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Attribution of inappropriate visitor behavior in a theme park setting – A conceptual model

Abstract

Given the scarcity of academic research on customer-to-customer (C2C) interaction in theme parks, this study was designed to construct and test a conceptual model of visitors' attribution of inappropriate behavior, satisfaction, and repeat patronage using attribution theory. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling, and analysis of the effect of visitor type were carried out. The results show that stability and controllability have a significant impact on satisfaction, and satisfaction also influences repeat patronage. Visitor type had no effect on the relationship between attribution and satisfaction. The theoretical and practical insights of the findings are presented along with the limitations of the study and future directions for research.

Keywords. Inappropriate behavior, theme park, attribution theory, customer-to-customer interaction

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to investigate aspects of inappropriate behavior in customer-to-customer (C2C) interactions, with specific reference to resident and non-resident (that is, tourist) visitors. A theme park setting was selected as the research context based on the observation that while this type of touristic resource has experienced rapid growth in recent decades, relatively little is known about the C2C issues encountered by park visitors. Within the broader tourism context, C2C interaction, also referred to as customer coproduction, may have a significant impact on visitors' emotions, behavior, enjoyment, satisfaction, and revisit intention (Ramanathan & McGill, 2007; Slåtten, Krogh, & Connolley, 2011). The manner in which firms deal with adverse C2C issues may be critical to long-term success, particularly where competition is strong. Some researchers have noted that negative interactions are often unavoidable (Bateson, 1985; Wu, 2007), and are usually a result of simply being part of the same physical environment (Huang, 2008; Martin, 1996). They may also arise as the result of the competition for access to tourism experiences that have capacity limitations such as theme parks during periods of high demand. Following a review of the literature related to C2C interaction and inappropriate behavior by customers, this paper uses attribution theory to develop a series of hypotheses before building a model depicting the impact of C2C issues and management response on satisfaction and revisit intention.

Theme parks provide an ideal setting for this research because they often involve interaction between customers including residents and nonresidents. They also continue to experience rapid growth. On a global basis, the top 25 theme park operators recorded 5.2% growth in 2012 and welcomed nearly 206 million guests in total (Themed Entertainment Association, 2013). This upward trend is even more obvious in Asia, where some operators have recorded double-digit annual growth. Given the potential future growth of this sector the ability to reduce negative C2C interactions is important. For this reason research that is able to identify potential areas of negative interaction is of some importance.

Literature review

Inappropriate Behavior of Customers

While many researchers have observed that the majority of customers appear to behave rationally (see for example Reynolds & Harris, 2006), others point out that some customers may act thoughtlessly or even abusively (Lovelock, 2001). Inappropriate behaviors of this nature may include rude comments or even physical contact and constitute a negative element of C2C interaction. Fullerton and Punj (2004) for example define customer misbehavior of this nature as a violation of acceptable behavioral norms and disruption to normal consumption during service encounters. In some cases customers may assume that they deserve "VIP treatment" in all service encounters (Aslan & Kozak, 2012; Tsang, Lee, & Chan, 2011) while others are insensitive to the impact of their behavior on other visitors.

Numerous examples of customer misbehavior have been reported (Fullerton & Punj, 2004). For example, Bitner, Booms, and Mohr (1994) analyze 774 critical incidents in airlines, hotels, and restaurants, and show that more than one-fifth of unsatisfactory incidents were caused by the inappropriate behavior of other guests. In another example, Grover and Fisk (1997) demonstrate that a quarter of unsatisfactory customer experiences result from the actions of other customers. While the general issue of C2C interaction has received growing attention in the literature the significance of interactions of this nature in a theme park setting have yet to be examined.

In sociocultural terms, inappropriate behavior by tourists may also affect residents' enjoyment of service encounters. As McKercher (1993) observed, residents and tourists often compete for the same resources such as space in shops, viewpoints at natural scenic spots, public transport, and access to festive events (Woosnam, Norman, & Ying, 2009). This also applies to theme parks where the behavior of groups or individuals may generate the disapproval of other customer groups, leading to a diminished level of enjoyment. Tensions may occur, particularly during peak season (Kemperman, 2000), for popular rides. Inappropriate behavior by individuals or specific groups of tourists may also be perceived as violating the social norms of the host community and may be viewed by some visitors as offensive or even illegal. National culture may also be a source of conflict because of the differences that may exist been national and host cultures in areas such as cognition, emotion, and motivation (Triandis, 2004). For example, Zhang (2006) reported a list of unacceptable behaviors demonstrated by Chinese outbound tourists including littering, spitting, queue-jumping, speaking loudly, and smoking in non-smoking areas, but did not suggest strategies that may be used to mitigate adverse impacts of behavior of this nature. Kang and Moscardo (2006) also identify several culturally unacceptable behaviors demonstrated by Korean, British, and Australian tourists, and suggested that national culture is significantly related to differences in attitudes toward responsible tourism behavior.

