

Ambiguous Consumption Mode in HKDL

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Abstract

In this paper, I will go to explore the consumption mode of HONG KONG DISNEYLAND (HKDL) through analyzing consumers' exploration route, shopping preference and dietary choice respectively in the spatial study and audience research. The purpose is to discuss whether there is a guiding consumption mode in HKDL and whether this mode is successful in practice.

Keywords

Therapeutical Consumption; Induced Consumption; Mentally Relaxation; Clear Orientation; Exploring Freedom; Reducing Authority; Staffs Integration.

1. Introduction

In the chapter of 'Disneyland: The Happiest Place On Earth' written by John Findlay, he mentioned "Walt Disney liked to think that the theme park permitted people to escape the here and now. Disney was designed to wall people off from the outside world". In Walt Disney's words, he wants to create a fantasyland that varies from the real world where the public actually live in. He intends to construct an illusion that the visitors are in another world in which is full of happiness and magic. From my points of view, Disneyland is originally conceptualized and planned as a magic zone in which protects its visitors from being affected by the negative interference of the real world. Once the visitors enter into the theme park, it means that they are accepted this consumption mode by default. However, in this paper, i want to argue that whether this mode really help visitors to temporarily forget the outside world; or maybe it conversely functions more at emphasizing visitors' identities of being consumers in the material aspect.

In order to explore the latent consumption mode of HKDL designed by its planners, this paper would use spatial movement as cue to invite the readers to travel with me. In addition, in order to further verify my perspectives, i would use some survey results from other consumers to increase the reliability of the generalization to avoid the pitfall of too small sample base for relatively convincing conclusion.

2. Consumption as the Therapy

My readers may have question that if the consumption mode really exist in the theme park, how does it run transparently? In the following, i would try to reveal its rules. Actually, in the original expectation of consumption orientation, every visitor would be regarded as a patient who is not quite right and needed a little bit help from the employees and environment of Disneyland. The designers intend to create an illusion that when consumers left the park they would be more right than when they came; and making the consumers feel better proved profitable (John Findlay). Those people are considered to have various troubles like losing themselves or having less choice both in their work and life. They are looking forward to find a place in which they are able to escape from these undesirable situations after long-time suffering. And fortunately, Disneyland is the paradise that could provide them some corresponding treatments and

salvations. Based on this imaged background, i will be going to explore the process how HKDL mange the consumption mode as the therapy for its consumers.

(a) Therapy one: Mentally relaxation by the simplified layout

While comparing with other theme parks like Ocean park, HKDL has only one main entrance, which means that the visitors are required to go into and go out off the park through this single entrance. They would have no difficulty in considering the question like which entrance would be more convenient and closer to their destinations. From official explanation, Disney had noticed, had more than one entrance and exit, which disrupted the even flow of crowds and prevented effective control over the influx and egress of consumers (In *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940*, p84) [1]. However, i suppose that perhaps HKDL tries to cure their consumers by simplifying the possibility of choice and process of thinking; consumers have no need to pay attention to some invaluable choices. Additionally, one main entrance also means that there would be no privilege here. Regardless of celebrities or ordinary civilian, they would be welcome equally and fairly. It seems that the position, label and title defining a person in the society would fail briefly. For most visitors, the class of service in the real world would not extend to the park, except the priority provided for the disable people. In my view, Disneyland intend to construct a simple and fair atmosphere to their consumers in the first place; because these consumers have already suffered a great amount of choices and unfair treatments in the real world.

