Salo et al., 2013) and the gratifications that showcase the enjoyment of media use (Boztepe Taşkiran, 2019; Cui Di & Huang Guangsheng, 2018; Gezgin & Sen, 2012; Holton et al., 2014; Hsu et al., 2015; Jin et al., 2017; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Mahmood et al., 2018; Oh & Syn, 2015; Park & Lee, 2014; Pentina et al., 2016; Rahman, 2022; Rubenking & Rister, 2016; Saridakis et al., 2016; Song et al., 2019; Willis & Ferrucci, 2017; Yu-Hsun Lin, 2022; Yoon et al., 2014). Lastly, the findings support Boztepe Taşkiran (2019) and Kircaburun et al. (2020), as they content creators sought to establish personal branding and share information about themselves. This representation of content creators is important as social media rises in popularity and more creation opportunities arise, including podcast creation, vlogs, Instagram stories, and online voice discussion rooms (e.g., Clubhouse, X Spaces). This act of creation requires a space within UGT that can be accomplished through this research. Implications also extend to theme park literature as guests and influencers are understood at a deeper level by understanding the physical and digital behavior during content creation.

The second and third articles identify an important differentiation between the posting behavior of typical guests and content creators. The guests in article two shared what they were experiencing through the distribution of attraction experiences, character meets, and entertainment. Content creators shared content discussing what the guests could experience during their time at the parks. This difference between the two segments provides profound

theoretical implications for how different types of individuals use social media, however needs additional comparison research.

5.3.2 Applied Contributions

Findings provide new knowledge that can be integrated with Wang et al.'s (2022) findings that social media leads to visit intention. By identifying the frequently posted attractions and main topics by guests and content creators. The results contribute to understanding park image and what guests may see as they decide on park visitation (Cheng et al., 2016; Geyik et al., 2014; Silva & Meyer, 2023; Wang et al., 2022). This study supports that content around a product or service contributes to buying habits, behavioral norms, or actions of others (Freberg et al., 2011; Kim & Kim, 2022; Martineau, 2019; Vrontis et al., 2021). Content creators often discussed in the in-depth interviews that they are influential, and they receive messages that mention someone tried what they posted about.

Supported by the findings of this research, theme parks should capitalize on the main topics of each park through strategic marketing. As found in Hollywood Studios and Disney's Animal Kingdom, the attraction experience was most popular. Epcot was the location of most food and beverage posts. Magic Kingdom had the highest frequency of entertainment posts and character meets. The main topics should be the focus of marketing materials such as commercials, printed materials (e.g., brochures, travel agent packets), and social media posts. These topics are what the guests are already seeing from the parks, which should be reinforced from the park posting about them. The hotspots identified in this research should be staffed with professional photographers to assist with picture taking. Furthermore, the areas should be equipped with props and signage labeled with corresponding hashtags (e.g., #WaltDisneyWorld), which provides a unique element to photos that can only be found at the hotspots.

Managerial implications across the industry impact the park operations and marketing. Park operations understand the impact of social content. For example, as merchandise, food, attractions, or locations receive more attention, guests will follow suit as the content influences their trips, meeting the gratification of assisting the guests from the influencers. Marketing should approach content creators as an extension of their owned marketing strategies. In the effort to communicate announcements, changes within the parks, or promotions, the influencers' gratifications for creating should be fostered, benefiting both the influencer and the company.

Theme parks should establish a social media listening center to track conversation, main topics, and sentiment deriving from guests' posts. By identifying the main topics and clusters of posts, the company could identify potential issues of crowding, foot traffic problems, and most discussed main topics within the parks. Through an ongoing approach of investigating posts, the popularity of topics and areas between time frames could be identified, creating more implications for park operations and marketing.

Theme parks, museums, experiences, zoos, and others can use this research to identify how guests share content. Practitioners could establish better synergy with influencers through partnerships. The stress and nerves derived from the potential lack of engagement or the influencers' nervousness about filming within the park. To address these issues, themed experiences could provide payment and mitigate the stress and nerves by providing special credentials within the park and sharing or engaging with content creators' content. Companies could also provide more intrinsic gratifications through exclusive events, where they could create content, which fosters the gratifications of creating and giving the Disney experience to their followers.

