# The Influence of Relational Bonds and Innovative Marketing on Consumer Perception – A Study of Theme Parks

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## Abstract

Increased prosperity has made quality of life and entertainment greater priorities, creating fierce competition among recreation industries. Apart from pursuing innovation, businesses must establish strong relational bonds with their customers to maintain their competitive edge. Using theme parks as a case study, we researched and modelled the relationships among relational bonds, innovative marketing, perceived value, satisfaction, trust and loyalty. A consumer survey returned 803 valid questionnaires and revealed the following: (1) Relational bonds with customers have a significantly positive effect on their perceived value and satisfaction. (2) Innovative marketing has a significantly positive influence on customer perceived value. Consumers were categorized by their visit frequency (high, moderate, or low) and compared by group. Results showed the most significant difference between moderately frequent and infrequent visitors in relation to the influence of trust on loyalty. The results can serve as reference for companies in implementing customer relations and innovative marketing strategies.

**Keywords:** customer relational bonds, innovative marketing, theme parks, consumer behaviour

## 1. Introduction

Increased prosperity has led to a greater focus on entertainment and recreation. According to the Ministry of Transport (2013), the Taiwanese people place priority on quality of life and are spending more on travel, entertainment and recreation. Theme parks have become a very popular feature of the tourism and recreation sector in Taiwan, creating fierce competition among businesses eager to enter the industry. If a company could identify the key factors to enhancing the success of amusement parks, it would be able to carve out a strong position for itself in the industry.

As theme parks have become more popular, customer awareness has also grown stronger. Breey (1983) proposed the concept of relational bonds with customers, which are formed by providing diverse services to attract, maintain and strengthen customer relationships. Relational bonds should be seen as even more important in theme parks, which are part of the service industry. In today's competitive environment, businesses should place priority on just only cultivating new clients but also maintaining long-term relationships with existing clients. How to maintain good interactive relationships with clients, thus encouraging them to offer their business again, is a particularly vital issue.

The travel industry must be more innovative as consumers today are no longer satisfied by only their basic needs being met; rather, they seek to enhance their recreational quality. Over the past several years, theme parks in Taiwan have become more successful than national parks, mainly due to innovative models or unique features, such as a cable car connecting the Formosa Aboriginal Cultural Village with Sun Moon Lake; romantic venues for weddings and photo shoots, and cartoon-related products. Evidently, innovative marketing attracts customers and is essential to the recreation industry.

In our dramatically shifting environment, we can no longer rely on empirical principles to understand customer perceived value, which is continually changing (Flint, Woodruff & Gardial, 2002). To better meet the needs of customers, the service industry should continue to pursue innovative marketing strategies. Perceived value must be cultivated by both businesses and clients (Vargo & Lusch, 2006); it is affected by both innovative marketing and relational bonds, and has a tremendous impact on consumer loyalty and satisfaction.

It is evident that strong relational bonds and innovative marketing form an important link. If theme park operators seek to gain an edge in the market, they must employ innovative marketing to create and maintain relational bonds with their customers. Using theme parks goers as research subjects, we aimed to understand the relationship between innovative marketing and customer relationships, as well as explore the effect of these two factors on the perceived value, satisfaction, trust and loyalty of customers. Apart from building relationship models, we also compared different visiting frequencies to see if this led to significant differences in the strength of construct relationships.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Relational Bonds with Customers

Relational bonds mean combining advertising, marketing, public relations and direct marketing to more effectively reach consumers and develop long-term, continuous relationships with them (Copulsky & Wolf, 1990). Berry & Parasuraman (1991) identified three types of relational bonds: Financial bonds - businesses use financial incentives to strengthen customer relationships. Social bonds - customer relationships are built through social interaction. Structured bonds - both parties share resources and develop a mutually beneficial relationship. Berry (1995), Williams, Han & Qualls (1998), Peltier & Westfall (2000) and Lin, Weng & Hsieh (2003) found that the strength of these relational bonds differs; with structural bonds being the strongest, followed by social and then financial. Structural and social bonds bring the parties closer together (Wilson, 1995). We adopted the three types of relationships proposed by Berry & Parasuraman (1991) as research constructs for relational bonds.

### 2.2 Innovative Marketing

Innovative marketing means tapping into the potential for new markets, or changing to new products, procedures or systems to meet customer demands (Brown, 1992). Innovation can improve the quality of products or services, enhance corporate image, strengthen customer loyalty and attract potential customers (Ottenbacher & Gnoth, 2005). Service innovation was defined as the adaptation of existing services to meet the needs of consumers (Smith, 1998). Higgins (1995) identified four widely accepted types of innovation, being production innovation, procedural innovation, marketing innovation and management innovation. We used product innovation, procedural innovation and marketing innovation as constructs to measure innovative marketing.