Theories about the drivers of inappropriate behavior have been postulated in the sociology (see for example Benford & Hunt, 1992; Heimer & Staffen, 1995), criminology (see for example Paternoster & Brame, 1998; Winfree, Giever, Maupin, & Mays, 2007), psychology (see for example Bianchi & Phillips, 2005; Kelly & Campbell, 1997), and marketing (see for example Bitner et al., 1994; Harris & Reynolds, 2004) literatures. Most attempt to identify the intrinsic factors underlying such behavior. Although some of the

research in this area was undertaken several decades ago, many of the findings are still valid. For instance, Bandura (1977) proposed the social learning theory, which posits that reward and punishment guide human behavior. People will perform a certain behavior if they perceive it as having benefits or rewards. An appealing reward may even encourage non-opportunistic customers to act inappropriately (Wirtz & Kum, 2004). However, if the risk of potentially unpleasant consequences is high, people are less likely to behave inappropriately. Corcoran and Rotter (1987) show that highly moral people are more easily influenced by the risk of detection. Their actions are reinforced when others are aware of their high moral standards. As a consequence, they are more motivated to act morally. Later, Matsueda (1992) put forward the self-theory, arguing that people are concerned that their bad behavior may affect their self-esteem or image. Tittle, Ward, and Grasmick (2004) argue that people who lack self-control are more likely to respond to temptation. Since self-control is sensitive to the external social context, those with a strong sense of self are more likely to behave appropriately. Weiner (1980, 1985) suggested a three-dimensional theory based on locus of control, stability, and controllability to postulate that humans are rational information processors. Based on the results of this processing, an individual assigns a causal attribution to a behavior. From a management perspective, Ford and Richardson (1994) suggest that the interaction between personality and situational variables, rather than individual moral development alone, may affect the incidence of misbehavior. While theories of this nature are of some interest, most lack specific strategies that may be employed to assist in remediation of on-the-ground problems, particularly in theme park settings.

In the tourism field, several researchers have investigated aspects of inappropriate behavior by tourists. McKercher, Weber, and du Cros (2008) suggested that tourists may be culturally distant from their hosts and lack knowledge of the social norms of the destination. Since they spend a limited time there, they cannot bond with residents, and thus may behave inappropriately (Woosnam, 2012). Different expectations of service encounters based on language, customs, and value systems may also be a factor (Tsang & Ap, 2007; Turner, Reisinger, & McQuilken, 2002). It is also apparent that problems that may arise between residents and non-residents need further investigation. However, research on the impact of inappropriate behavior on the tourist experience still lacks a theoretical foundation (Slåtten et al., 2011; Woosnam et al., 2009). To address this gap in the literature this research will employ attribution theory to identify the types of problems that may arise and to explore if these issues may also have a resident–non-resident dimension in a theme park setting.

Attribution Theory

Customers often have expectations regarding service organizations and employees' performance prior to service consumption. The widely adopted quality management framework SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1988) and the gap model (Patterson & Johnson, 1993) have often been used to focus on the interaction between service organizations and customers but generally not on C2C relationships. Such links generate very few expectations or perceptions in the servicescape. Huang and Hsu (2010) agree that customers may not recognize how their interactions with each other affect their perceptions of the service experience and impressions of the organization, unless other customers interfere with their enjoyment of the service encounter. In this sense, theme park

visitors may not associate other visitors' inappropriate behavior with their own dissatisfaction. To address this problem this study adopts attribution theory to investigate C2C relationships.

Attribution theory was developed by Austrian psychologist Heider (1958) and later modified by Weiner (1972, 1980, 1985). Attribution theory concerns the process of how individuals interpret events in their subjective surroundings (Robertson & Rossiter, 1974). For example, an individual will use observations to analyze and explain the actions of others. The explanations developed by individuals to explain the behavior of others may differ leading Heider (1958) to postulate two categories of explanations or attributions for the behavior of others: external, based on situation attributions, and interpersonal, based on personal attribution of behavior. The individuals' perceptions of their surroundings thus influence how they choose to behave. By using endogenous and exogenous factors to explain actions, the theory posits that the cognitive mechanism is important and can evaluate the linkage between reasoning and actions. Based on the ability of the theory to assist in explaining behavior, particularly in situations where there may be multiple types of behavior, Weiner's (1985) three-dimensional attribution theory based on locus of control, stability, and controllability was adopted to explore C2C issues in a theme park setting.

Attribution theory has been used in clinical psychological studies (see for example Bentall, Kaney, & Dewey, 1991; Weiner, 1988), marketing (Coombs, 2007; Keaveney, 2008), and management (Coff & Kryscynski, 2011; Martinko, Harvey, & Dasborough, 2011; Wirtz & Mattila, 2004). It has also been adopted in the study of service failure. In the tourism literature, several studies using attribution theory have been published. For example, Pearce and Moscardo (1984) show that it is useful in understanding the process by which tourists allocate blame and responsibility. McCollough (2000) shows that attributions of tourism service failure and recovery mediate the relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality. Furthermore, Swanson and Hsu (2011) discuss the effect of recovery locus attributions and service failure severity on customer word-of-mouth and repurchase behaviors. The following section expounds the three dimensions of the theory.

