Article

Service design: Suggesting a qualitative multistep approach for analyzing and examining theme park experiences

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Abstract

This article proposes and applies a multistep qualitative approach for evaluating service experiences, adapted from the emerging field of service design, in a theme park. It is argued that service design offers effective methods for analyzing and developing complex service experiences. By applying 'persona', 'observation', 'guided interviews', and 'visualization' methods to a theme park at the Gold Coast, Australia, it is found that the multistep approach delivers comprehensive insights into customer experiences and identifies critical incidents that take place during the service experience. As such, this study suggests a new method of how to analyze and evaluate service experiences.

Keywords

service experience, service design, persona, customer journey, observation, theme park

Introduction

Today's so-called 'experience generation' on one side seeks intensity, such as life-hype, impulsive, and fast experiences, and on the other side seeks calmness, authenticity, and 'soft tourism' experiences, such as trekking, mountain hiking, ocean cruising, or beach relaxation (Pikkemaat and Schuckert, 2006, 2007). Pine and Gilmore (1999: 12) describe experiences as the fourth economic offering or, in other words, 'events that engage individuals in a personal way'. They further indicate that 'while the experience itself lacks tangibility, people greatly value the offering because its value lies within them, where it remains long afterwards' (Pine and Gilmore, 1999: 12).

In particular, theme parks in various forms fulfill new leisure and tourism trends and have therefore become a favorite mode of mass entertainment in recent years all over the world (Liu,

2008; Milman, 2009; Williams and Buswell, 2003). Theme park spending worldwide is expected to grow at a 4.6% compound annual rate during the 2007–2011 period, from US $22.8 billion in 2006 to US$28.5 billion in 2011 (Milman, 2009).

The services provided by theme parks are multioption, time saving, emotional, and sense giving and meet the needs of what the current literature refers to as cocooning, wherein locations close to home become the basis for leisure activities (Cooper et al., 2008; Wong and Cheung, 1999). This cocooning behavior results from social trends, such as late marriages and an

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increased numbers of childless households, the adoption of family values, and the search for safety and security (Cooper et al., 2008).

Growing demand in the service experience sector exacerbates the importance of developing knowledge that assists in analyzing and designing service experiences. However, according to Gummesson (2005, 2006, 2007), the service marketing and service quality literature has its limitations, especially when examining and evaluating customers' experiences. Gummesson (2006) claims that just picking a few variables from received theory, hypothesizing some insulated causality between two or three variables, and testing them with perceptual survey data using statistical techniques will only result in superficiality and emptiness: 'Such research may offer face validity and reliability but not genuine validity and relevance' (Gummesson, 2006: 169). Due to the complexity of service experiences, the input of real-world data in the forms of words, pictures, and videos is required to better understand and express reality.

This article suggests the use of service design tools for analyzing and visualizing the complexity of service experiences in theme parks. We argue that the complexity of service experiences in theme parks derives from the following four factors: (1) user centricity, because the visitor is a central part of the service consumption (Battarbee et al., 2008); (2) experience cocreation by other visitors (Lovelock et al., 2007); (3) different target groups with diverse motivations, behaviors, and expectations (Williams and Buswell, 2003); and (4) a series of experience cues during the service process whereby every cue needs to fulfill the theme in order to enable the visitor to be immersed within the theme park experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

This article, therefore, distances itself from other experience evaluations suggested in a number of studies on theme parks (e.g. Bignè et al., 2005; Hickman and Mayer, 2003; Lewis and Clacher, 2001; Milman, 2009; Pikkemaat and Schuckert, 2006; Wanhill, 2002) and instead suggests a multistep qualitative approach, which is argued to enable a holistic analysis and evaluation of the service experience. This new method is applied on a theme park at the Gold Coast, Australia to test its practicability. Its emphasis thereby lies in the following steps: (1) the use of personas as a new method for target group analysis, (2) the use of observation to identify experience cues adapted from Berry et al. (2006), (3) the use of guided interviews to identify critical incidents adapted from Bitner et al. (1990), and (4) the visualization of results to make service experiences manageable (Diana et al., 2009).

The article is structured as follows. First, the emerging field of service design is discussed. Second, after reviewing theme parks in general, this article emphasizes the theme park product in combination with experience cues. By doing so, the characteristics of theme park experiences are identified. Third, in order to address the complexity of theme park experiences, a multistep approach is proposed. This article then describes the application of the proposed multistep approach on a theme park as a single-case study and outlines the main findings during the application. Next, the application of the service design methods, as well as the multistep approach as a whole, is discussed separately. Finally, after outlining the limitations, the main results of the study are summarized in the conclusion.

Literature review

Service design

The field of design has changed dramatically during the last decade (Koivisto, 2009; Mager and Gais, 2009; Moritz, 2005). Previously, design was seen as a profession that operates in specialized areas, such as graphic design, product design, and fashion design (Moritz, 2005). During the last 10 years, the field changed its scope from 'Design Centered Design' to 'User Centered Design' (Mager, 2009). As such, service design goes beyond designing artifacts and is no longer limited to the design of tangible products only but designs complex and interactive experiences, processes, and systems. These developments lead to the emergence of 'service design', which builds on service-dominant logic (Grönroos, 2006a; Vargo and Lusch, 2004) and services marketing (Grönroos, 2006b; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Service design uses participatory design, which makes clients part of the project (Battarbee et al., 2008) and adapts special tools and methods from service marketing such as blueprinting and service mapping (Design Council, 2004; Hollins and Shinkins, 2006; Zehrer, 2009).

The key characteristic of service design is argued to be the visualization of experiences conferring tangibility by considering the emotional context, which consists of the five senses and the personal meaning held by the customer

Table 1. Summary of theme parks in Australia.