### 2.3 Customer Perceived Value

Perceived value encapsulates product value, service value, staff value and image value (Kotler, 1992). Mathwick et al. (2001) studied experiential value, which they suggested is divided into four quadrants, being consumer return on investment, service excellence, aesthetic appeal and playfulness. These constructs are all applicable to theme parks. After studying theme parks, Jiang (2004) found that playfulness had the greatest impact on customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions, followed by aesthetic appeal and service excellence. This study used the four constructs proposed by Mathwick et al. (2001), being consumer return on investment, service excellence, aesthetic appeal and playfulness, to measure perceived value.

### 2.4 Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction means that the quality of the product of service creates a feeling of contentedness for the customer (Gustafsson, Johnson & Sandén, 2000). Satisfaction results from the customer favourably comparing product outcomes with expectations (Kotler, 2003). Therefore, satisfaction as a kind of overall feeling that reflects whether or not the consumer likes the product or service after its experience (Fornell, 1992).

Booms & Bitner (1981) compiled the 7P's of marketing, which together form a marketing portfolio suited to the service industry: product, price, place, promotion, people, process and physical presence. Lin (2010) also pointed out that a unique, creative atmosphere is a key factor of influence on travel, and should be included in the 7P's. As theme parks are considered part of the service industry, this study used the 7P's of Booms & Bitner (1981) as variables to measure customer satisfaction with theme parks.

### 2.5 Trust

Trust as confidence in the reliability and integrity of trading partners (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust implies a willingness to assume risk; in other words, people are willing to assume the risk of being hurt because they believe in the integrity, kindness or ability of the trusted party (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). Meanwhile, trust requires long-term regard for the relationship between consumers and businesses (Pavlou, 2003). Put simply, when both parties trust each other and recognize the value of the transaction, it is much more likely to be successful. This study adopted the variables of trust and reliability proposed by Morgan & Hunt (1994) to measure the trust of consumers in theme parks.

*2.6 Loyalty*

Loyalty is built on continued dealings between the customer and the business; it is a type of commitment to purchase a favourite product or service again in the future (Oliver, 1999). Customers who commit to a repeat purchase have stronger levels of loyalty (Hoong & Goo, 2004). Price, service quality, product quality, innovation and image all significantly affect how customers perceive the value of the product or service, which in turns influences their loyalty (Fredericks & Salter, 1995).

Gronholdt et al. (2000) suggested using the following four indicators to measure customer loyalty: willingness to repurchase and to provide recommendations to others, acceptance of price and cross-purchase willingness. This study used the above variables to measure the loyalty of customers to theme parks.

## 3. Hypotheses

*3.1 Relational Bonds and Perceived Value*

Customer value can be created through collaboration and relationships of trust (Sheth, Gardner & Garrett, 1998). The objective of relational bonds is to deliver long-term value to customers (Armstrong & Kotler, 2000). Stronger bonds mean higher perceived value and greater satisfaction, which leads to greater willingness to repurchase (Lee & Chen, 2005). Based on the above, relational bonds have a positive influence on perceived value, as described in Hypothesis 1:

H1: Relational bonds with customers of theme parks has a significant and positive effect on customer perceived value.

*3.2 Relational Bonds and Satisfaction*

The needs of the customer are at the core of relational bonds, which aim to retain existing customers and increase their satisfaction (Kandell, 2000). Businesses that have a better understanding of what their customers need can provide products or services targeted to meet those demands, which strengthens their relationships with their customers and enhances satisfaction (Andersonet al., 2007; Boulding et al., 2005; King & Burgess, 2008). Mutually beneficial long-term relationships are built through providing customers with superior value, which positively contributes to customer satisfaction (Kotler, 2003). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Relational bonds with customers of theme parks has a significant and positive effect on their satisfaction.

*3.3 Relational Bonds and Trust*

The more often businesses and customers interact, the more opportunity customers have to understand the services provided by the businesses and to place greater trust in them (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997). Therefore, relational bonds can effectively increase trust (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Rodriguez & Wilson (2002) indicated that structural and social bonds are important to building trust and commitment. Functional, social and structural bonds all strengthen the relationship of trust between the business operator and customer (Lin et al., 2003). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Relational bonds with customers of theme parks has a significant and positive effect on trust.

*3.4 Innovative Marketing and Perceived Value*

Innovation means continually improving and adding to the functions of products in order to meet more of the needs of customers (Gallouj & Weinstein, 1997). Innovation, regardless of whether it is applied to product functions, marketing or services, improves the product in the eyes of customers, contributing to meeting their needs and increasing perceived value (Jan & Christian, 2005). We inferred that innovative marketing by theme parks would enhance their perceived value to customers. We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Innovative marketing employed by theme parks has a significant and positive effect on customer perceived value.