Locus of Control

The locus-of-control dimension denotes the origin of service failure – whether it is caused by extrinsic factors such as an error by the service provider, or by intrinsic factors within the customer himself or herself. Leonard and Cronan (2001) point out that individuals with an internal locus of control believe that they can control events that affect their lives, whereas those with an external locus of control believe that such events are driven by forces outside their control. Applying this view to the current study, it may be argued that theme park visitors who exhibit inappropriate behaviors may have an external locus of control, such as the norms acceptable in their national culture. If such issues are not appropriately managed, such as in a theme park setting, other visitors may experience a diminished level of satisfaction. Therefore, we propose the following two hypotheses (Hs):

H1a: Inappropriate behavior by visitors in a C2C setting will have a negative impact on visitor satisfaction.

H1b: Theme park management-related problems that generate inappropriate behavior will have a negative impact on visitor satisfaction.

Stability

The stability dimension is related to uncertainty and influences customers' future expectations of service performance (Oliver, 1997). Specifically, it concerns the perception that service failure is either temporary or persistent. Customers may be willing to forgive a one-off or minor service failure (Holloway, Wang, & Beatty, 2009). Repeated service failure has the potential to reinforce negative perceptions resulting in lost goodwill leading customers to feel disappointed or betrayed (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002). Multiple service failures also lead customers to expect the same problems in the future. In a theme park context, stability can be measured by the frequency of inappropriate visitor behavior, as perceived by other visitors. If this is high, visitors may assume they will experience similar behavior in the future. On this basis, a further hypothesis can be proposed:

H2: Frequent inappropriate behavior will have a negative impact on visitor satisfaction.

Controllability

The controllability dimension reflects the extent to which an individual believes the failure could be prevented (Wirtz & Mattila, 2004). From a customer's perspective, service failure is preventable (Tsiros, Mittal, & Ross, 2004). Folkes (1984) showed that restaurant-controlled factors were perceived as the most common reason for complaints about food. The inability to control failures may be seen as a sign of poor customer treatment and can lead to diminished satisfaction (Poon, Hui, & Au, 2004).

In this study, visitors' views of the ability of theme park managers to control service failure may be regarded as a judgment on the ability of management to prevent inappropriate behavior. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: The ability of the service provider to limit inappropriate behavior will have a positive impact on visitor satisfaction.

Visitor Satisfaction and Repeat Patronage

Visitor satisfaction and repeat patronage have commanded considerable academic attention because they are instrumental in gaining competitive advantage and securing business sustainability (Tsang, Lee, Wong, & Chong, 2012).

Satisfaction, a positive affective feeling, is generated by a service provider's performance (Geyskens, Steenkamp, & Kumar, 1999), and is the accumulation of all potentially salient dimensions (Oliver, 1993). It is in effect a state of mind where a visitor's needs and wants have been met and it predisposes to repeat patronage. Researchers consistently report that customer satisfaction positively influences repeat business (see for example Chi & Qu, 2008; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Ladhari, Brun, & Morales, 2008). A further hypothesis is suggested to test this relationship in a theme park context:

H4: Satisfaction of theme park visitors will have a positive impact on repeat patronage.

Based on this discussion, a conceptual model is proposed where locus of control (internal and external), stability, and controllability are the main determinants of satisfaction, which in turn is an antecedent of repeat patronage for theme park visitors.

Methodology

Aim, Objectives, and Location

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of inappropriate behavior in C2C interactions in a theme park setting. It has three objectives:

1. to construct a conceptual model of theme park visitors' attribution of inappropriate behavior, satisfaction, and repeat patronage;
2. to examine the attribution of inappropriate behavior based on the perspectives of both residents and non-residents; and
3. to provide recommendations to theme parks on managing visitors' inappropriate behavior.

Given the nature of the theme park experience, C2C interaction is unavoidable, particularly during peak periods and at popular attractions. The level of interaction and its effect may even be more apparent in theme parks than in other tourism contexts because they involve the shared use of facilities within a restricted physical space. In other words, visitors are competing for public resources for which no property rights have been allocated.

Data Collection

A self-administered bilingual (English and Chinese) questionnaire with five sections was developed for use as the data collection instrument. The reason for adopting a bilingual questionnaire was based on the resident and non-resident profile of Hong Kong. The questions were first formulated in English, then translated into Chinese, and back-translated into English, to ensure there were no translation errors. A pilot test was then conducted to check the reliability of the items and validate their accuracy.

The survey instrument was organized into five sections as follows:

- Section 1 was designed to investigate the issue of stability and its impact on inappropriate behavior on resident and nonresident visitors. Respondents were asked to rate the perceived frequency of inappropriate behaviors based on 19 measurements derived from the literature (see for example Lee, 2010; Pearce & Moscardo, 1984; Voice of America, 2009; Weaver & Lawton, 2007; Zeng, 2006). Responses were collected using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not very frequent) to 5 (very frequent).
- Section 2 tested respondents' perceptions of locus of control as a driver of inappropriate behavior. The 13 items used were derived from the literature (see for example Brown, 1999; McKercher et al., 2008; Wirtz & Kum, 2004).
- Section 3 tested respondents' perceptions of controllability. Nine measures adopted from Huang (2008), as well as the rules and regulations of two local theme parks (Hong Kong Disneyland, 2012; Ocean

  Park, 2012) restricting inappropriate behavior were used. Responses were collected using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (very ineffective) to 5 (very effective).
- Section 4 examined how the occurrence of inappropriate behavior affected respondents' satisfaction and intention of repeat patronage. Items were drawn from Chi and Qu (2008) and Kozak and Rimmington (2000).

