

Findings in Sport, Hospitality, Entertainment, and Event Management

Empirical - Entertainment

Returning to the Magic: Examining the Impact of Previous Attendance on Male and Female Disney Fans Perceptions of Universal Theme Parks

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Abstract

The current study investigated the influence prior consumption has on male and female consumers and brand supporters. In particular, 206 self-reported fans of Disney reported their perceptions of the Disney and Universal theme parks brands. Results indicate that men reported more negative perceptions and likely behaviors toward Universal theme parks than did women. Further, those that had attended a Disney theme park were more negative toward Universal than participants that had not visited a Disney theme park. Finally, the interaction of prior park attendance and gender displayed significant differences among participants. The current findings study adds to the literature on group member behavior and presents numerous avenues for future research.

Keywords: Disney, Universal, Brand Perceptions, Consumer Behavior, Rivalry, Group Membership

Within society, there are several brands that elicit strong emotions, including loyalty from supporters and derogation from opponents. For example, many people express positive and negative opinions on New York Yankees and Manchester United sport brands. Within the entertainment space, the Walt Disney Company is one such brand. Covering many facets and product genres, the company plays an important role in many people's lives and within society as a whole. One area of the company that elicits strong memories for consumers is the parks and resort properties operating around the world.

An important part of understanding human behavior is to study how perceptions of favorite and rival brands impact consumers and fans. Brand supporters can often display affiliation or loyalty to one brand by derogating, or voicing negative opinions on a competing or rival brand (Muniz, Jr. & Hamer, 2001). To better understand how supporters and consumers view favorite and rival brands in the theme park setting, the current findings study investigated factors that influence the way participants perceived the Disney and their rival Universal brands.

Background

In an attempt to better understand how a brand engages with consumers, it is important to investigate variables that influence outcomes. For example, within sport, variables such as gender and identification influence fans (Wann, 2006; Wann, Waddill, Bono, Scheuchner, & Ruga, 2017). Further, people are more likely to consume a product if they have had prior positive interactions with the brand (Wann & James, 2019; Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2003). This helps to explain how brands and organizations encourage repeat patronage and build loyalty among fans and consumers.

Another area of importance to the further understanding of consumer behavior is how the support of one brand influences feelings toward other competing brands, most frequently, rival brands. A lot of what is known about rivalry comes from the sport management literature, where characteristics and antecedents of rivalry include prior competition, proximity, and perceived similarities and differences among brands (Havard, 2014; Kilduff, Elfenbein, & Staw, 2010; Tyler & Cobbs, 2015). Rivalry can influence outcomes such as merchandise consumption (Havard, Shapiro, & Ridinger, 2016; Havard, Inoue, &

Ryan, 2018), attendance at live events (Sanford & Scott, 2016), and watching games on television (Mahony & Moorman, 1999).

The various ways that people view their favorite and rival brands are one way to measure brand equity and loyalty (Muniz, Jr. & Hamer, 2001), and impact organizational brand management (Ramirez, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2019). For purposes of the current findings study, we will focus on how individuals views of out-groups and out-group members (i.e., rivals). These perceptions can be influenced by many variables, including perceived success of the favorite and rival brands (Cikara, Botvinick, & Fiske, 2011; Havard & Hutchinson, 2017; Leach & Spears, 2009), identification with a favorite brand (Havard, Wann, Grieve, & Collins, 2020a), and product genre (Havard, Reams, & Gray, 2013). Further, the views one reserves for a rival brand can be influenced by mediated messaging (Havard, Ferrucci, & Ryan, 2019; Havard, Wann, & Grieve, 2018), relative importance of rival group (Havard & Reams, 2018), and the perceived deservingness of the rival or out-group (Berndsen, Tiggemann, & Chapman, 2017; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Van Dijk, Ouwerkerk, & Goslinga, 2010).

With much of what is currently known about rivalry coming from research in the sport setting, the current study investigated characteristics that influence perceptions of competing or rival brands outside of sport. Namely, the current findings study investigated how characteristics such as gender and prior consumption influenced Disney fans perceptions and behaviors toward the Universal branded theme parks. As an exploratory investigation, the following research questions guided the inquiry:

RQ1: How do female and male fans of Disney differ in their perceptions regarding Universal branded theme parks?

RQ2: How does prior consumption influence the way people view and behave toward the Universal branded theme parks?

RQ3: How does the interaction of gender and prior consumption influence the way people view and behave toward the Universal branded theme parks?

Method

In order to investigate the research questions, 206 participants from a larger sample were used in the current analysis. The majority of participants were male (53.4%), while 46.6% were female, aged 18 to 68 ($M = 33.15$, $SD = 9.85$). Further, 62.6% of participants reported to having previously visited a Disney parks and resort, while 37.4% reported never having done so.

Participants in the current findings study completed an online survey built using the Qualtrics software and distributed via social media and Amazon MTurk. The instrument used in the current investigation contained three sections. First, participants reported their identification with the Disney brand using a modified version of the Sport Spectator Identification Scale-Revised (SSIS-R; James, Delia, & Wann, 2019), consumption habits of the Disney branded parks, and attitudes toward the Disney and Universal brands (Spears & Singh, 2004).