*3.5 Innovative Marketing and Satisfaction*

Innovative marketing means not just developing new products and services but also modifying and improving existing products, updating systems etc. (Drejer, 2004). Innovative marketing targeting the core needs of customers can provide them with rich experiential value and raise their levels of satisfaction (Vang & Zellner, 2005). Theme parks must employ strong innovative marketing strategies that meet and even exceed the expectations of consumers in order to win their recognition and support. Based on the above, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5: Innovative marketing employed by theme parks has a significantly positive effect on the satisfaction levels of

their customers

*3.6 Innovative Marketing and Trust*

Consumers build trust in a brand through interaction between their own personality and the brand personality developed through innovative marketing (Schultz & Barnes, 1999). In order for innovative marketing to have its desired effect, a trust mechanism must be established between the parties (Hung & Liu, 2002) indicated that. We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

H6: Innovative marketing employed by theme parks has a significantly positive effect on trust.

*3.7 Customer Perceived Value and Satisfaction*

Perceived value as the ability of a product or service to satisfy the needs of customers or provide some benefit (Holbrook, 1984). Greater perceived value leads to increased levels of satisfaction (Anderson, 1995). Some studies have also identified perceived value as an antecedent to customer satisfaction (Bolton & Drew, 1991; Fornell et al., 1996; Sajeev & Colgate, 2001). Customers are more satisfied when their interaction with a business provides value, which leads to a higher customer retention rate (Barnes, 2001). Hosany & Witham (2010) researched the relationship between perceived value and customer satisfaction and found that the former has a significant influence on the latter. We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

H7: The perceived value of theme parks to customers has a significantly positive effect on their satisfaction.

*3.8 Satisfaction and Trust*

Customers are more trustful of and committed to a business that satisfies them (Tax, Brown & Chandrashekaran, 1998). Satisfaction is an emotional appraisal based on a series of interactive experiences, and serves to strengthen trust (Westbrook, 1981). Singh & Sirdeshmukh (2000) and Garbarino & Johnson (1999) both indicated that customer satisfaction positively influences trust; therefore, trust reflects satisfaction levels. Ha & Perks (2005) demonstrated that high service quality increases satisfaction and builds the trust of customers. Based on the above, we propose the following hypothesis:

H8: The satisfaction levels of theme park customers has a significantly positive effect on their trust

*3.9 Trust and Loyalty*

Trust improves loyalty between trading partners and implies genuine loyalty from customers (Oliver, 1999). Trust is at the core of loyalty and is a decisive factor in the future purchasing behaviour of clients (Sirdeshmukhet, Singh & Sabol, 2002). Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001) pointed out that trust in a brand affects the loyalty of customers in terms of both attitude and purchasing decisions. Further, Bitner (1995), Gounaris & Venetis (2002) and Hennig-Thuraet, Gwinner & Gremler (2002) all found that winning the trust of customers positively influences their repurchase loyalty. When studying the loyalty of consumers, Floh & Treiblmaier (2006) found that trust is an important factor that promotes loyalty. We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

H9: The trust of theme park customers has a significantly positive effect on tier loyalty.

*3.10 The Effect of Different Visit Frequencies on Variable Relationships*

Consumers should be classified by their characteristics in order to better understand the differences between the groups (Wind, 1978). Birgit (2001) categorized travelers by destination image in order to identify target markets and their demographics, using these as a basis for developing marketing strategies. Hu & Ritchie (1993) found that familiarity with a destination significantly affects its attractiveness, as visitors often have a more positive impression of a place they have previously visited. As we believed visiting frequency to be an important divider, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H10: Different visiting frequencies lead to significant differences in the strength of construct relationships.

## 4. Research Design

*4.1 Research Framework*

Based on the objectives of this study and a review of relevant literature, we designed a framework (shown in Figure 1) to explore the relationships among relational bonds, innovative marketing, perceived value, satisfaction, trust and loyalty, as well as compare the differences attributable to visiting frequency.
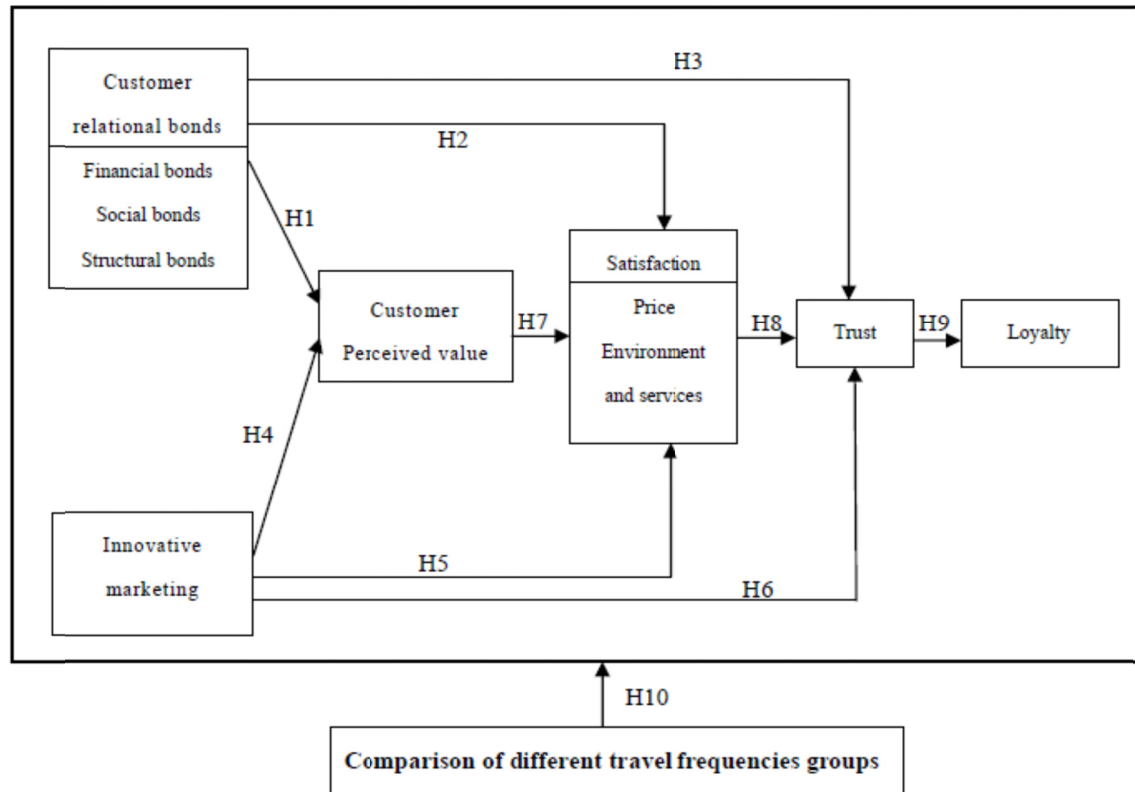
Figure 1. Research framework