(b) Therapy two: Clear orientation by guiding routes

After passing through the single entrance, the visitors are free to go straight to the main street or catch the train. It seems that there are two routes we are able to make the decision with respect to our preferences; but this alternative choice is actually just an illusion. Regardless of which route we chosen, we would be finally guided to areas on the right side as HKDL expected. For instance, if we go straight to the main street, the spacious road would led the visitors to the Tomorrowland; instead, the road leading visitors to turn to the left areas would be hided by tussock grass or trees. It would be quite easy to get lose if the visitors forcibly enter the left areas. Also, if we are going to catch the train, we would be guide to the Fantasyland station (near to the Tomorrowland); after arriving, we are free to get off or stay at the train. But if we are going to stay at the train, it would bring us back to the origin station (the entrance). This loop actually means that the visitors only have one choice and one route in HKDL; after entrance, the next suggested attraction would be Tomorrowland or the station near to the Tomorrowland. I have asked ten visitors the same question: which area would you go first after going into the theme park? Not surprisedly, eight of them will go to the main street or Tomorrowland while two of them will go the Castle of princess. Walt himself had explained that disneyland would be a place where you can not get lose or tired unless you want to (In *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940*, p84) [1]. From my experience of traveling HKDL for several time, i suppose that that so-called correct route is from main street-Tomrrowland-Fantastyland-Toy Story Land-Mystic Point-Grizzly Gulch-Adventureland (2017.4). I guess if visitors follow this most promising route, they would successfully avoid getting lose and being trapped. As John Findlay said, this route led to a system of circulation that, using moviemaker's cues, subtly guided people around the park (In *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940*, p84). [1]

(c) Therapy Three: Exploring freedom by making reservation or using priority

If we are traveling inside the park, it is not difficult to find that waiting in the queue is so time-consuming that seriously hinder our exploration. At the very beginning (in 1955), Disneyland intended to foster an illusion of secret short, fast-moving lines instead of a single long one by using fences and railings that double back and forth in maze patterns and preventing crowding (In *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940*, p85) [1]. According to

my experience, if i intend to finish all the seven areas inside in one day , i have to give up traveling some compelling recreations and line up to the most interested attractions. If fortunate enough, i could have fun in at least one recreation facility in each area; but generally, excluding the meal time, totally six attractions in one-day trip would be the most common situation. Nobody could escape from waiting in the line. But actually, HKDL provides the visitors several approach to cut their queue times and free their actions to further exploring the park. Firstly, the visitors are expected to make a reservation through the machine or the staffs. For example, in some early attractions like the space mountain, visitors could take the reservation ticket from the machine in advance and then continue their explorations. Even though in some new attractions like Slinky Dog, visitors can ask the staffs for reservation ticket and then go back to the recreation facility at the appointed time. Secondly, in order to fill the seats maximumly, HKDL provides a priority channel for those single visitors who have no demand to play with friends or family necessarily; and this channel could be find in some attraction like Toy Soldiers Parachute Drop. Finally, there are some priority tickets would be provided for the visitors who live in Hong Kong Disneyland Hotel or Disney's Hollywood Hotel, which allows these consumers to skip the process of standing in the queue in some particular attractions. Through ways like these, HKDL shows its sincerity in liberating their consumers of being limited by rules inside the park; it provides them freedom as much as possible in the exploration.

(d) Therapy Four: Reducing authority or tension by staffs integration

In order to keep order inside the park, the staffs of HKDL would provide us service everywhere, from different attractions to shops and restaurants. They make lots of efforts on pretending themselves as a part of the park by dressing up the clothes full of Disney elements. Especially those staffs who are wearing the heavy costume performing the typical Disney characters, such as Mickey mouse and Minnie. By requiring their staffs to work as performers, HKDL intend to undermine the reality and create a more fantasy land for their visitors. However, instead of pretending as a part of the park, there is also another form of staffs hiding inside the consumers. In order to not disturb the consumers, they would try their best to become transparent through pretending themselves as shoppers, photographers and so forth. During the process of interview, i have communicated with a visitor i supposed; but surprisedly, he suddenly told me that he is actually one of the staffs serving for HKDL and his job is to work as a part of surveillance system and take photos inside the park. He also told me that lots of his colleagues were actually on the duty in the same way as he did. They would wear casual clothes as pedestrians to monitor the consumers in various shops and attractions, instead of dressing up as security. Regardless of being a part of the park or the consumers, i suppose HKDL staffs successfully integrate themselves into the Disney system that our consumers are not easily to discover these internal requirements.