State	Businesses June 2001 (n)	Total Visitors (in thousands)	Employment June 2001 (n)	Gross Income (in million AUD$)
Queensland	7	4,590	2,442	203.6
New South Wales	12	2,360	1,496	70.0
Victoria	4	320	72	4.6
Other States	7	1,050	140	8.9
Australia	30	8,320	4,150	287,2

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010).

during the design process (Aaltonen, 2010; Ojasalo, 1999; Parker and Heapy, 2006; Stickdorn and Zehrer, 2009; Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010). Furthermore, service design presupposes that customers do not live isolated lives; instead, they consume a mix of many goods and services in all sorts of combinations (Gummesson, 2005). Because service designers work visually, the transformation of ideas and processes into visible dimensions throughout all phases of the design process makes processes manageable and ideas comprehensible (Mager, 2009). Service design, therefore, can be described as a multidisciplinary and systematic approach that copes with the functionality and complexity of services by visualizing their systems and processes as well as by placing the client at the heart of the process. By doing so, potential problem areas can be identified as a starting point for creating favorable interfaces/experiences for both the user and the service provider.

Service design tools offer an alternative to conventional approaches for analyzing and evaluating service experiences. Apart from the centrality of user-centered design and cocreation in service design thinking (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2010), service design gives profound insights into how customers experience the service, and visualizes the processes that may be effective for handling the complexity and variety of service experiences (Segelström, 2009; Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010).

Theme parks

The 1955 opening of Disneyland in Anaheim, California was a turning point in the attraction industry, wherein a gated facility emphasized themes or stories coordinated with architecture, landscaping, costumed personnel, rides, shows, food services, and merchandizing (Milman, 2001; Richards, 2002; Wanhill, 2002). According to the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (2010), there were

more than 400 amusement parks and traditional attractions operating in 2006 in the United States alone, with all kinds of attractions and themes as well as more than 300 million visitors and approximately US$11.5 billion of revenue.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010) identified 30 theme parks that operate within Australia. The theme park industry attracts more than 8.9 million visitors, has a gross income of AUD$287 million, and employs more than 4150 people. In terms of attendance levels, Australian theme parks had an average of 0.5 theme park visits per person. This is the third highest rate in the world, behind only the United States and Japan, which experienced similar levels of demand at 0.6 theme park visits per person (Nelson, 2006). These numbers indicate a high demand for visiting theme parks for recreational and travel needs in Australia.

In theme park experiences, the user-centered viewpoint of service design is argued to be of particular importance because customers are deeply involved in the consumption process (Johns and Gyimothy, 2002). It is not about entertaining customers; it is about engaging them. Derived from Pine and Gilmore's (1999) 'experience realm', theme park experiences are mainly escapist experiences in which the customer actively participates in an immersed environment. This means that the visitor influences the performance, either actively or passively (Johns and Gyimothy, 2002).

In order to create escapist experiences, theme parks need to establish 'cues' that consistently support the theme (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Each cue must fulfill the theme in order to enable the visitor to immerse himself within a dream world (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). An effective theme must be concise and compelling, as well as a driver of the experience's design elements and staged events, working toward a unified storyline that entirely captivates the customer. Without such a theme, a theme park would merely be a
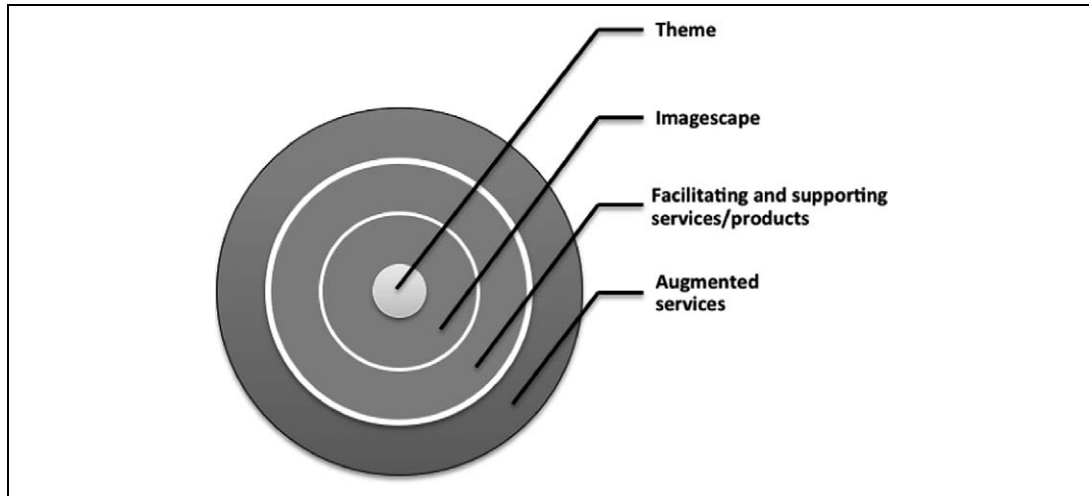
Figure 1. The theme park product.
Source: Adapted from Wanhill (2002: 129).

collection of rides, games, and refreshments (Wong and Cheung, 1999). The breakdown of the theme park product as illustrated in Figure 1, therefore, suggests that the theme itself is at the core of the theme park product. The experience cues thread the theme through the whole service experience.

The complexity of the theme park product derives from experience cocreation by other customers, differing target groups with diverse motivations, behaviors and expectations, and a number of experience cues during the visit. These cues are comparable with touchpoints and occur in the service interface, which is where the customer interacts with the organization by being part of the service process (Berry et al., 2006; Moritz, 2005). The service interface is the platform from which the service experience is developed.