### 4.2 Research Variables

The initial draft of the questionnaire was designed according to the above described theories and previous literature. Its aim was to understand how relational bonds with customers and innovative marketing affect perceived value, satisfaction, trust and loyalty among customers of theme parks in Taiwan. The questionnaire comprised seven sections, the first six of which employed a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". A nominal scale was used in the last section.

### 4.3 Pilot Testing and Pre-testing

We conducted a pilot test and pre-test of the questionnaire before the formal survey and modified it accordingly, in order to ensure its effectiveness as a research instrument.

For the pilot test, we used convenience sampling to select 30 visitors for in-depth interviews. As results showed that the intended meaning of some questions were unclear, the textual content of the questionnaire was partially modified. Again employing convenience sampling, we surveyed 100 pre-test subjects using the modified questionnaire, and then tested the reliability and validity of results.

Pre-test results showed that the Cronbach's α of each construct ranged from 0.883 to 0.929, meeting the >0.7 criterion. Item-total correlation coefficients all approached or exceeded 0.5, indicating strong reliability (Nunnally, 1978). Factor analysis showed that the eigenvalues of each construct exceeded 1, cumulative explained variance exceeded 0.5, and the factor loading of each variable approached or exceeded 0.6, demonstrating the convergent validity of each construct (Kerlinger, 1978; Kaiser, 1958). We then conducted the formal questionnaire survey, with the entire process covering a period of two months.

## 5. Data Analysis and Results

### 5.1 Analysis of Sample Structure

Using convenience sampling methods, staff members distributed a total of 850 questionnaires to subjects who were over 15 years of age and had visited a theme park in Taiwan within the past three years. We recovered 803 valid questionnaires after eliminating 47 invalid questionnaires, making a recovery rate of 94.5%. We divided the samples into eight general categories for analysis. Gender - a majority of respondents were female, at 51.9%. Age - the 15-24 bracket had the most respondents at 40.7%, followed by the 25-34 bracket at 26.9%. Place of residence - Central

Taiwan claimed the highest number of respondents at 34.1%, followed by southern Taiwan at 32.9%. Education - the majority of respondents (61.1%) had a university or college level of education, with the next largest group (18.9%) having a graduate education level. Occupation - Students accounted for the largest group at 37.0%, followed by employees of the service industry at 28.8%. Income - 36.1% had an average monthly income of NTD10,001-30,000, followed by 32.1% with an average income of less than NTD10,000. Visit frequency - 33.5% visit theme parks once every other year (inclusive) on average, followed by 31.4% who visit once every two years or less. Reason for visiting - 30.3% cited recommendations by relatives or friends, while another 20.2% cited a desire to revisit the parks.

*5.2 Reliability and Validity Analysis of the Formal Survey*

Before testing the reliability and validity of all constructs, we first extracted factors using factor analysis. From the construct of relational bonds we extracted three factors, being financial bonds, social bonds and structured bonds. From the construct of satisfaction we extracted the two factors of price and environment/services (see Table 1).

As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach's α of each construct ranged from 0.705 to 0.918, meeting the > 0.7 criterion. The item-total correlation coefficients all exceeded 0.5, indicating strong reliability (Nunnally, 1978). The results of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) showed that the eigenvalues of all extracted factors exceeded 1, cumulative explained variance exceeded 0.6, and the factor loading of each item exceeded 0.6, demonstrating the convergent validity of each construct (Kerlinger, 1978). The composite reliability (CR) of latent variables ranged from 0.6 to 0.9, indicating strong internal consistency among construct factors.