Next, participants responded to items in the 12-item, four facet Rivalry Perception Scale (RPS; Havard, Grieve, & Lomenick, 2020). Originally developed and validated in the sport setting (Havard, Gray, Gould, Sharp, & Schaffer, 2013), the RPS measures participants (1) support of rival brand in indirect competition, (2) perceptions of rival prestige, (3) perceptions of rival supporter behavior, and (4) amount of excitement or satisfaction when a favorite brand directly compares favorably to a rival brand. Additionally, participants completed the Glory Out of Reflected Failure (GORFing) items to measure the likelihood of celebrating any perceived indirect failure of the Universal branded theme parks (Havard & Hutchinson, 2017). Finally, participants provided demographic information.

Results

The items used in the current findings study were combined and averaged so that one number was used to represent each participant for each measure. All eight scales used in the analysis displayed reliability in the research setting, with α ranging from .729 to .953. Overall, participants were highly identified with the Disney brand, and held favorable attitudes of both the Disney and Universal theme parks. Regarding perceptions and behavior toward the Universal theme parks, participants were for-the-most-part willing to support Universal, viewed the prestige of Universal and behavior of its supporters somewhat positively, and were somewhat willing to celebrate Universal's direct and indirect failure. Descriptive data is available in Table 1.

Before examining the research questions, we investigated the influence identification with the Disney brand had on perceptions of Universal theme parks. A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) yielded significant main effects, and therefore was included in further analysis. Therefore, a MANCOVA was used to examine differences among male and female respondents that had or had not attended a Disney Theme Park, while again controlling for brand identification, and revealed significant differences regarding gender, attendance, and the interaction (Gender – Wilk's Δ .915(7, 191) = 2.55, $p = .016$, $\eta^2 = .085$; Attendance – Wilk's Δ .857(7, 191) = 4.54, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .143$; Interaction – Wilk's Δ .881(7, 191) = 3.68, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .119$). For space, significant univariate results are provided below, and means and standard deviations can be found in Table 2.

Table 1.
Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability for Scales

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
Brand Identification (SSIS-R)	5.42	1.91	.926
Attitude toward Disney	6.13	1.03	.946
Attitude toward Universal	5.79	1.14	.953
Support for Universal (OIC)	4.71	1.40	.729
Universal Behavior (OB)	3.37	1.97	.940
Universal Prestige (OP)	3.52	1.88	.895
Satisfaction (SoS)	4.12	1.76	.886
GORFing toward Universal (GORF)	3.70	2.01	.923

Univariate analysis revealed that male fans were more negative toward Universal theme parks than female fans regarding fan behavior (Female – $M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.75$; Male – $M = 3.81$, $SD = 2.06$), prestige of Universal (Female – $M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.76$; Male – $M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.93$), and celebrating Universal indirect failure (Female – $M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.89$; Male – $M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.20$).

Having previously attended a Disney theme park made fans report a lower attitude toward Disney (Attended – $M = 6.08$, $SD = 0.94$; Not Attended – $M = 6.19$, $SD = 1.17$) and Universal (Attended – $M = 5.70$, $SD = 1.05$; Not Attended – $M = 5.96$, $SD = 1.23$). Further, prior attendance at a Disney theme park made fans report more negative perceptions of Universal theme park fan behavior (Attended – $M = 4.04$, $SD = 2.00$; Not Attended – $M = 2.21$, $SD = 1.33$), prestige of Universal theme parks (Attended – $M = 4.19$, $SD =$

1.84; Not Attended – $M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.36$), and increased likelihood of celebrating Universal theme park failure in direct (Attended – $M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.62$; Not Attended – $M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.32$) and indirect (Attended – $M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.87$; Not Attended – $M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.58$) competition.

Finally, the interaction univariate analyses revealed that males that had attended a Disney theme park were more negative than females that had attended regarding their attitude toward Disney (Male Attended – $M = 5.84$, $SD = 0.96$; Female Attended – $M = 6.40$, $SD = 0.81$, their perceptions of Universal theme parks fan behavior (Male Attended – $M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.71$;

Table 2.
Mean Scores by Gender, Attendance, and Interaction.

	Disney Att		Universal Att		OIC		OB		OP		SoS		GORF	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender														
Female	6.32	0.95	5.87	1.16	4.55	1.48	2.80*	1.75	3.05*	1.76	3.88	1.72	3.08*	1.89
Male	5.95	1.07	5.74	1.10	4.82	1.36	3.81*	2.06	3.87*	1.93	4.28	1.78	4.18*	1.99
Attended														
Yes	6.08*	0.94	5.70*	1.05	4.99	1.35	4.03*	2.00	4.19*	1.84	4.80*	1.62	4.44*	1.87
No	6.19*	1.17	5.96*	1.23	4.21	1.39	2.21*	1.33	2.34*	1.36	2.93*	1.32	2.41*	1.58
Interaction														
Female x Yes	6.40 ^b	0.81	5.85	1.01	4.88	1.49	3.05 ^b	1.98	3.46 ^b	1.88	4.53 ^c	1.73	3.60 ^b	1.97
Female x No	6.21	1.12	5.91	1.35	4.11	1.36	2.46	1.36	2.51	1.45	3.01 ^a	1.28	2.39	1.54
Male x Yes	5.84 ^{ad}	0.96	5.60 ^d	1.07	5.07	1.25	4.74 ^{ad}	1.71	4.71 ^{ad}	1.63	4.99 ^d	1.51	5.04 ^{ad}	1.55
Male x No	6.18 ^b	1.24	6.02 ^b	1.11	4.32	1.44	1.93 ^b	1.25	2.16 ^b	1.25	2.85 ^b	1.39	2.44 ^b	1.64