Building on user-centered thinking, Berry et al. (2006) claim that customers always have a service experience when interacting with an organization. The authors describe these interactions as experience cues, distinguished into three categories: (1) functional cues regarding the technical quality or the 'what' of the service experience, (2) mechanical cues coming from the actual objects or environments and mainly concerning the experience's sensory design, and (3) humanic cues derived from the behavior, attitude, and appearance of the service provider. Thereby, functional cues are argued to influence the customers' cognitive or calculative perception of quality, whereas mechanic and humanic cues influence the customers' emotional or
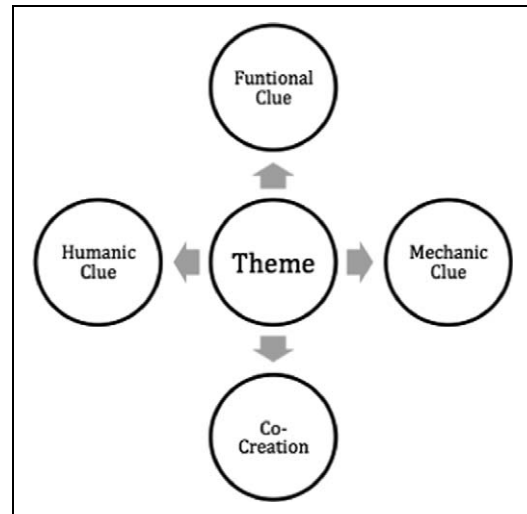
Figure 2. Experience clues in theme parks.
Source: Adapted from Berry et al. (2006: 46).

affective perceptions of quality (Berry et al., 2006). By reviewing the experience cues in the understanding of Berry et al. (2006) in relation to theme parks, 'the theme' and 'cocreation' are suggested as additional components (Figure 2) due to the centrality of the theme and the cocreation of experiences by other visitors.

Proposing a multistep qualitative approach

It is suggested that service design tools can manage the complexity and intangibility of service experiences by applying qualitative research methods and visualization techniques. The following

section describes a multistep qualitative approach, adapted from the emerging field of service design. Proposed is the combination of personas, observation, guided interviews, and visualization techniques used to gain comprehensive insight into customer experiences and identify critical incidents that take place during the service experience. The proposed combination originates from the service design literature, which discusses the individual tools of 'personas', 'observation', 'guided interviews', and 'visualization techniques' in the context of analyzing and evaluating services (Kimbell and Seidel, 2008; Segelström, 2009; Stickdorn and Schneider, 2010).

Persona

In simple terms, a persona is 'a technique that employs fictitious users to guide decision making regarding features, interactions, and aesthetics' (Lidwell et al., 2010: 182). The strength of the persona technique is argued to be the user-sensitizing impact, adapted from user-centered design, which may help designers understand the user better for further analysis and research (Burdon, 2006; Lidwell et al., 2010). Personas are suggested to not only make the target audience more real to designers but also ensure that requirements are prioritized to specifically meet the needs of the users (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2010). The creation of the personas is based on a small number of archetypal users, and each profile should represent a composite of a subpopulation of users (Lidwell et al., 2010). Each persona is typically represented with a photograph, name, description, and details about specific interests and relevant behaviors (Burdon, 2006; Massanari, 2010).

Like most tools of service design, the persona technique is a new approach. However, it is increasingly recognized, especially in user-centered design, because it offers insight regarding customers' attitudes, behaviors, and interests (Burdon, 2006; Massanari, 2010; Sanders, 2007).

Observation

The background information gained by using the persona technique is claimed to give a more comprehensive understanding during the analysis process. Consequently, by using observation or 'shadowing' as a second step, the observer may have a clear picture of the persona in mind when following the visitor through the service experience (Stickdorn and Zehrer, 2009). Thereby,

special attention should be paid to body language, emotions, and reactions as well as to influences by other guests and interactions with employees (Gummesson, 2007).

Guided interviews

In order to understand visitors' behaviors and experiences, guided interviews or in-depth interviews are suggested as a next step. Conducting interviews in addition to observation can have the advantage of allowing research participants to express ideas in their own words, which may be essential in order to holistically understand the customers' experiences (Gummesson, 2005).

The importance of gaining a holistic viewpoint of service experiences is supported by Edvardsson (1992: 18), who stresses the importance of identifying critical incidents. In this study, he uses the 'Critical Incident Technique' (CIT) to create an understanding of how customers perceive the quality of a given service. Critical incidents can be defined as 'specific interactions between customers and service firm employees that are especially satisfying or especially dissatisfying' (Bitner et al., 1990: 73). Similarly, this article suggests using guided interviews as a qualitative approach to identify situations where the service, or any part of the service process, including the outcome of that process, clearly differs from the desired service experience, which, according to Rust and Oliver's (1994) expectancy-disconfirmation-paradigm (EDP), would be equivalent to negative disconfirmation.

Visualization

As a final step, the findings should be visualized by using a customer journey map (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2010) together with the experience cues categories adapted from Berry et al. (2006). Visualization techniques can transform ideas and processes into visible dimensions that may create greater clarity about the service experience (Mager, 2009). A study by Segelström (2009) found that the three main reasons for service designers using visualizations during their service design process were as follows: (1) to articulate insights gained from the collected data, (2) to communicate insights to clients, and (3) to retain empathy as a way of keeping the data "alive" during the process. The most common visualization techniques used in service
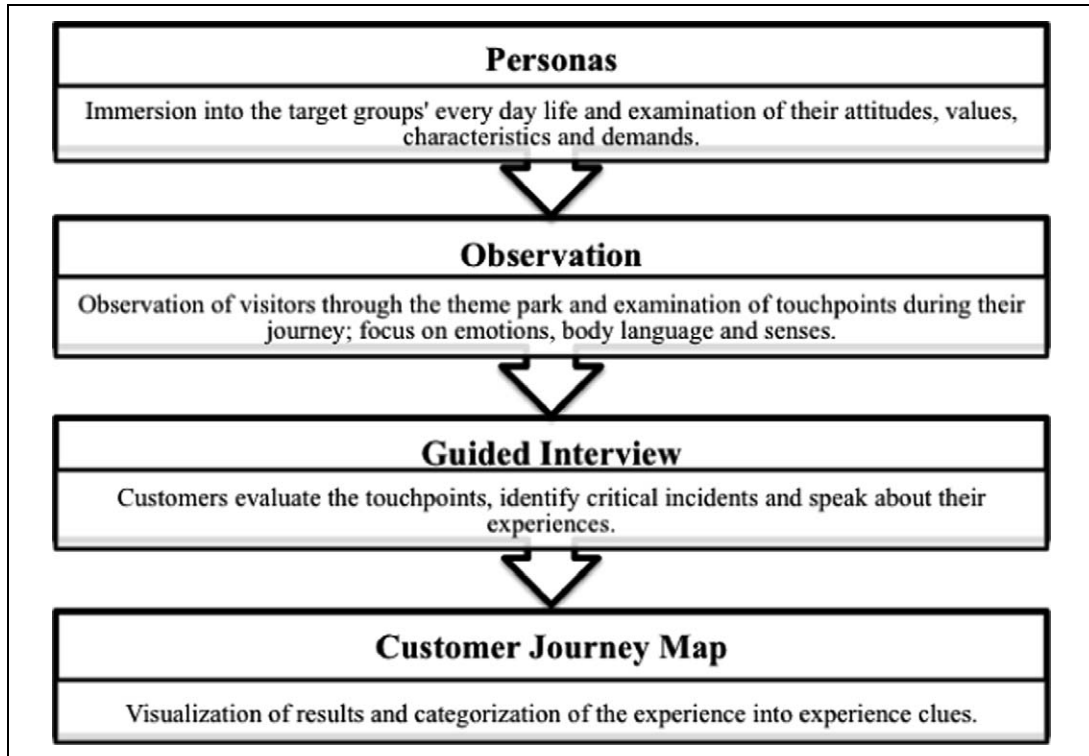
Figure 3. Multistep approach for analyzing service experiences