Also, the square root of the average explained variance of each variable ($\sqrt{AVE}$) exceeded the correlation coefficient of the two corresponding variables (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), showing the discriminant validity of each construct in this study.

Table 1. Reliability and validity analysis for formal survey

| Variable | Item to total correlation | Factor loading | Eigenvalues | Cumulative explained variance(%) | Cronbach's ∝ | Composite reliability (CR.) | Average extracted variance (AVE) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Customer relational bonds (CRB)** | | | | | | | |
| Financial bonds (FIN) | | | | | | | |
| This theme park often hosts promotional activities | 0.588 | 0.779 | 2.122 | | 0.705 | 0.561 | 0.300 |
| This theme park distributes coupons. | 0.576 | 0.711 | | | | | |
| This theme park offers discounts on entry tickets. | 0.473 | 0.686 | | | | | |
| Social bonds (SOC) | | | | | | | |
| This theme park offers mementos as gifts. | 0.603 | 0.688 | | | | | |
| The staff at this theme park takes the initiative to interact with visitors. | 0.646 | 0.702 | 2.582 | | 0.814 | 0.730 | 0.404 |
| This theme park regularly or irregularly sends out information about its most recent activities. | 0.659 | 0.803 | | | | | |
| The staff at this theme park treats me as a friend. | 0.633 | 0.670 | | 64.326 | | | |
| Structural bonds (STR) | | | | | | | |
| This theme parks hosts activities on holidays or festivals. | 0.500 | 0.536 | | | | | |
| The facilities at this theme park meet the needs of its customers. | 0.641 | 0.688 | | | | | |
| This theme park has clearly marked escape routes and safety equipment. | 0.683 | 0.789 | 3.015 | | 0.824 | 0.758 | 0.387 |
| This theme park has a customer complaints hotline. | 0.629 | 0.735 | | | | | |
| Browsing information on this theme park's website is relatively convenient. | 0.643 | 0.753 | | | | | |
| **Innovative marketing (IMA)** | | | | | | | |
| This theme park launches new activities. | 0.640 | 0.717 | 5.092 | 63.651 | 0.918 | 0.900 | 0.532 |
| This theme park offers more innovative facilities and | 0.688 | 0.760 | | | | | |

services compared to its competitors.

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| This theme park often has performances by show troupes or cartoon exhibitions. | 0.659 | 0.733 | | | | | |
| This theme park often integrates new travel routes. | 0.675 | 0.750 | | | | | |
| This theme park often uses new and unconventional advertisements. | 0.762 | 0.829 | | | | | |
| This theme park always employs inventive marketing methods. | 0.784 | 0.850 | | | | | |
| This theme park always hosts novel promotional activities. | 0.802 | 0.863 | | | | | |
| The marketing activities of this theme park are more innovative than its competitors. | 0.805 | 0.864 | | | | | |
| **Customer perceived value (CPV)** | | | | | | | |
| The time spent visiting this theme park is worthwhile. | 0.734 | 0.801 | | | | | |
| The money spent visiting this theme park is worthwhile. | 0.483 | 0.569 | | | | | |
| This theme park has unique features that its competitors do not. | 0.659 | 0.749 | | | | | |
| This theme park could become an example for others in the industry to follow. | 0.709 | 0.794 | 4.895 | 61.188 | 0.894 | 0.884 | 0.493 |
| It's fun and entertaining to visit this theme park. | 0.718 | 0.803 | | | | | |
| The style of this theme park is very attractive. | 0.750 | 0.836 | | | | | |
| You feel a sense of value when visiting this theme park. | 0.738 | 0.818 | | | | | |
| This theme park provides excellent value and quality. | 0.780 | 0.851 | | | | | |
| **Satisfaction (SAT)** | | | | | | | |
| Price (PRI) | | | | | | | |
| The entry prices at this theme park are reasonable. | 0.524 | 0.788 | | | | | |
| The prices of food and drink in this theme park are reasonable. | 0.615 | 0.826 | 2.375 | | 0.743 | 0.605 | 0.339 |
| This theme park offers satisfactory discounts. | 0.604 | 0.714 | | | | | |
| Environment and services (SEP) | | | | | | | |
| The facilities at this theme park are satisfactory. | 0.627 | 0.584 | | | | | |
| The website of this theme park provides accurate and relevant information. | 0.658 | 0.686 | | 65.659 | | | |
| The environment of this theme park is pleasing. | 0.692 | 0.776 | | | | | |
| The service at this theme park is satisfactory. | 0.765 | 0.805 | 4.191 | | 0.903 | 0.880 | 0.512 |
| The staff at this theme park is all neatly attired. | 0.730 | 0.832 | | | | | |
| The entertainment options at this theme park are satisfactory. | 0.793 | 0.824 | | | | | |
| The paths and locations in this theme park are clearly marked, making is easy to navigate. | 0.729 | 0.736 | | | | | |
| **Trust (TRU)** | | | | | | | |
| This theme park presents a trustworthy image. | 0.686 | 0.784 | | | | | |
| The safety of the facilities in this theme park is reliable. | 0.702 | 0.804 | | | | | |
| The staff at this theme park is responsible. | 0.812 | 0.886 | | | | | |
| The staff at this theme park is dependable. | 0.828 | 0.894 | 4.118 | 68.626 | 0.905 | 0.882 | 0.556 |
| The staff at this theme park takes the initiative to ensure that all customers are well cared for. | 0.729 | 0.806 | | | | | |
| The staff in this theme park strives to understand the needs of customers. | 0.705 | 0.790 | | | | | |
| **Loyalty (LOY)** | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I would tell my friends about this theme park. | 0.691 | 0.777 | | | | | |
| I will post online about the fun I had at this theme park. | 0.685 | 0.768 | | | | | |
| I would recommend that others to go this theme park. | 0.777 | 0.847 | | | | | |
| I will return to this theme park in the future. | 0.729 | 0.809 | | | | | |
| Next time I am making travel plans, I make this theme park a priority. | 0.771 | 0.837 | 5.077 | 63.457 | 0.915 | 0.899 | 0.527 |
| Even if this theme park raises its prices, I would still be willing to return. | 0.691 | 0.759 | | | | | |
| I would recommend the merchandise of this theme park to my friends and relatives. | 0.755 | 0.808 | | | | | |
| I would purchase the products launched by this theme park. | 0.701 | 0.764 | | | | | |