Content creators are artists, so they should be treated as such. Instead of using them for a one-time production, partnerships should be established that last longer than one small project. That allows an identity to be more associated with the brand, building on the trust between the content creator and the followers. A more inclusive program for content creators is needed, providing a sense of belonging and appreciation to creators who meet established metrics of influencer classification. The program should provide resources, training and a sense of community where creators could meet other creators. A "Content Creator Leader" job position should also be established within the parks. This individual would work with content creators who arrive at the park to communicate new park offerings and information needed to be shared online, provide access to certain attractions, and mitigate any negative experiences they encounter in the park. In addition, a digital information guide should be provided for the content creators who create content about the theme park. This would give new talking points to share online, fulfilling gratifications with the creators as they feel as they are assisting the park and guests.

This study contributes to the literature on theme park marketing (Albayrak et al., 2021; Wong & Cheung, 1999) and guest digital behavior (Birenboim et al., 2013; Dalrymple et al., 2020; Fotiadis, 2016; Huang et al., 2020; Ji et al., 2021). Marketing is established through the guests and content creators' posts. Positive reviews from content creators can benefit a business can negatively impact a business if a negative review is published (Freberg et al., 2011; Gorry & Westbrook, 2009). The findings around content creators in the theme parks support Freberg et al., (2011) research that influencers often give advice or are turned to for advice.

Results have managerial implications for park operations, marketing, and consumer behavior. Findings provide tourism managers with a new method to identify the most discussed

main topics within the daily park operations, discovering hotspots of specific activity in the parks. Managers can apply findings to park or immersive experience development by understanding what guests post the most from the study context. Marketing practices are impacted by understanding what guests showcase more of through social media, providing intelligence on what is desired out of the theme park experience, and impacting guest visitation (Wang et al., 2022).

5.3.3 Methodological Contributions

This research provides novel methods for studying social media use within a theme park context. Plans for research labs utilizing geospatial software in conjunction with social listening software would provide an intelligence center for discovering potential crowding issues during entertainment events, popular meet and greets, and what locations in the park are most prominent on social media. The methodologies used in the second article share an outline to discover how the park is presented on social media. This understanding is important for every themed experience as that directly results in visit intention and switching from one company to another.

While several studies mentioned using social media data within their methods, they have used review sites (e.g., TripAdvisor), which the researcher does not classify as a traditional social media platform. According to Howard and Parks (2012), social media serves as a tool for disseminating information, transforming digital ideas into cultural assets, and a place where individuals and organizations create and consume content. TripAdvisor does not align with these specifications. This research provides a foundational understanding of the platforms often used for public display of the theme park experience.

This research also contributes to the use of big data (Albayrak et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2020; Niu et al., 2019; Park et al., 2020; Sanfilippo & Shvartzshnaider, 2021; Torres et al.,

2021). Six articles in theme park literature have been identified as using big data, including topic modeling online reviews (Luo et al., 2020;) comparing online reviews across theme parks (Niu et al., 2019), sentiment analysis of social media posts (Park et al., 2020), understanding the surveillance technology (Sanfilippo & Shvartzshnaider, 2021), discovering customer delight and outrage within online reviews (Torres et al., 2021) and competitive analysis across theme parks using TripAdvisor reviews (Albayrak et al., 2021). The methodology in this research utilizes social media conversation, which has been limited in this field but is crucial to understanding guest behavior. Methodology implications include generalizing methods to other theme parks, immersive experiences, and leisure areas.

5.4 Limitations

Limitations exist in all three articles, which were addressed independently in each article. There are still limitations that need to be addressed over the entire research. This research only looked at the perspective of creating social media, however there are other ways of creating media that can lead into a gratification fulfillment. One could create a podcast or stream on Twitch, providing creators a platform to showcase their art. The research was also written by a 34-year-old Caucasian male who has created social media content since 2005 and has been in the online theme park community for four years. This involvement provides a perspective that is susceptible to bias on social media and within theme parks.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory is a positive theory that examines the gratifications fulfilled through media use. Minimal consideration has been given to the negative aspects of media. Other ways of using media could be through the distribution or the engagement of illicit media, content that shows harm, or using media to harass or bully. In addition, UGT does not consider the cultural changes in how users engage with media, which expands beyond what this

research addressed. Other ways of using media could include livestreaming, moderating online communities, engaging in online forums, and playing video games. The other media uses within the theory must be integrated into the theory to continue evolving with the culture.