design include customer journey mapping and blueprinting (Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010). This study also suggests using customer journey mapping for illustrating and communicating findings.

The proposed multistep method as illustrated in Figure 3 is argued to provide an in-depth and holistic analysis of service experiences. The approach proposes the application of different service design tools and qualitative research. Qualitative methods are claimed to be more appropriate than quantitative methods research when analyzing and examining service experiences. Important in-depth insights may not be possible through the use of current quantitative techniques, in which individual companies and customers are reduced to masses and described as averages and distributions (Gummesson, 2006; Lidwell et al., 2010). This is supported by Babbie (2009), who argues that qualitative methods as used in service design seem to achieve a higher validity than survey and experimental measurements, especially due to the very detailed analytical data regarding people's attitudes and behaviors. By building on the described strengths of service design and outlining the importance of managing theme park experiences, this article applies the suggested

multistep approach to a theme park at the Gold Coast, Australia.

Methodology

This study applies the service design tools of 'personas', 'observation', 'guided interviews', and 'visualization' on a theme park as a single-case study. Single-case studies, it is argued, do not assume away complexity, chaos, ambiguity, uncertainty, and dynamic forces for the convenience of the researcher and his or her analysis (Stake, 1995).

Complexity and uncertainty play a major role within service experiences because they consist of interactions between customers and employees, employees and employees, and customers and other customers, making it difficult to maintain consistency in processes (Sparks, 2001). These difficulties are reinforced by the subjectively perceived manner of service experiences, which creates one of the major challenges in service management: In this context, services are described by customers with words such as 'experience', 'trust', and 'feeling', which are difficult to evaluate because it is difficult to give a distinct value to 'trust' or to a 'feeling' (Grönroos, 2007; Lovelock et al., 2007).
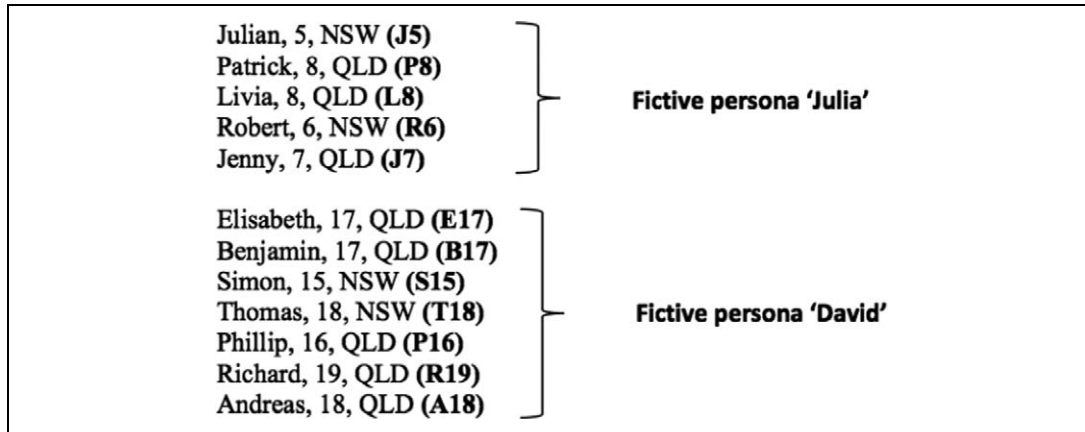
Julian, 5, NSW **(J5)**
Patrick, 8, QLD **(P8)**
Livia, 8, QLD **(L8)**   — **Fictive persona 'Julia'**
Robert, 6, NSW **(R6)**
Jenny, 7, QLD **(J7)**

Elisabeth, 17, QLD **(E17)**
Benjamin, 17, QLD **(B17)**
Simon, 15, NSW **(S15)**
Thomas, 18, NSW **(T18)**   — **Fictive persona 'David'**
Phillip, 16, QLD **(P16)**
Richard, 19, QLD **(R19)**
Andreas, 18, QLD **(A18)**

Figure 4. Randomly selected personas.
Note: NSW = New South Wales; QLD = Queensland.

Hence, applying service design tools to a theme park as a single-case study may help one understand the specific case, solve a practical problem, and generate new knowledge and understanding of the methods used (Perry and Gummesson, 2004). The next section describes and discusses the application of 'personas', 'observation', 'guided interviews', and 'visualization' to a theme park at the Gold Coast, Australia.

Selecting and developing personas

Children and teenagers usually act as opinion leaders in their families regarding leisure activities (Baker, 2001; Botha et al., 2004; Kerin, 2008). Therefore, this article suggests children and teenagers as target groups. The selected theme park defines its domestic target group 'children' by an age of between 3 and 12 years and 'teenagers' by an age of between 12 and 19 years, all coming from Australia. The persons chosen for this study were randomly selected from the theme park's database with the following stipulations: (1) they own an annual pass to the examined theme park, (2) they visited the theme park at least once during the year 2010, and (3) they live in one of the two Australian states of New South Wales and Queensland, as these two states account for 70%–80% of park visitors. Based on these three requirements, the database identified an entity of 45,6250 visitors of whom 17,3375 or 38% are children and 28,2875 or 62% are teenagers. Five children between 5 and 8 years of age and seven teenagers between 15 and 19 years of age were randomly selected for this study (Figure 4). The data points

for the persona profiles were derived from user interviews. The results were clustered into information about daily routines, favorites, motivations and frustrations, and typical sources of information used by the selected persons.