### 5.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To again verify the efficiency of the measurement constructs, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of each measurement model using AMOS statistical software. We also tested construct validity according to the principles of $\chi^2/$ df $\leqq 3$ (Carmines & MacIver, 1981), RMSEA <0.05, GFI, AGFI, NFI and CFI > 0.9 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1989) , and RMR < 0.08 (Hair et al., 1998).

Results were $\chi^2/$ df = 2.584, GFI = 0.912, AGFI = 0.887, NFI = 0.944, RFI = 0.932, CFI = 0.965, RMSEA = 0.044 and RMR = 0.08, indicating that the model fitness is acceptable although not ideal. Significant relationships between the questions and constructs were demonstrated, indicating that the measurement model is efficient and has construct validity.

### 5.4 Structural Model Analysis

This study employed AMOS software to analyse linear structural relationships, in order to understand the causal relationships and correlations among variables. Results were as follows: $\chi^2/$ df = 2.757; RMR = 0.069; GFI= 0.906; AGFI = 0.88; NFI = 0.94; RFI = 0.928; CFI = 0.961, and RMSEA = 0.047. These results match the criteria for good model fitness and demonstrate that the structural model employed by this study is acceptable. Standardized parameter estimates in path analysis showed that relational bonds with customers did not significantly influence trust (H3) and innovative marketing did not significantly influence satisfaction (H5) and trust (H6). However, all remaining hypotheses were supported (See Figure 2). The effect of the relational bonds→perceived value→satisfaction→trust→loyalty path was the strongest (0.563), followed by innovative marketing→perceived value→satisfaction→trust→loyalty (0.503). This shows that relational bonds have the strongest influence on customer behaviour at theme parks, although the importance of innovative marketing cannot be discounted.

### 5.5 Competing Model Analysis

We categorized subjects by visit frequency to conduct further analysis. The 357 subjects who visited theme parks once every six to twelve months (inclusive) were classified as highly frequent; the 194 subjects who visited theme parks every 18-24 months (inclusive) were considered moderately frequent, and the 252 subjects whose visits to theme parks are more than two years apart were considered infrequent. We employed AMOS software to compare the three groups, in order to determine whether visit frequency interferes significantly in construct relationships. As shown in Table 4, the competing model has good fitness, with $\chi^2/$ df = 2.211; RMR = 0.097; GFI = 0.789; AGFI = 0.745; NFI = 0.86; RFI = 0.839; CFI = 0.917, and RMSEA = 0.039. The results of competing model analysis are described below (as shown in Table 2):

(1) The influence of relational bonds on perceived value was significantly stronger - and positively oriented - among highly frequent visitors compared to moderately frequent (t=-1.663) and infrequent visitor (t=-2.921). This indicates that highly frequent customers are most likely to increase their perceived value of theme parks due to strong relational bonds with the venues.

(2) The influence of relational bonds on satisfaction was significantly stronger and positively oriented – among infrequent visitors compared to moderately frequent visitors (t=2.871). This indicates that infrequent customers who have strong relational bonds with theme parks are more likely to have higher satisfaction levels.

(3) The influence of relational bonds on trust was significantly different when comparing moderately frequent and infrequent visitors (t=4.473), and highly frequent and infrequent visitors (t=2.023). This relationship was negative in the highly and moderately frequent groups but positive in the infrequent group.