The guest posts involved in article two were a .12% of the entire public posts from Walt Disney World in 2023. Large data analysis programmed with image identification and geo-spatial identification could assist with this research to analyze a more in-depth sample. The sample includes guests that know how to use technology and post on social media. Furthermore, they pay for a data plan and a personal device. At times, they know how to edit videos using third-party applications, have the financial means to pay for such applications, and have accrued followers through their time on social media. They also have the financial means to attend the park and the free time to take pictures for their social media.

Technology only provides a glimpse into the theme park experience, as there are other ways of communicating to others what one experiences at the theme park, like word of mouth and other digital means. Additionally, social media is not reflective of the full experience, as there are times in the theme park when phones cannot be held while riding attractions or eating. Only a percentage of guests have social media within the park, which further limits the number of guests who post about the park. Theme park operations (e.g., operating hours, special events, line-hopping privileges) change frequently, which deems influencer and guest content outdated if they share information about previous offerings, such as Fastpasses when the company switched to Lightning Lane and the dining plan when the plan was not offered.

This research relies on the author's interpretation of sentiment, in-depth interview statements, location of the post in the park, and their own use of social media. With the author being a frequent social media user, creating content is gratifying, which may have impacted the

first study. The author also has a deep connection to the park, which may have influenced the location of the posts, main topics, and sentiment. Lastly, the author did not ask the content creators to be neutral or implement bias-addressing tactics in the interviews.

The content creators have the financial means for annual passes and the knowledge to use technology, including their camera equipment and phone. Content creators who identified as LGBTQ were not represented. In addition, BIPOC and AANHPI creators were not represented. Creators that are in the family travel content were not represented.

If I did this research again, I would seek diversity in the content creator sample. Including representation of minorities and individuals who identify as LGBTQ would provide a new perspective. I would also utilize a larger sample to account for a better representation of the year of the guests' posts. Surveys within this research would provide a deeper understanding of guest behavior that would help explain the findings further, which would assist greatly with the implications for academia and industry.

5.5 Final Reflection

This research revealed to me how much media has shifted into a culture where creating content is essential. The concept of creating content has given power to the individual contributor as they feel as they are part of the discussion, event, or narrative. Taking out the context of theme parks, individuals find gratification in creating and sharing content.

The guests' posts in article two provided a new perspective of the focus of social media posts. They wanted to showcase what they were experiencing at the park. The emphasis on theming, what the design looked like, merchandise, or designed concepts was not emphasized at all. Brands create content that emphasizes the lands, the narrative, and the attractions; while they play a huge part in the overall theme of the experience, guests desire a place where they can have

fun and show that they are having fun. This research has taught me that content creators seek to be a valuable source of information to others because they love the product and the experience. Content creators approach life with a humble and freeing attitude to the theme park experience. Even though they were motivated to go full-time or partner with others, they seemed to enjoy their current role regardless of pay.

Content creators wanted to provide a free service to individuals through their content by offering advice for future trips. This surprised me, as they took on the role of advisors for their followers. Videos became free vacation planning videos that should be capitalized on from a brand perspective. Overall, creating content is a broad topic that cannot be fully explored through these three studies. There are depths of knowledge that should be explored that could use this research as a foundational understanding.

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APPENDICES

Highlights

- Gratifications that are driven by one's needs for oneself, including the needs for presentation, attraction, and branding, in addition to information discourse, reflect a new mode of gratifications, create.

- The most common main topics on social media are the attraction experience, character meets, and entertainment, deriving from Walt Disney World.

- Character meets, attraction experiences, and entertainment posts are most common from Magic Kingdom, while food and beverage posts on social media are more frequent in EPCOT than other main topics, and attraction experiences on social media are more frequent at Hollywood Studios and Disney's Animal Kingdom.

- Themed lands have a social media micro-brand, where the lands are connected with the most common topic (e.g., Adventureland with Attraction Experiences and Main Street U.S.A. with Entertainment).

- Content creators do not want to be called influencers but rather be called content creators, acknowledging that their content influences guests.

- Content creators have a deep connection with the parks, ranging from childhood to previous employment.

- Content creators seek to establish authenticity and credibility through their posts.

- Content creator gratifications include creating content, assisting the park, and assisting the guests.

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

IRB Protocol Number: IRB2023-0749

Warm Up:

Tell me about yourself. Who are you? Where do you live?

Relationship with Disney/ Theme Parks

How long have you been going to the Walt Disney World parks?

Do you have a childhood connection to the Walt Disney World parks?