It was found that all participants in the target group 'children' are active and competitive persons who place a strong emphasis on sports. Furthermore, the main sources of information are their parents, who also act as major influencers. While prohibitions, uncertainty, and inactivity frustrate them, fictional heroes as well as older siblings take role model positions in their lives. The defined target group 'teenagers', however, is characterized by social personalities who set a high value on socializing and sports. All participants gain their information from friends and the Internet. Their specific motivations are defined quite differently; however, bad performance in sports often triggers frustration. The information selected from the interviewees is summarized into two fictive personas, namely, 'Julia', representing the target group children, and 'David', representing the target group teenagers. The generation of personas, ensuing data analysis, and interpretation were done by the two authors separately and controlled for interrater reliability. The two fictive personas are described in Figures 5 and 6.

Observing the service experience

The insights into the everyday lives of the 12 participants give a comprehensive background understanding for the subsequent customer observation. Every participant was observed individually during the timespan between the
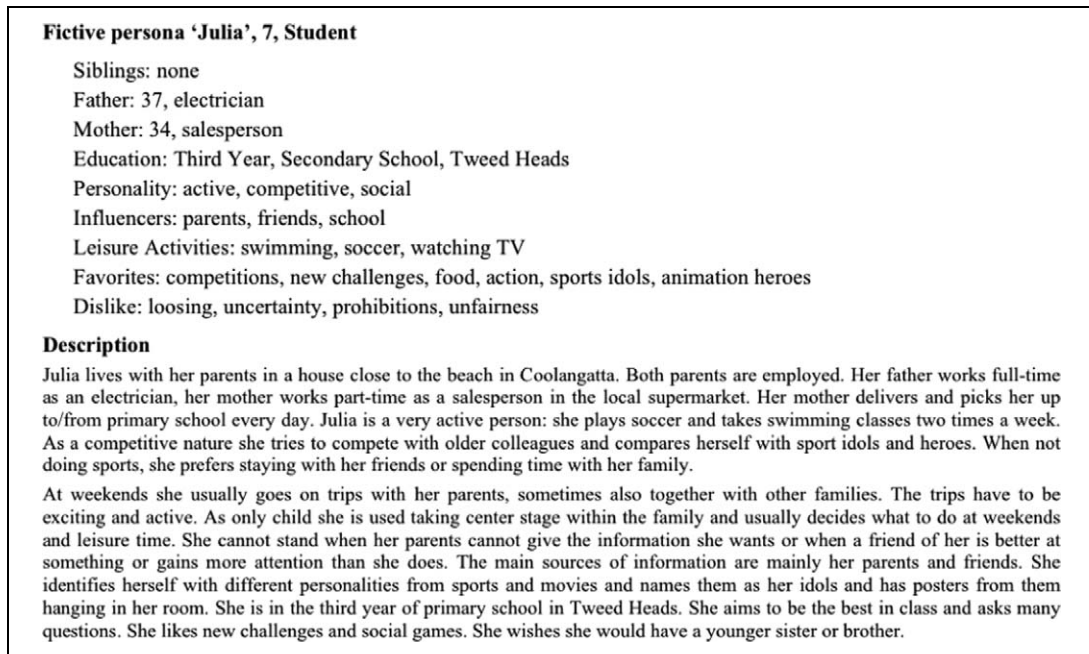

Fictive persona 'Julia', 7, Student

Siblings: none
Father: 37, electrician
Mother: 34, salesperson
Education: Third Year, Secondary School, Tweed Heads
Personality: active, competitive, social
Influencers: parents, friends, school
Leisure Activities: swimming, soccer, watching TV
Favorites: competitions, new challenges, food, action, sports idols, animation heroes
Dislike: loosing, uncertainty, prohibitions, unfairness

Description

Julia lives with her parents in a house close to the beach in Coolangatta. Both parents are employed. Her father works full-time as an electrician, her mother works part-time as a salesperson in the local supermarket. Her mother delivers and picks her up to/from primary school every day. Julia is a very active person: she plays soccer and takes swimming classes two times a week. As a competitive nature she tries to compete with older colleagues and compares herself with sport idols and heroes. When not doing sports, she prefers staying with her friends or spending time with her family.

At weekends she usually goes on trips with her parents, sometimes also together with other families. The trips have to be exciting and active. As only child she is used taking center stage within the family and usually decides what to do at weekends and leisure time. She cannot stand when her parents cannot give the information she wants or when a friend of her is better at something or gains more attention than she does. The main sources of information are mainly her parents and friends. She identifies herself with different personalities from sports and movies and names them as her idols and has posters from them hanging in her room. She is in the third year of primary school in Tweed Heads. She aims to be the best in class and asks many questions. She likes new challenges and social games. She wishes she would have a younger sister or brother.

Figure 5. Fictive persona description 'Julia'.

Fictive persona 'David', 17, Student

Siblings: 1 younger brother (12 years), 1 younger sister (10 years)
Father: 47, teacher
Mother: 45, nurse
Education: Last Year, Secondary School, Currumbin
Personality: active, social
Influencers: friends, Internet
Leisure Activities: socializing, sports, action movies
Favorites: Surfing, new challenges, hanging out with friends, being with family, cars
Dislike: staying indoors, work when friends have fun

Description

David lives with his parents in a house close to the beach in Palm Beach. Both parents are employed. His father is a teacher in Brisbane. His mother works part-time as a nurse in the hospital in Tweed Heads. He goes to school by bus every day together with his younger brother and sister. He is a very active and social person who likes spending time with his friends after school. He often goes surfing together with his brother and friends at the local surf spots or joins diverse sport activities in town.