- The final section collected information on respondents' demographic characteristics.

Data collection was conducted on randomly selected days over a two-month period. Target respondents included local residents and international tourists who had visited a theme park in Hong Kong within the past 12 months. Six student assistants distributed the questionnaires at major bus terminals with routes connecting to the two largest theme parks within the territory. A screening question was asked to ascertain if the respondent had visited a local theme park in the designated period. A quota sampling method was employed to ensure a balanced sampling proportion between residents of Hong Kong and tourists. Given that non-random missing data may create bias in the statistical results, the ideal approach is to employ structural equation modeling (SEM) using a complete data set without any missing observations (Kline, 2005). Compared with other techniques such as multivariate analysis, SEM can estimate a series of relationships simultaneously (Cheng, 2001), making it an ideal technique for this study. After eliminating questionnaires with missing data, 520 questionnaires were considered usable for further analysis.

Data Analysis

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was first conducted to refine the measurements, followed by a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to identify the model structure based on the assessment of factor loadings, convergent and discriminant validity, and goodness-of-fit indices with the samples. SEM was then used to analyze the causal relationships among the constructs as established by the literature. The goodness-of-fit indices and parameters were evaluated via the maximum likelihood estimation method. Path analysis was then used to test the proposed hypotheses. The moderating effect of residents and tourists who visited theme parks was examined within the proposed model. Finally, a descriptive analysis was carried out to characterize the demographic profiles of respondents.

Limitations

As in any research of this nature that uses data generated from a consumer survey, the problem of social desirability bias (that is, under-reporting favorable behavior and overreporting bad behavior) (Chung & Monroe, 2003) must be considered. The anonymity and confidentiality of the survey instrument helped reduce such bias but it is not possible to determine the extent to which it may have occurred. Other limitations that should be noted include the use of questionnaires in English and Chinese only. Tourists who did not use either language were excluded. While the overall percentage of such tourists is likely to be small, this issue should be considered if the results are to be generalized over a wider population. Furthermore, customer satisfaction is a multidimensional construct affected by a range of antecedents which were not tested in this research. Finally, it may be argued that other factors may also affect satisfaction. Given the limitations imposed by the potential for "survey fatigue" of respondents, it was necessary to focus on items directly related to the three dimensions of attribution theory.

Findings

Respondent Profiles

Table 1 presents the demographic information of respondents. Just over half (56.2%) were Hong Kong residents while the remainder (43.8%) were non-residents. They were almost

equally divided according to gender, with 50.4% of respondents being male and 49.6% of respondents being female. The majority were aged 18–25 years (41.4%), university graduates (61.9%), and had a monthly household income of US$ 2001–US$ 4000.

Insert Table 1

EFA

Data were first screened for any missing data and normality. In the few cases where missing data were noted, this was replaced by the mean score. The use of a 5-point Likert-type scale precluded outliers. An EFA using the principal component method with varimax rotation was used for the independent (locus of control, controllability, and stability) and dependent variables (satisfaction and repeat patronage) separately for refining the measurements. In the sample of 520 respondents, items that exhibited low factor loadings (≤ 0.40) or high cross-loading (≥ 0.40) were deleted (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). As for locus of control, the EFA results for visitor-related problems resulted in six items that explained 45.045% of the variance. The factor dealing with theme park management-related problems explained 57.613% of the variance, with three items retained. The EFA results for stability and controllability each showed one component structures accounting for 50.509% and 38.839% of the variance, with seven and nine items respectively being retained.

Similarly, satisfaction and repeat patronage were also one-component factors, explaining 90.803% and 86.699% of the variances respectively, and all items being retained unchanged. The EFA results are summarized in Table 2.

Insert Table 2

Measurement Model

A CFA was performed using the same sample of 520 respondents after purification of the data by EFA. The skewness statistics ranged from −1.002 to 0.452, and the kurtosis from −0.083 to 2.286. The data set was normally distributed as indicated by the absolute values of the skewness and kurtosis statistics lying below 3.0 and 8.0 respectively (Kline, 2005). The measurement model was confirmed to have good fit because it reached the threshold of all the goodness-of-fit indices, including the ratio of chi-square value to degrees of freedom (2.373), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) (0.952), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (0.051), normed fit index (NFI) (0.933), comparative fit index (CFI) (0.960), and goodness-of-fit index (GFI) (0.924). The standard factor loading, t-value, and construct reliability are shown in Table 3. Standardized factor loadings of all items ranged from 0.549 to 0.977, well above the acceptable level of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). Composite reliability of visitor-related problems (0.756), theme park management-related problems (0.667), controllability (0.919), stability (0.837), satisfaction (0.949), and repeat patronage (0.924) were all above the 0.6 threshold suggested by Diamantopoulos and Siguaw (2000), thus exhibiting high construct reliability. Hair et al. (2010) suggest a threshold of construct reliability value of at least 0.6 to indicate acceptable reliability, whereas the Cronbach's alphas for all constructs ranged from 0.636 to 0.949. Convergent validity was therefore established. Moreover, all average variance extracted (AVE) values were greater than the squared correlation coefficients for the corresponding constructs, confirming satisfactory discriminant validity (Table 4). The results therefore indicate that

the model specifying the theoretical relations among the constructs was a good fit to the data.