How often do you visit any of the Walt Disney World Parks?

What does a typical trip to Walt Disney World look like? (e.g., how many days, who do you

travel with, do you stay on site).

Tell me about your favorite experiences in Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Hollywood Studios, or

Disney's Animal Kingdom.

How do you choose which Walt Disney World park you visit?

Do you often have a goal of what you want to experience when you visit any Walt Disney World

parks?

Social media influencing and Disney.

Tell me a little bit about how or why you began focusing on Disney in your social media

postings. Do you plan out what media you will create when getting ready for your Walt Disney

World visit?

How did you get into social media influencing?

Tell me about your online presence.

Specific follow up topics if the person requests clarifications:

What social media platforms are you using on a regular basis?

How often are you posting?

Why do people follow you online?

What type of content do you create?

RQ1: What main topics are found from influencers created social media posts within Walt Disney World?

Would you call yourself an influencer and why?

Who is your target audience with the created content about Walt Disney World?

What kind of content from Walt Disney World generates the most engagement from your audience?

What kind of content about Walt Disney World do you post the most?

What type of Walt Disney World created content do you engage with?

Do you find inspiration on what to post from other influencers?

RQ2: How do influencers' Instagram posts (photos, captions, reels), differ in terms of focus and sentiment across the different thematic zones of Walt Disney World?

Do you have a favorite area in the Walt Disney World? What do you like about it? What makes it your favorite?

Do you find yourself posting more about one area of a certain park and why?

What attraction have you posted about recently? Why did you post about that specific one?

Have you posted a photo of you meeting a Disney character? Why did you share that on your Instagram profile?

RQ3: What gratifications do influencers experience as a result of their online activity about theme parks?

What motivates you to post in general?

What motivates you to post content from the Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Hollywood Studios, or Disney's Animal Kingdom?

Do you have any goals regarding your social platforms? (e.g., getting media previews to new attractions)

Describe how you feel when you create content. (e.g., do you enjoy doing this work? Do you find it monotonous, exciting, etc.?)

Describe how you feel when you receive engagement from the content.

Have any exciting opportunities resulted due to your social media activity and following?

What downsides have you experienced due to your social media activity and following?

Do you create more content about theme park news, your own Walt Disney World experiences, or about the Walt Disney World parks in general?

Are there any other reasons why you post from the parks that we did not discuss?

Follow Up:

I see this post on your Instagram feed, (bring up posted photo), tell me why you chose to post this media.

Why do you think people engage with you?

Example Coding and Analysis Process

To provide an example of an analyzed post, this section will walk through the process of analyzing a created post, which was modified slightly, and photo was not shown to protect privacy. The post was a photo of an individual in front of a wall that the researcher recognizes is at Muppet 3D attraction in Hollywood Studios. The caption of the post states "I'm back in the park tonight with my Kermit sweater on. It's time to watch Muppet 3D!" This example is

provided as an illustration of how the data and meaning is derived from the post and account.

This post was not involved in the coding process and only served as an example of data

collection.

Analysis category	Analysis results
Main Topic:	The individual is showcasing their sweater and discussing their fashion choice. The main focus of the post is to draw attention to the Muppets sweater with the mention in the text that Kermit is featured on the sweater. The focus could be coded as fashion.
Sentiment:	The post itself is neutral as it is sharing information rather than saying anything positive or negative. No emotional driven words were found in the caption or the media.
Number of Followers:	The author of the post has a follower count of 7,561. This number can be derived from the user's Instagram profile.
Number of Following:	In addition to followers, the number of followings can be derived the profile as well. Currently, the user is following 1,286 accounts.
Theme Park Name:	The username does not mention any Disney concepts and will not be coded as a theme park name.
Number of Likes:	In the post, the researcher identified that there 702 likes on the post.
Themed Land:	In the post, the background identifies a character from the Muppets, revealing the location of the photo. The Muppet character "Sweetums", is outside of Muppets 3D, which is in Grand Avenue of Hollywood Studios. The location is circled with a red circle overlaying Hollywood Studios.
Theme Park:	Grand Avenue is in Hollywood Studios.
Direct URL:	The direct URL is gathered from the keyword search on Sprinklr. The downloading of the data provides the CSV file with the URL.
Following/Follow ratio:	It was revealed that the user has 7,561 followers and 1,268 following, resulting in a follower ratio of 5:1.