The weekends he usually spends with his family. They often make one-day trips together with friends around the Gold Coast or meet for a barbecue at the local beach. Sometimes he goes to the movies with his friends. He likes action and entertainment movies. Furthermore, he is saving for a car and already takes driving lessons with his father.

David is in his final year of secondary school and wants to continue his Bachelor in Sports Management. Even though his friends try to impress the girls at school he is not interested in girls that much. He rather prefers sport and spends his time outdoors with his friends. He hates staying indoors, being sick or taking care of his younger sister. The evenings, he spends in front of the TV or surfs on the Internet, which is also the main source of information, which he then shares with his friends on social networks.
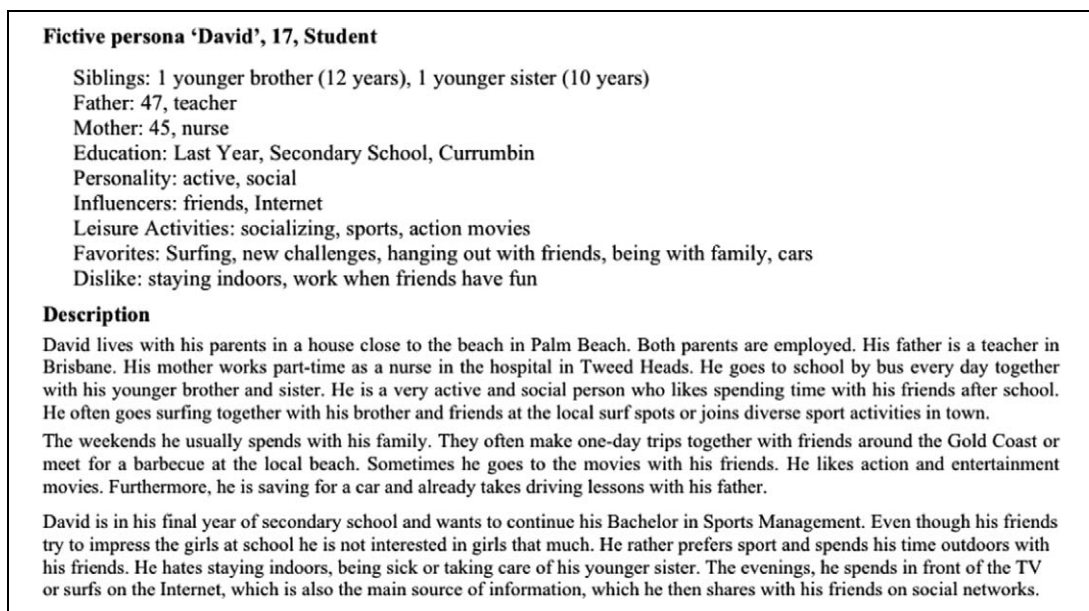
Figure 6. Fictive persona description 'David'.

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arrival at and departure from the theme park. Hence, an observation typically lasted between 5 and 8 hours. During the observation, notes were taken regarding what services the observed visitor used, how long he or she spent at the different theme park attractions, how his or her reactions and body language changed during and resulted from the service experiences, and what interactions he or she had with employees. The data generated from the observation were transcribed into Excel datasheets by using a time line as well as by examining and describing the touchpoints during the service experience journey.

Conducting guided interviews

The guided interviews, conducted after the theme park visit, enabled a holistic view of how the visit was experienced by the two target groups. The interviews were structured, one-on-one interviews
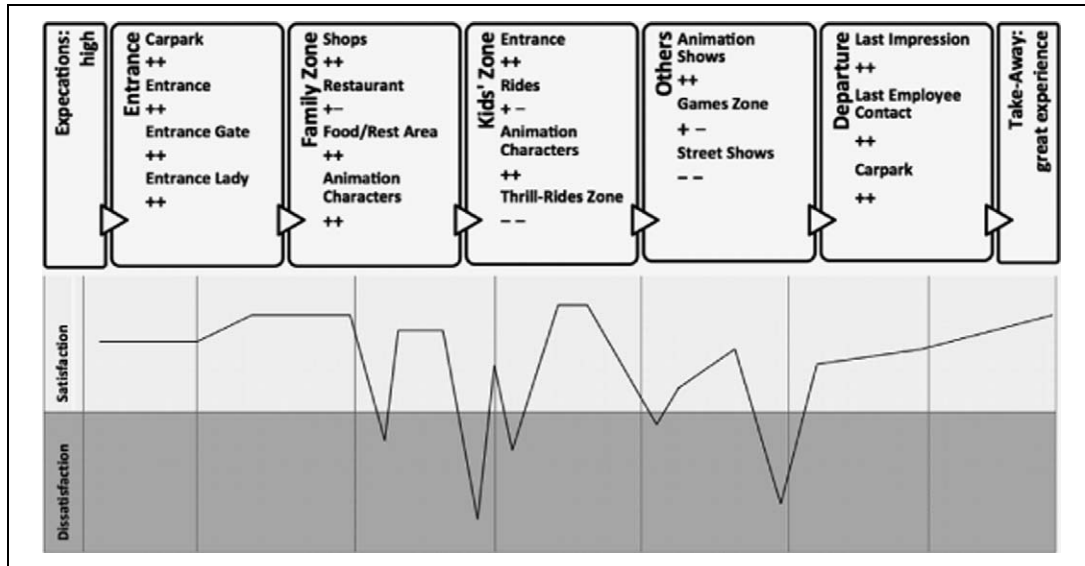
Figure 7. Customer journey 'Julia'—how children experienced their theme park visit.

in which a single respondent was probed by an interviewer to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings found during the observation. The questionnaire outline included probing techniques to ensure that the information the participant provided had been correctly understood. Moreover, although the questions were structured, the researcher followed the laddering technique to ask additional subquestions based on information provided by the participants during the interviews. The laddering method of interviewing is a technique recognized as effective for eliciting underlying values and feelings and is claimed as particularly helpful during the early stages of user experience research (Miles and Rowe, 2004). Interviews lasted between 45 and 65 minutes. All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed to identify patterns regarding sources of expectations, triggers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and postservice actions (for summarized interview results, see Appendix). Resulting from the guided interviews, four critical incidents were identified:

(a) The importance of interactions with animation characters.
(b) A consistent theme through the whole customer journey.
(c) Rest areas that are protected from the atmosphere.
(d) The design of and entertainment within queuing areas.