* = significant difference at .05 level. c = significant difference with Female x Not Attended at .05 level
 a = significant difference with Female x Attended at .05 level. d = significant difference with Male x Not Attended at .05 level
 b = significant difference with Male x Attended at .05 level.

Female Attended – $M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.98$), prestige of Universal theme parks (Male Attended – $M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.63$; Female Attended – $M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.88$), and likelihood of celebrating Universal Theme Parks indirect failure (Male Attended – $M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.55$; Female Attended – $M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.97$).

The interaction also revealed that prior attendance influenced differences within genders. Males that had previously visited a Disney theme park were more negative than males who had not visited regarding attitude toward Disney (Male Attended – $M = 5.84$, $SD = 0.96$; Male Not Attended – $M = 6.18$, $SD = 1.24$), attitude toward Universal (Male Attended – $M = 5.60$, $SD = 1.07$; Male Not Attended – $M = 6.02$, $SD = 1.11$), their perceptions of Universal theme parks fan behavior (Male Attended – $M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.71$; Male Not Attended – $M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.25$), prestige of Universal (Male Attended – $M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.63$; Male Not Attended – $M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.25$), and willingness to celebrate Universal direct (Male Attended – $M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.51$; Male Not Attended – $M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.39$) or indirect (Male Attended – $M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.54$; Male Not Attended – $M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.63$) failure. Finally, females that had attended a Disney theme park were also more willing to celebrate Universal direct failure (Female Attended – $M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.75$; Female Not Attended – $M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.28$) than females that had not attended a Disney theme park.

Discussion

The current findings study investigated how gender and prior attendance at the Disney theme park influenced participant views of the Universal theme park brand. Results showed that males reported more negative views of Universal than females. Similarly, those that had previously visited a Disney theme park reported more negative perceptions and likely behaviors toward Universal than participants that had not visited on of the Disney theme parks. The interaction of gender and prior attendance revealed that males having attended a Disney theme park were more negative in their views on Universal than were females that had attended and males that had never attended. Finally, female participants that had visited a Disney theme park were more willing to celebrate the direct failure of Universal than females that had not previously visited a park. While out-group views and likely behaviors are less negative in the theme park setting than in the sport setting (Havard, Wann, Grieve, & Collins, 2020b), the current findings study

suggest potential areas where more understanding of out-group behavior regarding brands is needed.

Implications and Future Investigation

The findings shed light onto the way supporters and consumers view their favorite and rival brands. Additionally, the current findings study supports previous research in the sport setting that male fans report more negativity toward rival brands than do females (Havard, Achen, & Ryan, 2020; Havard, Eddy, & Ryan, 2016). With this, the current findings study adds to the literature suggesting that men react to out-groups and rivals in a more negative manner than do women. This is an area where future investigation is very much needed.

The findings indicate how important prior attendance is to the ways consumers and supporters view competing brands, with those having visited a Disney theme park reporting more negativity toward Universal theme parks than their counterparts. Both researchers and practitioners should take notice of these findings and plan their investigations and promotions accordingly. When combined with gender, it is not all together surprising to see that repeat male participants report more negative perceptions of competing or rival brands that do repeat female consumers. While this is an area ripe for future investigation, the current findings should not suggest that men form stronger bonds with their preferred brands than do women. Further, it also should not be suggested that more negative views of a rival brand through repeat consumption of a favorite brand leads to more loyalty toward a preferred brand. A more fruitful avenue would be investigating *why* men, whether they are first-time or repeat consumers, report more negative perceptions of out-groups than do women. Additionally, future researchers should investigate how loyalty to brand is formed, and how that loyalty influences views and likely behaviors toward a rival brand.

These findings also present researchers and practitioners with the important task of finding ways to decrease negativity and animosity among group members. While the current findings illustrate that participants tended to view the Universal theme park brand somewhat positively, future investigation should focus on ways to decrease the negative feelings and views toward an out-group on display within the research question analysis.

The current findings study set out to further inform readers how gender and prior consumption influenced group member views and behavior. In that scope, the current findings study provided results that can help

readers, investigators, and practitioners while suggesting potential areas for future inquiry on the topic. It is important to continually monitor and investigate group member behavior, including variables that influence such behavior and finding ways to decrease out-group negativity. The current findings study provides an important step in this direction.

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