Insert Table 3

Insert Table 4

Structural Model

As the overall measurement model had been found to be acceptable in terms of the model fit indices and parameter estimates, the structural model was tested using the same sample. The model fit indices (chi-square to degree of freedom = 2.374, TLI = 0.952, RMSEA = 0.051, NFI = 0.931, CFI = 0.959, GFI = 0.922) indicated that the overall structural model fit was adequate based on the goodness-of-fit indices threshold. The path coefficients were subsequently examined. Figure 1 shows the standardized path coefficients for the causal relationship between the constructs. Visitor-related problems were found to have a significant and positive relationship with satisfaction, so H1a was rejected as it proposed a significant but negative relationship. The path between theme park management-related problems and satisfaction was insignificant, so H1b was also rejected. H2 was supported as a significant and negative relationship was found between stability and satisfaction. H3 was also confirmed, given the significant and positive relationship between controllability and satisfaction. A strong and significant positive relationship between satisfaction and repeat patronage was also identified, indicating that H4 was supported.

Insert Figure 1

Moderating Effect of Visitor Type

Survey respondents were divided into two groups: Hong Kong residents and international tourists. A measurement invariance test was simultaneously run across the two groups using CFA, to examine if the measurement model was equivalent across the groups. As suggested by Yoo (2002), identifying the chisquare difference between the non-restricted measurement and the full metric invariance model is a viable approach to testing measurement invariance. If the chi-square difference is insignificant, the measurement model is invariant across the two groups. As shown in Table 5, the chi-square difference between the two models was 49.588 and the p-value is 0.00. It may be concluded that the proposed measurement model did not apply across the two groups.

Insert Table 5

Next, a structural invariance test was undertaken to measure whether the proposed structural model was equivalent across the two groups. The model will be different across groups if the non-restricted and restricted model are significantly different, implying a moderating effect (Yoo, 2002). The structural invariance test result is shown in Table 6. It can be seen that the chi-square difference between the two models yielded a value of 60.160 with 19 degrees of freedom, which exceeded the critical value of 30.140 at the significance level of 0.05. Structural invariance is therefore supported. In other words, there was no moderating effect between local residents and tourists.

Insert Table 6

Discussion

This study used attribution theory to investigate C2C relationships in a theme park domain, an area that has received relatively little attention in the literature. The results of the research have been used to construct a conceptual model as shown in Figure 1. Three dimensions of the theory were tested, and only stability and controllability were found to be significantly correlated with satisfaction. Contrary to the assumption that visitor-related problems would be most salient, the locus-of-control factor was found to have a significant positive impact on satisfaction.

The first objective of the research was to build a conceptual model of theme park visitors' attribution of inappropriate behavior, satisfaction, and repeat patronage. The model is outlined in Figure 1. Results show that theme park management-related issues, another element of the locus of control, did not have a significant impact on satisfaction. This is clearly demonstrated in Figure 1. Unlike the hotel sector, service excellence and hospitality are not the most important criteria affecting satisfaction of theme park visitors. Instead, tangible facets of the facilities and the built physical environment (Sureshchandar, Rajendran, & Anantharaman, 2002) are more important. Theme parks may be described as a form of mass entertainment created through a deliberately constructed atmosphere of fantasy (Milman, 2001; Wong & Cheung, 1999).

Pikkemaat and Schuckert (2007) propose a list of theme park success factors, of which many are related to tangibles such as infrastructure, theming, environmental integration, and design. Quality tangibles are the essential component that drives competitive advantage and novelty, and leads to theme park success (Tsang et al., 2012; Wong & Cheung, 1999). As a result, theme park visitors are more likely to notice problems associated with the physical elements, but less likely to attribute other visitors' inappropriate behavior to problems with theme park management. This finding has significant implications for theme park managers and is discussed later.

The stability dimension indicates that service failures caused by other visitors' inappropriate behavior have a significant negative impact on satisfaction as shown in Figure 1. Service quality management researchers have reported similar findings. For instance, research conducted in the United States (US) by Lassar, Manolis, and Winsor (2000) shows that as the number of service failures declined, visitor satisfaction increased. Wang and Huff (2007) suggest that repeated service failure is perceived as a violation of trust, leading to a decline in satisfaction and increase in negative emotions. Customers' satisfaction appears to be sensitive to service failure. Based on this view, satisfaction of theme park visitors is adversely affected by the frequency of inappropriate behavior of other customers.

In line with previous studies, the ability of theme park managers to effectively manage the visitor experience was found to have a significant positive influence on theme park visitor satisfaction in these results (see Figure 1). Folkes (1984) shows that long queues or waiting times are perceived as a service failure. This provokes dissatisfaction because customers believe that the situation is preventable (Taylor, 1994). Choi and Mattila (2008) echo the findings of other scholars who show that customers react negatively when they believe the provider can prevent the service failure. Negative feelings of this nature may not be mitigated if there is ambiguity about the cause of failure. Consistent with this argument,

theme park visitors tend to be satisfied if they perceive that management has taken preventive measures, such as placing warning notices regarding certain actions, and exercised other forms of control of inappropriate behavior.