Improvement or decline of these critical touchpoints within the theme park tips the balance in favor of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Thus, it is essential to ensure that these incidents operate seamlessly and are permanently developed to guarantee ongoing service quality. The first two critical incidents support the importance of creating experiences that enable the visitor to escape from daily routines. Quiet rest areas and queue entertainment are also identified as critical incidents.

Visualization of the service experience

The observation and interview results as summarized in the appendix were subsequently incorporated into two customer journeys, as illustrated in Figures 7 and 8. The customer journeys holistically visualize how the two target groups experienced their theme park visit. The two journeys comprise all touchpoints the visitor had during the theme park experience, including touchpoints during the pre- and postservice period. The sections rated with two '++' in the customer journey represent good and very good experiences, '±' ratings represent neutral or mixed experiences, and the '−−' represents negative experiences, resulting in dissatisfaction and negative reactions. In other words, the ratings represent the summarized mood and satisfaction of the observed persons at the respective touchpoint. Furthermore, the satisfaction lines indicate how satisfied the visitor was at certain stages of the service consumption.

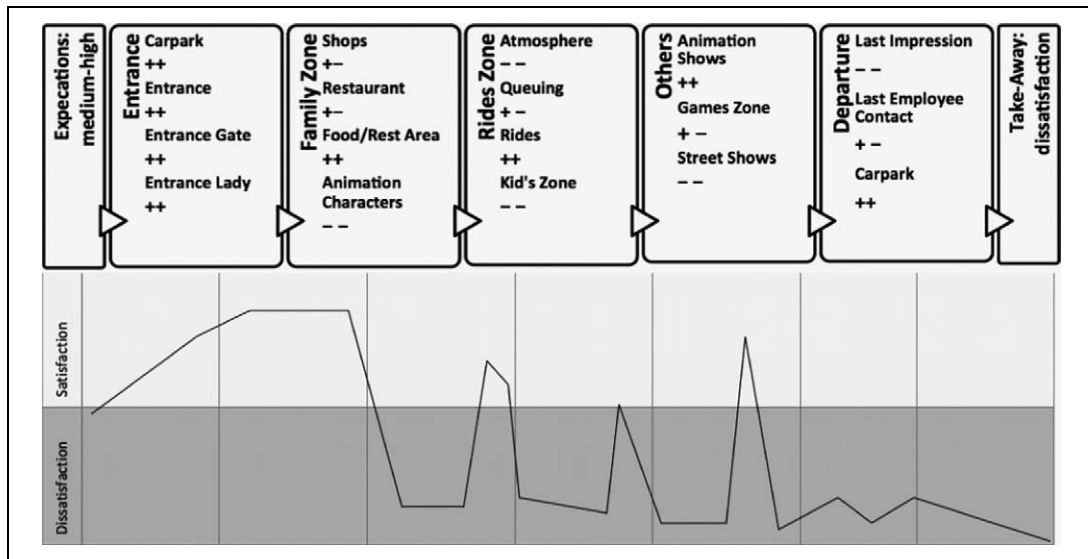It was found that while the persona 'Julia' (representing children) has a great experience

Figure 8. Customer journey 'David'—how teenagers experienced their theme park visit.

at the theme park and is delighted about her stay, the persona 'David' (representing teenagers) gets bored after a few hours and is dissatisfied at the end. It was additionally found that children get frustrated about height restrictions, required for thrill rides, which affects their overall satisfaction. Teenagers, however, complain about the bad music, the laughable atmosphere and shows, and the long and inconvenient waiting times at thrill rides.

Discussion

When applying a multistep qualitative approach on a theme park, emphasis lay on the following steps: (1) the use of personas as a new method for target group analysis, (2) the use of observation, (3) the use of guided interviews to identify critical incidents, and (4) the visualization of results to make service experiences manageable. Furthermore, by using a theme park at the Gold Coast, Australia as a single-case study, it was confirmed that the theme park experience is complex and diverse in terms of how it is taken in by different target groups. This complexity is enforced by the user centricity and subjectivity of visitors' service experiences perceptions as well as other customers' cocreation of the experience. The following section discusses the findings from the application of the multistep approach.

First, by developing personas not only based on sociodemographic but also on psychographic and behavioral data such as daily routines, favorites, motivations, and frustrations, this method provided a holistic picture of target groups. Detailed persona descriptions helped the researcher gain a better understanding in the next steps (e.g. when customers were observed during their service experience).

Second, participant observation was successful in surfacing where the observed persons spent their time as well as their expressions, body language, reactions, and emotions during the service consumption. However, difficulties emerged in the capture of spoken words and interactions with employees. The reason for that was the crowded and noisy atmosphere, which hinders precise observation at some stages. Furthermore, during rides and shows, it turned out to be almost impossible to observe the selected persons due to special effects, darkness, and distances. The findings during the observation therefore were not significant enough for a clear understanding of the theme park experience. Hence, it is argued that meaningful insights may not be gained from merely observing the customer during the theme park experience.

The guided interviews, conducted after the theme park visit, closed the information gap and enabled a holistic view of how the visit was experienced by the two target groups. Furthermore, potential misinterpretations by the researcher were avoided by letting the observed persons talk about their experiences in their own words. It was thereby possible to identify critical incidents which lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Finally, the use of a customer journey as a visualization technique made the results

manageable and understandable. It was possible to visualize how the two target groups experienced their theme park visit. Moreover, the two customer journeys outlined and rated all touchpoints the visitor had during the theme park experience, including the pre- and postservice period.