3. Fantasyland as an Illusion?

However, on the one hand,we have to admit that HKDL make lots of effort to insert valuable therapies into the consumption mode to help the visitors escaping from the real world and make them feel better than when they came; on the other hand, a great deal of unfriendly and profit-driven intentions that would also visualize in the consumption mode of HKDL, which would tend to emphasize the domination position of HKDL while destroy consumer's expression of this fantasy land. In the following part, i will be gong to explore the ambiguous elements in the aspects of diet and shopping, which would contribute to bring the visitors back to the real world where the producers are keen on chasing profit while the consumers are in the position of being squeezed with less choices.

(a) Conspicuous consumption

Before getting permission into the park, every consumer is required to pass through the security check, in which they would be warmly reminded that any food and drink water would not allowed to bring into the park. But generally, in one-day traveling, consumers must be hungry and it means that they have to pay for the foods provided by HKDL at least for one time, regardless of in the snack vender or in the restaurant. Also, beginning in 2007, to increase visitors' spending, HKDL management abandoned the localized carts imitating Mong Kok hawkers selling snacks inside the park. This decision pressed visitors to purchase and consume food inside HKDL's restaurants (Disneyfication and Localization: The Cultural Globalization Process of Hong Kong Disneyland", P 390)[2]. In other word, the consumers have no choice in the aspect of diet; they have to consume the food as what HKDL expect, unless they choose to stay hungry or maybe bring the food with them secretly. Referring to the diet consumption, HKDL shows its dominating position; it seems that consumers are free to make decision in buying the food, but actually, they are under the control of HKDL. What's more, based on my interview, most consumers hold the view that the price of the food is expensive though they would understand this management. In my view, the higher price would remind the consumers the fact that this fantasy land they now playing is also a place that emphasis the materialism, which would further make the real world visible though HKDL do not want to admit.

(b) Induced consumption

Instead of the obviously intention-driven consumption in the diet aspect i mentioned above, i also want to reveal other latent consumptions guided by HKDL. If our consumers pay a little bit attention on the location and rule settings inside the park, it is not difficult for us to find a fact that through the management of location and improvisation of the rule, HKDL constantly expose the products to the consumers in order to increase the interaction time between consumers and the products. For instance, i discover a phenomenon that after playing some attractions, the visitors have to pass through the gift shop that located in the middle of the facility and the exit. The purpose of this tricky location is quite obvious; whether the consumers want to buy the product or not, HKDL intends to attract the visitors' eyes by exposing as many products as possible. What' more, HKDL would change their rules inside the park to strengthen this potential power as well. For example, after the year of 2015, selfie stick is abandoned inside the park; however, there is no forbidden to take photos inside the shop. It seems that visitors are allowed to take photos inside the shop even though they have no interest in buying something. Indeed, i suppose this case is a little perverse. HKDL do not protect the copyright of their products by avoid taking photos in the gift shop; instead, they subtly utilize the improvisation of rules to stimulate all the potential consumptions.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, i believe that HKDL successfully construct a fantasy land in which they are not only selling happiness but also providing their consumers corresponding treatments with the combination of the staffs and the environment. In order to undermine consumers' difficulty of making choice or their feeling of being treated unfairly, HKDL provides only one entrance and exit. For purpose of avoiding losing inside the park, HKDL offers a obvious and special road to guide their consumers in the route of exploration. In order to free consumers' actions in exploration, HKDL creates lots of approaches to shorten the queue time, such as making reservation through the machine or staffs, using the single channel or priority ticket. Also, to keep order inside the park while not disturbing the consumers, HKDL pays lots of effort in integrating their staffs into the park by making them invisible. Obviously, if consumers follow these transparent consumption modes (therapies) character in this imaged fantasyland, perhaps most of them would be more right than when they came as HKDL expected. However,

this magic zone is also possible to fail under the same consumption mode of HKDL. That is because even though consumers have already paid for the tickets, Disneyland still cannot give up the possibilities of earning more profits by enforcing visitors to the diets consumption in their restaurants and to passage of gift shop for the induced buying, which would endanger the efforts of building a fantasyland that varies from the real world. This profit-driven intention would inevitably make the rules in real world visible again. Hence, through the consumption mode to construct a fantasyland providing therapies while reproducing the profit-driven world is what i call ambiguity in HKDL.

References

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