Customer satisfaction and repeat purchase are among the prime concerns of tourism and hospitality practitioners (Smith, Costello, & Muenchen, 2010). Service management researchers have long focused on the relationship between satisfaction and repeat visitation in diverse settings including hotels (Dominici & Palumbo, 2013), events (Papadimitriou, 2013; Smith et al., 2010), casinos (Wong & Dioko, 2013), and restaurants (Heung & Gu, 2012). This study offers the first empirical evidence (see Figure 1) that overall satisfaction positively influences repeat patronage in theme parks as shown by the strong path coefficient of 0.89. Hospitality and tourism businesses require satisfied customers if they are to survive.

Recognizing the expectations of visitors in this area provides theme park managers with an insight into the strategies they need to implement to ensure a high level of customer satisfaction. These might include changes to signage, queuing strategies, public service announcements in multiple languages, and the stationing of park staff in specific areas to assist patrons.

The second objective of this study was to examine the attribution of inappropriate behavior from the perspectives of residents and non-residents. No significant differences were detected between the two groups; in other words, visitor origin did not moderate the relationship between attribution and satisfaction. This is an interesting finding because it contradicts the results of many studies conducted in other tourist-related settings. For example, Oh, Draper, and Dixon (2010) show that non-residents and residents have diverse coastal recreational needs. Hwang, Lee, and Park (2012) find that resident and non-resident groups have dissimilar dining preferences, and Vaughan and Ardoin (2014) identify significant differences in how residents and non-residents perceive community-based resource management. The findings of the current study may suggest that residents and non-residents see themselves as equals in a setting that is so different from their normal place of living that points of difference based on culture have less importance. The fantasy of the make-believe world of many theme parks may, in a sense, blur any sense of distinction between the two groups. In other words, every visitor may feel like a foreigner in the theme park.

In terms of objectives, three findings also highlight a number of C2C issues that will be of interest to theme park management. For instance, as shown in Figure 1, visitors think that frequent inappropriate behavior has a negative effect on satisfaction, and that the management should be responsible for controlling such inappropriate actions. This suggests an operational need to carefully regulate in-park behavior. Gentle enforcement of the visitors' code of conduct may be a solution. However, it may be difficult to "police" everyone, because actions that are considered normal in one culture may be offensive in another. Thus, staff training may play an important role as a strategy to strengthen front-line employees' competence in crowd control, communication, cultural sensitivity, complaint and conflict handling, and so on. Ideally, employees should be trained to identify potential problems and react promptly and courteously, because timely resolution of issues can deliver a strong message to customers that similar situations will be handled in the same way (Swanson & Kelley, 2001).

Satisfactory resolution of problems can improve a theme park's image. Professionalism of this standard is likely to be appreciated by customers and encourages repeat patronage. In addition, regular surveying of visitors regarding their experience should be carried out in order to detect problems that may not be otherwise apparent. Effective surveying can provide theme park management with information about the effectiveness of the control measures already in place, as well as immediate feedback on problems.

Implication

The purpose of this research was to examine C2C interaction in a theme park setting, with a particular focus on inappropriate behavior. As stated earlier, there is a paucity of research regarding this topic. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study to apply the three dimensions of attribution theory in a theme park context. Two dimensions were found to be significant in determining satisfaction (controllability and stability) while the third (locus of control) was seemingly unimportant. Future research may seek to explore the factors underlying this finding.

From a management perspective, the relationships identified in Figure 1 provide insights into the type of strategies that may be developed. For example, as Tittle et al. (2004) observed, there will always be a group of visitors who lack self-control and will need some form of external control to ensure they do not generate negative C2C interactions with other visitors. Active controls of this nature may include stationing of staff in key areas to detect possible C2C incidents and undertake subtle intervention to prevent an escalation of incidents. Another, slightly more passive, strategy may be to employ a CCTV monitoring system that allows park staff to monitor crowd movements and to direct intervention if required. Developing a register of incidents based on type, location, and other variables such as weather and time of day will facilitate the identification of patterns of behavior using data-mining techniques similar to those developed by various law enforcement organizations to detect crime patterns and for crowd management (Chen et al., 2004). Adoption of strategies of this nature will facilitate more effective management strategies to be introduced.

As observed earlier many problems of a C2C nature arise because of problems associated with the physical layout of parks. As Pearce and Moscardo (1984) note, tourism infrastructure, including the physical layout of facilities, barriers, shelters, seating, placement of signage, and queuing, affect customers' enjoyment. Ongoing monitoring including by staff and as suggested above, by CCTV, is required to identify areas where problems are emerging. One simple example is the placement of free Wi-Fi, now almost an obligation of tourism operators, because the desire to take pictures (selfies) at certain key spots is likely to cause crowding and possibly jostling. Moreover, similar crowding is likely to occur if Wi-Fi coverage is limited to certain areas or is unable to sustain large volumes of users.