In summary, the findings from the observations, together with the guided interviews that build on the background understanding of detailed persona descriptions, give meaningful insights into how the customer experiences the theme park visit. By virtue of its application on a theme park at the Gold Coast Australia, it was found that the proposed approach offers holistic insights into customer experiences. It provides in-depth insights into the customers' experiences, implies the complexity and uncertainty of the study itself, and allows visitors to express their experiences in their own terms. Furthermore, the proposed method recognizes reality as it is and applies qualitative and user-centered service design tools to analyze and visualize visitor experiences.

Limitations

Although the study expands our knowledge of evaluating service experiences, certain limitations must be noted. First, it is suggested that employees' viewpoints should be integrated within the analysis. Whereas interviews with the management may offer reasons and outlooks for strategic directions, information from frontline employees can provide insights into the status quo. Thus, both the strategic and operational organizational levels should be integrated into the analysis steps.

Furthermore, the findings from the single-case study are derived from a small sample within only one theme park. This leads to the frequent criticism of single-case studies being 'microscopic' due to the insufficient number of cases for providing generalizable conclusions (Yin, 1994). Hence, whereas the application of service design tools and qualitative research bring about significant information and insights, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all theme parks.

Conclusion

Service design is an evolving field. Online networks such as 'Service Design Network' and 'Service Design Tools' permanently contribute to discussions and improvements. The findings of this study may also contribute to the ongoing field of service design, especially with regard to the development of an accepted methodology. From a leisure and touristic point of view, service design seems to be effective and applicable due to its user-centered approach. This article applies service design tools for the analysis and evaluation of theme park experiences.

The multistep approach suggested in this single-case study, applied to a theme park on the Gold Coast in Australia, is successful and significant due to the identification of problem areas, critical incidents, and improvement indicators at the strategic and operational level. This is primarily due to its user-centered and qualitative approach. It provides information about how the customer experiences services, which may not be found by methods so far used on theme parks. Additionally, by using customer journey mapping as a visualization technique, this study enables a categorization and evaluation of the experience cues. This leads to the conclusion that the visualization of results, with the aid of service design tools and an analysis of the service experiences in a customer-centered view, makes the complex theme park experience transparent, tangible, and designable.

Funding

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Persona 'Julia'	Sources of Expectation	R	Entrance	R	Family Zone	R	Kids' Zone	R	Others	R	Departure	R	Post-Service Actions	R
Functional Clue	TV ad, Brochure, Call center, Homepage	+ + + +	Parking area, Signage, Ticket counter	+ + +	Signage, Information counter, Souvenirs, Food and Beverage, First aid, Cleanliness	+	Signage, Rides, Queuing system, Safety instructions, Cleanliness	+ + - + + +	Game machines, Entertainment venues, Safety instructions, Cleanliness	+ - - + +	Exit gate, Parking area, Signage	- + + +	Birthday letter, Entrance pass, Personal pictures and movie clips	+ + +
Mechanic Clue	Music & pictures in ads, homepage and promotions	+	Flags, Pictures, Music, Lightning, Open atmosphere	+	Theme music, Light effects, Artificial design, Smell of food, Costumes	+ + + + +	Theme music, Music effects, Fantasy design, Smoke and water effects, Costumes	+ + + + +	Theme music, Music and light effects, Smoke and water effects, Costumes	+ + + +	Flags, Pictures, Music	+ + +	Pictures, Movies	+ +
Humanic Clue	–		Employee at entrance		Employees in shops, restaurants & information center	+	Employees who assist at the rides, Fay who offers face paintings	+	Employees at the entrance, Actors	+ +	Employee at exit gate	+ +	–	+
Theme	Theme is content of all promotions	+	First impression gives a strong clue to the theme	+	Names of the shops, Design, Pictures, Animation characters	+	Names of the rides, Fantasy design, Pictures, Animation characters	+	Pictures, Animation characters, Entertainment program	+	Pictures, Music, Animation characters	+	Theme is content of all promotions	+
Co-Creation	Word of mouth, Suggestions from friends	+ +	No queues	+	Children having fun, Very crowded	+	People screaming while riding, Children having fun, Noisy atmosphere in queuing area	+ - + -	People applauding and screaming, Noisy atmosphere	+ + -	No queues	- -	Word of mouth	+

Interview results-persona 'David'

Persona 'David'	Sources of Expectation	R	Entrance	R	Family Zone	R	Rides Zone	R	Others	R	Departure	R	Post-Service Actions	R
Functional Clue	TV ad, Brochure, Call center, Homepage	+ + + +	Signage, Ticket counter	+ + + +	Signage, Information counter, Souvenirs, Food and Beverages, First aid	+ + - +	Signage, Rides, Queuing system, Safety instructions	+ + - +	Game machines, Entertainment venues, Cleanliness	+ + - +	Exit gate, Parking area	- + +	Homepage, Birthday letter, Entrance pass, Social networks	+ + + +
Mechanic Clue	Music in ads & while on hold on phone, Design of homepage	+ +	Flags, Pictures, Music, Open atmosphere	+ + + +	Theme music, Light effects, Artificial design, Smell of food, Costumes	+ + + +	Theme music, Music effects, Fantasy design, Smoke and water effects, Costumes	- - - + -	Theme music, Music and light effects, Smoke and water effects, Costumes	- - - - -	Flags, Pictures, Music	- - -	Pictures, Movies	- -
Humanic Clue	Employee on telephone, Replies on mails	+ +	Employee at Entrance	+	Employees in shops, restaurants and information center	+	Employees who assist at the rides	+	Employees at the entrance, Actors	+	Employee at exit gate	+ -	Replies on mails and feedback	+
Theme	Theme is content of all promotions	+	First impression gives a strong clue to the theme	+	Names of the shops, Design, Pictures, Animation Characters	+	Names of the rides, Fantasy design, Pictures, Movie trailers at queuing areas	+	Pictures, Animation characters, Entertainment program	+	Pictures, Music, Animation characters	+	Theme is content of all promotions	+
Co-Creation	Word of mouth, Suggestions from friends	+ -	No queues	+	Noisy atmosphere, Very crowded	+ -	People screaming while riding, People's behavior while queuing	- -	People applauding and screaming, Noisy atmosphere	- -	No queues	-	Word of mouth, Feedback on homepage and social networks	- -