Table 6.1 *Data Gathered from Social Media*

Image 6.1 *Geo-location of Sample Post*

Gathering the data from the CSV file along with the manual data collection, data was collected for each post. The main topic was coded as fashion with a neutral sentiment. The example user had 7,561 accounts following and was following 1,268 accounts. The username was identified and is not a theme park name since it did not reference any park or company keyword ("magic", Disney, themed land name, etc.). The park this post was taken at was Hollywood Studios and the researcher identified Grand Avenue as the themed land it was taken at due to the attractions and architecture found in the post media. The URL was found in the CSV sample downloaded. The following/follower ratio was calculated (7,561:1,268) meeting the 5:1 ratio classification for good follower ratio.

Main Topic	Sentiment	# Followers	# Following	# of Likes	Theme Park	Themed Land	F/F Ratio	Theme Park Name
Fashion	Neutral	7,561	1,268	702	Hollywood Studios	Muppets Courtyard	Good follower Ratio	No

Table 6.2 *Example Data*

Codebook

Main Topic	Description
Self-photo:	This includes staged images of an individual person as the focus of the image. This could include images about their fashion, experience, or a selfie. At times, they may have photoshoot techniques in which they are the focus in a scenery type setting. However, they are still the main focus. If they are holding food up or in the process of experiencing a drink, food, or taking part of an attraction, code it elsewhere.
Group-photo:	Images of a group of people (2 or more) as the main focus of the image, usually posing or looking at the camera. They are not experiencing anything else at the moment (ride, show, or food). It is a group picture. If they are holding food up or in the process of experiencing a drink, food, or taking part of an attraction, code it elsewhere.
Self/Icon	Images of a solo person in front of one of the four park Icons (Cinderella Castle, Spaceship Earth, Tree of Life, Chinese Theatre)
Group/Icon	Images of a group (2 or more) in front of one of the four park Icons (Cinderella Castle, Spaceship Earth, Tree of Life, Chinese Theatre)
Large Prop	A construct of the themed experience that is a permanent fixture of the themed land, queue, or experience. A large prop is larger than an average person but is not classified as a building or an attraction. This may include X-Wings, a Millennium Falcon, or a 20-foot-tall Woody from Toy Story. May include props inside queues or inside buildings.
Small Prop	A construct of the themed experience that is a permanent fixture of the themed land, queue, or experience. A small prop is smaller than an average person. This may include small character statues, table settings, or small themed concepts in the parks or queues.
Scenery	This is a wide-angle image that displays the scenery of the themed land or experience. This has no central focus to the post of an individual item, but rather shares a broad overview of the area.
Holiday/Festivals Decorations	Decorations from Food and Wine Festivals, Festival of the Arts, Christmas, Halloween, Festival of the Holidays are all included.
Architectural Design	The inside and outside of permanent buildings are classified under this code. This does not include large decorative props. Stationary attractions are considered architectural design due to there is no experience for guests happening at the moment.

Attraction Experience	Attraction experience covers media that is taken from the entire attraction experience during the entry, large displays of the queue, loading, attraction point of view, ride photos, and exit. The attraction should be a moving vehicle that seats guests and does not include shows. This code may include photos of people riding a ride or includes a ride point of view video. Meeting characters in queues are classified under character meet.
Informative Sign	This media includes images of signs that provide information about happenings in the park.
Experience Active Engagement	Media that is classified as active engagement where they user is actively taking part of the experience. This could include scanning into the park, cosplaying, playing with interactive props, extra magic photopass, playing on a playground, or pin trading.
Entertainment	This media includes fireworks, special daytime/nighttime shows, theatre shows, street entertainment, musicians, and parades.
Character Meet	This code includes any interaction, photo, or posed position with a character(s). This could occur in one-on-one sessions or from a distance. This could include character interactions within queues since the main focus at the time is the character itself. A character meet should include a human connection. Mannequins do not count towards character meets.
Food/Beverage/Restaurant	This code includes any posts that display any type of food or beverage, including desserts, coffee, tea, alcohol, and full menus.
Icon	Any of the four icons from the parks taken by itself (Cinderella's Castle, Tree of Life, Spaceship Earth, and Chinese Theatre)
Merchandise	This coded media has an emphasis on merchandise bought or brought where they item is the main focus of the media.
Misc.	May include keepsakes, mementos, and flowers. Animal habitats are included if they are not viewed from an attraction experience.

Table 6.3 *Codebook*