Finally, it should be noted that the attempt to explain the relationship between attribution of inappropriate behavior and visitor satisfaction is exploratory in nature. There is scope to include other factors that may affect satisfaction, such as visitor profile, income, and visitor density, in future research. Scope also exists to investigate these issues according to type of park.

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TABLE 1. Demographic Profiles of Respondents (N = 520)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Types of theme park visitors		
Local residents	292	56.2
Overseas tourists	228	43.8
Gender		
Male	262	50.4
Female	258	49.6
Age (years)		
18–25	216	41.6
26–35	186	37.8
36–45	86	16.6
46–55	24	4.6
56 or above	7	1.3
Education		
Primary school or below	4	0.8
Secondary school	78	15.0
College	92	17.7
University	322	61.9
Graduate school	24	4.6
Monthly household income (HK$/US$ in brackets)		
Less than 16,000 (2,000)	75	14.4
16,001–32,000 (2,001–4,000)	173	33.3
32,001–48,000 (4,001–6,000)	169	32.5
48,001–64,000 (6,001–8,000)	72	13.8
64,001–80,000 (8,001–10,000)	20	3.8
80,001 or above (10,001 or above)	11	2.1

TABLE 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis Results (N = 520)

Dimension	Mean*	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Variance explained (%)	Reliability coefficient
Locus of control					
Visitor-related problems			2.703	45.045	0.835
The behavior is acceptable in his/her culture	3.66	0.660			
He/She thinks that no one suffers from any real injury or loss	3.50	0.677			
He/She feels that tourists have no concern for their social responsibilities	3.54	0.775			
He/She feels that there is a low probability of unpleasant consequences	3.55	0.773			
He/She receives benefits from performing the behavior	3.07	0.526			
He/She is not concerned about public display of self	3.45	0.578			
Theme park management-related problems			1.728	57.613	0.783
Notices prohibiting the inappropriate behavior are not clear	2.90	0.805			
Theme park employees do not stop them engaging in inappropriate behavior	2.97	0.789			
Theme park employees are complicit in permitting inappropriate behavior	2.79	0.676			
Stability			3.536	50.509	0.748
Jumping queue for rides or outlets	3.49	0.690			
Spitting on the floor	3.14	0.750			
Violent behavior toward visitors	1.84	0.679			
Blocking the passage ways to occupy the “best” seats for the show	3.15	0.755			
Impeding the operation of shows/performances	2.63	0.733			
Asking for excessive gifts (such as theme park freebies) from staff	2.65	0.679			
Taking off shoes and socks in public areas	2.56	0.684			
Controllability			3.496	38.839	0.796
Given verbal warning by staff	3.07	0.517			
Asked to leave the theme park without refund/compensation	3.77	0.579			
Denied admission to the park	3.93	0.475			
Blacklisting visitors	3.93	0.420			
Put up notices at conspicuous places, such as rides	3.06	0.761			
Distribute behavior guidelines to visitors	2.86	0.747			
Attach behavior guidelines to the attraction map	2.93	0.743			
Bespoke staff training course to handle problem visitors	3.66	0.656			
Empower staff with more authority and flexibility to handle problem visitors	3.77	0.609			
Satisfaction			2.724	90.803	0.949
I have positive feelings about my visit	3.82	0.943			
I am satisfied with my visit	3.85	0.961			
I am pleased with my visit	3.84	0.954			

Repeat patronage			2.601	86.699	0.922
I will visit the theme park in the future	3.79	0.913			
I have a strong intention to visit the theme park in the future	3.67	0.938			
I will recommend others visit the theme park	3.73	0.943			

Notes. *A 5-point Likert-type scale was used. Stability: 1 = not very frequent, 5 = very frequent; controllability: 1 = very ineffective, 5 = very effective; other constructs: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree.

TABLE 3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results (N = 520)

Dimension	Standard factor loading	Critical ratio	Construct reliability
Locus of control			
Visitor-related problems			0.756
The behavior is acceptable in his/her culture	0.622	9.939	
He/She thinks that no one suffers from any real injury or loss	0.599	10.662	
He/She feels that tourists have no concern for their social responsibilities	0.731	14.118	
He/She feels that there is a low probability of unpleasant consequences	0.687	NA	
Theme park management-related problems			0.667
Notices prohibiting the inappropriate behavior are not clear	0.850	NA	
Theme park employees are complicit in permitting inappropriate behavior	0.549	3.871	
Stability			0.837
Jumping queue for rides or outlets	0.642	11.531	
Spitting on the floor	0.700	12.467	
Violent behavior toward visitors	0.602	11.169	
Blocking the passageways to occupy the “best” seats for the show	0.712	12.723	
Impeding the operation of shows/performances	0.664	12.162	
Asking for excessive gifts (such as theme park freebies) from staff	0.600	11.239	
Taking off shoes and socks in public areas	0.626	NA	
Controllability			0.919
Put up notices at conspicuous places, such as rides	0.780	23.839	
Distribute behavior guidelines to visitors	0.977	33.767	
Attach behavior guidelines to the attraction map	0.902	NA	
Satisfaction			0.949
I have positive feelings about my visit	0.901	36.306	
I am satisfied with my visit	0.939	42.221	
I am pleased with my visit	0.945	NA	
Repeat patronage			0.924
I will visit the theme park in the future	0.850	29.245	
I have a strong intention to visit the theme park in the future	0.903	34.512	
I will recommend others visit the theme park	0.932	NA	

Notes. NA: not available because the item was used as a reference variable.