(4) The influence of innovative marketing on perceived value was significantly stronger, as well as positively oriented, among moderately frequent visitors compared to infrequent visitors (t=-3.553). This indicates that innovative marketing by theme parks is more likely to enhance the perceived value of moderately frequent visitors.

(5) The influence of innovative marketing on satisfaction was significantly different between highly/moderately frequent visitors (t=3.386); moderately frequent/infrequent visitors (t=3.025), and highly frequent/infrequent visitors (t=1.882). The relationship was negative in the highly frequent and infrequent groups but positive in the moderately frequent group.

(6) There were no significant differences between the three groups as far as the relationship between innovative marketing and trust. Evidently, how frequently people visit theme parks does not change the influence of innovative marketing on trust.

(7) The influence of perceived value on satisfaction was significantly different when comparing the highly/moderately frequent groups (t=1.622), and even more so when comparing the moderately frequent/infrequent groups (t=-4.464). The influence of perceived value on satisfaction was positively oriented and strongest among moderately frequent visitors, indicating that they are most likely to experience increased satisfaction from theme parks if they perceive such venues as offering good value.

(8) The influence of satisfaction on trust was significantly different when comparing the highly/moderately frequent groups (t=-8.094), the highly frequent/infrequent groups (t=-1.722), and particularly the moderately frequent/infrequent groups (t=-4.872). This relationship was positive and strongest among moderately frequent visitors, indicating that they are most likely to place greater trust in theme parks they feel satisfied with.

(9) We found significant differences in the influence of trust on loyalty when comparing the moderately frequent/infrequent groups (t=-6.419). This relationship was positive and much stronger among moderately frequent visitors, indicating that a feeling of trust is most likely to increase the loyalty of these theme park goers.

In fifteen cases, visit frequency caused significant differences in construct relationships, indicating that the frequency with which subjects visit theme parks alters the intensity of some variable relationships. This is a key finding of this study and partially supports H10 (as shown in Table 3).

Table 2. The competing model analysis for different travel frequencies groups

| Mode path | | | Standardized Regression Weights | | | T test results | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | highly frequent visitors | moderately frequent visitors | infrequent visitors | highly frequent visitors v.s moderately frequent visitors | moderately frequent visitors v.s infrequent visitors | highly frequent visitors v.s infrequent visitors |
| | | | 357 | 194 | 252 | | | |
| (H1) Customer relational bonds | → | Customer Perceived value | 0.599*** | 0.357*** | 0.543*** | -1.663* | -2.921*** | -0.049 |
| (H2) Customer relational bonds | → | Satisfaction | 0.451*** | 0.161* | 0.67*** | 0.381 | 2.871*** | -0.058 |
| (H3) Customer relational bonds | → | Trust | -0.188* | -0.039 | 0.226 | 1.109 | 4.473*** | 2.023*** |
| (H4) Innovative marketing | → | Customer Perceived value | 0.255*** | 0.447*** | 0.193 | 1.497 | -3.553*** | -0.368 |
| (H5) Innovative marketing | → | Satisfaction | -0.004 | 0.035 | -0.29** | 3.386*** | 3.025*** | 1.882*** |
| (H6) Innovative marketing | → | Trust | 0.029 | 0.092 | -0.092 | 0.596 | 0.993 | -0.964 |
| (H7) Customer Perceived value | → | Satisfaction | 0.525*** | 0.742** | 0.608*** | 1.662* | -4.464** | 0.951 |

| | | | | | * | | | * | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (H8) Satisfaction | → | Trust | **1.106***** | **0.935***** | **0.827***** | **-8.094***** | **-4.872***** | **-1.722*** |
| (H9) Trust | → | Loyalty | **0.919***** | **0.954***** | **0.821***** | 0.465 | **-6.419***** | -1.295 |

| | | | | | | **Model Fit** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $\chi^2$ | d.f. | $x^2$/d.f. | P value | RMR | GFI | AGFI | NFI | RFI | CFI | RMSEA |
| 3449.239 | 1560 | 2.211 | 0.000 | 0.097 | 0.789 | 0.745 | 0.86 | 0.839 | 0.917 | 0.039 |

Table 3. Research hypothesis testing results

| Research hypotheses | highly frequent customers | moderately frequent visitors | infrequent visitors |
|---|---|---|---|
| H1: Customer relational bonds and Customer Perceived value | support | support | support |
| H2: Customer relational bonds and Satisfaction | support | support | support |
| H3: Customer relational bonds and Trust | support | no support | no support |
| H4: Innovative marketing and Customer Perceived value | support | support | no support |
| H5: Innovative marketing and Satisfaction | no support | no support | support |
| H6: Innovative marketing and Trust | no support | no support | no support |
| H7: Customer Perceived value and Satisfaction | support | support | support |
| H8: Satisfaction and Trust | support | support | support |
| H9: Trust and Loyalty | support | support | support |
| H10: Comparing groups with different travel frequencies | partially support | | |

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusions

With theme park consumers as research subjects, we explored the influence of relational bonds and innovative marketing on perceived value, satisfaction, trust and loyalty. Our results are as follows:

(1)  Overall analysis:

a. Relational bonds with customers were shown to have a significant and positive effect on perceived value, which is in line with the findings of Armstrong & Kotler (2000) and Lee & Chen (2005). Theme parks that have strong relational bonds with customers are perceived as offering greater value.

b. Relational bonds with customers have a significantly positive effect on satisfaction, a finding which is line with the viewpoints of Kandell (2000) and Kotler (2003). This indicates that theme parks can help their customers to feel more satisfied by maintaining strong relational bonds with them.

c. Relational bonds did not have a significantly positive influence on trust, indicating that customers who have closer relational bonds with theme parks are not necessarily more trustful of these venues. Rather, trust is increased through perceived value and satisfaction.

d. As discovered by Gallouj & Weinstein (1997) and Jan & Christian (2005), innovative marketing was shown to have a significantly positive effect on perceived value. Offering more innovative activities is a way for theme parks to enhance their value in the eyes of customers.

e. Innovative marketing did not have a significantly positive influence on satisfaction. Therefore, more innovative activities at theme parks do not directly affect the satisfaction of customers. Instead, satisfaction is increased through perceived value.

f. Innovative marketing did not have a significantly positive influence on trust, meaning that greater innovation in theme parks will not directly improve the trust of customers. Rather, trust is enhanced through perceived value and satisfaction.

g. Perceived value had a significantly positive impact on satisfaction, an outcome which echoed the work of Holbrook (1984), Ravald & Grönroos (1996) and Hosany & Witham (2010). This means that customers

experience more satisfaction when they place greater value on the products or services offered by theme parks.

h. Customer satisfaction had a significantly positive impact on trust, echoing the viewpoints of Singh & Sirdeshmukh (2000), Garbarino & Johnson (1999) and Ha & Perks (2005). The more satisfied customers are with their experiences, the more they trust theme parks.

i. Trust had a significantly positive influence on loyalty, which is in line with the viewpoints of Oliver (1999), Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) and Floh & Treiblmaier (2006). Customers are more loyal to theme parks when they trust these venues to meet their expectations.

(2) Comparison by group:

Comparison by group showed that visit frequency does lead to some significant differences, as described below:

a. The influence of relational bonds on perceived value was most significant among highly frequent customers. Theme parks should build strong relational bonds with this group to enhance their perceived value.

b. The influence of relational bonds on satisfaction was most significant among infrequent visitors. Theme parks should build strong relationships with this group to enhance their satisfaction levels.

c. The influence of relational bonds on trust was most significant among highly frequent visitors. Theme parks should build strong relationships with this group of customers to increase their trust.

d. Innovative marketing had the most significant influence on perceived value among moderately frequent visitors. Theme parks should use innovative methods to attract these customers and enhance their perceived value.

e. Innovative marketing had the most significant influence on satisfaction among infrequent visitors. This means that by offering innovative activities, theme parks can increase the satisfaction levels of these customers.

f. None of the groups showed a significant difference in the relationship between innovative marketing and trust, indicating that whether a theme park offers innovative activities or not has no effect on the trust levels of its customers.

g. Perceived value had the most significant influence on satisfaction among moderately frequent visitors. This means that these customers experience more satisfaction when they perceive theme parks as offering greater value.

h. Satisfaction had the most significant influence on trust among moderately frequent visitors. This means that the more satisfied these customers are, the more they trust theme parks.

i. Trust had the most significant impact on loyalty among moderately frequent visitors, indicating that they are more likely to revisit or recommend a theme park they have greater trust in.

*6.2 Management Implications*

This study discussed the influence of relational bonds and innovative marketing on the perceived value, satisfaction, trust and loyalty of theme park customers. We built relational models between each construct and identified valid measurement variables. Our results can provide the recreation industry with practical concepts and research instruments.

Results showed that building strong relational bonds with consumers and employing innovative marketing aids theme parks in enhancing the perceived value, satisfaction, trust and loyalty of their customers. Stronger relational bonds and more innovative marketing implies greater perceived value, satisfaction and trust, which affects customers' decision as to whether they will revisit the theme park. Relational bonds were shown to be particularly influential, more so than innovative marketing. Therefore, we recommend that theme parks strive to develop strong relationships with their customers, which encourage them to identify with the venues and thereby affect their behaviour. Theme parks should also implement innovative marketing strategies to attract and interest customers.

As far as comparison by group, the link between satisfaction and trust is most significant for both highly frequent and infrequent visitors, who place priority on feeling the satisfaction of their needs being met. Theme parks should focus on improving products and intangible services in order to foster trust among these customers.

Moderately frequent visitors, on the other hand, felt that trust was the most important factor. So theme parks should strive to help customers feel secure and safe during their visits, increasing their willingness to return and to recommend the venue to their friends and relatives.

*6.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research*

As we made a case study of theme parks, the results of this research may not be applicable to other types of industry. Therefore, we recommend that future studies apply this conceptual framework to researching other industries, in order to verify its applicability.

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