TABLE 4. Average Variance Extracted and Standardized Correlation Matrix

	Visitor-related problems	Theme park management-related problems	Stability	Controllability	Satisfaction	Repeat patronage
Visitor-related problems	1					
Theme park management-related problems	0.176	1				
Stability	0.227 (0.052)	−0.053 (0.003)	1			
Controllability	−0.018 (0.000)	0.201 (0.040)	−0.042 (0.002)	1		
Satisfaction	0.078 (0.006)	0.087 (0.008)	−0.158 (0.025)	0.282 (0.080)	1	
Repeat patronage	0.084 (0.071)	0.093 (0.009)	−0.153 (0.023)	0.295 (0.087)	0.835 (0.697)	1
Average variance extracted	0.438	0.512	0.423	0.792	0.862	0.802
Mean	3.561	2.843	2.781	2.951	3.838	3.730
Standard deviation	0.647	0.756	0.654	0.896	0.705	0.690
Alpha	0.750	0.636	0.835	0.916	0.949	0.922

TABLE 5. Testing for Measurement Invariance Across the Two Groups

	Chisquare	df	RMSEA	CFI	NFI
Non-restricted model	762.286	390	0.043	0.942	0.890
Restricted model	811.874	405	0.044	0.937	0.882
Difference	49.588	15	0.001	0.005	0.008

Notes. df: degrees of freedom; RMSEA: root mean square error of approximation; CFI: comparative fit index; NFI: normed fit index.

TABLE 6. Testing for Structural Invariance Across Two Groups.

	Chisquare	df	RMSEA	CFI	NFI
Non-restricted model	787.470	400	0.043	0.940	0.886
Restricted model	847.530	419	0.044	0.944	0.877
Difference	60.160	19	0.002	0.004	0.009

Notes. df: degrees of freedom; RMSEA: root mean square error of approximation; CFI: comparative fit index; NFI: normed fit index.

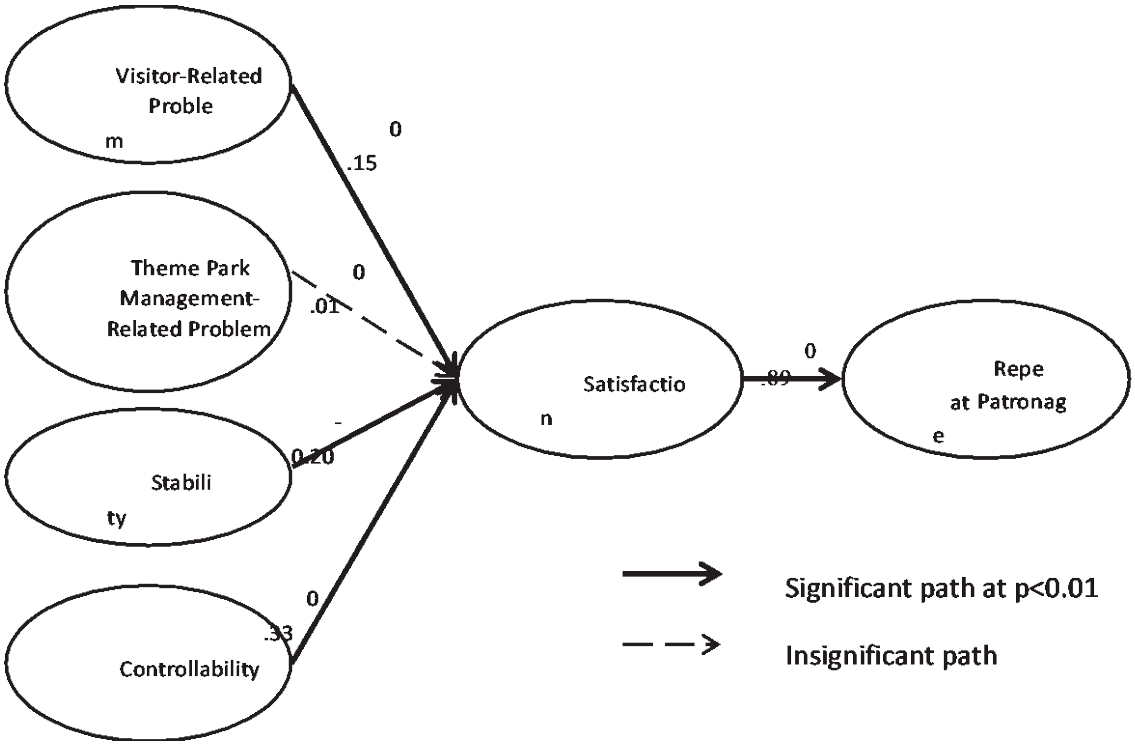

FIGURE 1. Structural Model with Standardized Path Coefficient