DETERMINANTS OF VISITORS' PREFERENCE REGARDING THEME PARKS - A STUDY IN ERODE CITY

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Abstract: The service sector seems to be taking over the world economy because of its growing significance and immense share of the economic landscape of most nations. Now-a-days, the world economy has become synonymous to service economy. The services sector contributions to Indian economy are 57 per cent of GDP and are rapidly increasing. The service sectors are classified as personal care services, hotel services, transportation services, banking services, communication services and tourism services, etc., Among these, the tourism plays an important role in generating the service sector. As the tourism industry has a significant impact in the economy of different nations in the world. Recently, the major type of tourist attractions is theme park. Hence, the present study has been undertaken to determinants of visitors' preference in Erode city regarding theme parks. The most famous theme parks selected for the study include Black Thunder, KovaiKondattam, Maharaja theme park, Chill Out, Athisayam and Wonderla.

Index Terms: Service sector, Theme park

1.INTRODUCTION

The service sector seems to be taking over the world economy because of its growing significance and immense share of the economic landscape of most nations. To some extent, the service sector has been regarded as a gauge of a country's economic advancement. Now-a-days, the world economy has become synonymous to service economy. To be successful at services marketing, today's marketer must understand how the nature of services can control marketing strategy. To enhance the sustenance and survival of services marketing there should be a clear understanding of the strategies so as to overcome the challenges of internal and external business environment. The service sectors are classified as personal care services, hotel services, transportation services, banking services, communication services and tourism services, etc.,

Among these, the tourism plays an important role in generating the service sector. As the tourism industry has a significant impact in the economy of different nations in the world. All countries try to promote their tourist products using various marketing techniques. The tourism embraces nearly all aspects of our society. Recently, the major type of tourist attractions is theme park. It is a type of amusement park which has been built around one or more themes. It represents leisure facilities that operate mechanical rides, water rides, games, shows, themed exhibits, refreshment stands and other attractions. Theme park is one of the tourism products that generate the income to the country and influence the growth of tourism economy. The theme park industry has been growing fast globally in the last three decades due to the development of different types of theme park in respect to size, capacity and entertainment offerings.

Theme park attraction has able to improve destination image, enhance tourism, benefit the economy and provide education, recreation and entertainment opportunity for people. Other than that, theme park offer employability opportunity for local residence to sustain the country and accelerates the country economic growth. It provides services such as accommodation, online booking services, night entertainment, activities and transportation services other than the rides, performances, retail outlets, food and beverage services. In this regard, the present study has been undertaken to determinants of visitors' preference in Erode city regarding theme parks. The most famous theme parks selected for the study include Black Thunder, KovaiKondattam, Maharaja theme park, Chill Out, Athisayam and Wonderla.

2.STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Today, almost every theme park organization is facing the marketing challenges in business environment due to the basic characteristics of services. A growing number of theme park industries now find themselves competing in the national and international environment. Hence, it has become the duty of the theme park management has concern to know the visitors' preference. Based on the above background, the present study has made an attempt to analyse the determinants of visitors' preference in Erode city regarding theme parks. This study provides answer for the following questions:

1) How far the respondents have awareness on the theme parks?
2) What are the factors influencing the visitors' preference towards theme parks?
3) What is the opinion of the respondents towards theme parks?

3.OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

❖ To know the factors that influences the visitors to prefer the theme parks.
❖ To examine the visitors' preference regarding theme parks.
❖ To offer suitable suggestions based on the study.

4.SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study has been undertaken to examine the determinants of visitors' preference in Erode city regarding theme parks. The scope of the study is restricted with the objectives of studying the profile of the respondents, the factors that influences the visitors to prefer the theme parks and the visitors' preference regarding theme parks.

5.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study on determinants of visitors' preference regarding theme parks has been limited to the respondents located in Erode city only. In order to realise the objectives, the primary data is used. The required primary data have been collected through a survey method from the respondents during the period of April 2017 to July 2017.The convenient sampling technique was employed in the selection of the sample. Besides the primary data, the secondary data were also collected from various sources like newspapers, magazines and websites to make highlights on theme parks. The number of items selected from the total population constitutes the sample size. Sample of 200 respondents were selected to carry out the present study in Erode city.

6.LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

❖ The result and the analysis made in this study depends fully on the information given by the respondents.
❖ The data given by the respondents are limited to their own perception, opinion, emotion, knowledge, feelings and awareness.

❖ The data collected for the studies are quantitative being subject to personal bias of the respondents.
❖ Due to time constraint, the sample size was limited to 200 respondents and the findings might not be applicable to the total population.

7.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following are the findings of the study:

7.1.PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS - SIMPLE PERCENTAGE ANALYSIS

In order to have knowledge on the profile of the respondents, it has been analysed by employing simple percentage analysis. The profile of the respondents has been classified as socio-economic profile and profile based on study related variables.

The socio-economic profile of the respondents based on their demographic factors such as Gender, Age, Marital Status, Educational Qualification, Occupational Status, Monthly Family Income, Nature of the Family, Size of the Family and Area of Residence. The profile of the respondents are also analysed on the basis of study related variables such as sources of awareness, recently visit the theme park, preference of theme park, most preferable activities in theme park, frequency of visiting the theme park, opinion about the cost of theme park, overall experience about the theme park and recommend others to visit the theme park are considered as variables in the present study.

The followings Table 7.1 shows that the socio – economic and study related variables of the respondents.

TABLE 7.1

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	128	64
Female	72	36
Total	**200**	**100**
Age	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Upto 20 years	80	40
21 - 30 years	65	32.5
31 - 40 years	42	21
Above 40 years	13	6.5
Total	**200**	**100**
Marital Status	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Married	71	35.5
Unmarried	129	64.5
Total	**200**	**100**
Educational Qualification	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Illiterate	9	4.5
School level	52	26
Graduate	116	58
Professional	23	11.5

Total	200	100
Occupational Status	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Student	95	47.5
Business	30	15
Employed	35	17.5
Professional	20	10
Others	20	10
Total	**200**	**100**
Monthly Family Income	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Upto Rs.20,000	73	36.5
Rs.20,001 - Rs.40,000	74	37
Above Rs.40,000	53	26.5
Total	**200**	**100**
Nature of the Family	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Joint family	85	42.5
Nuclear family	115	57.5
Total	**200**	**100**
Size of the Family	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Below 3 members	31	15.5
3 - 5 members	127	63.5
Above 5 members	42	21
Total	**200**	**100**
Area of Residence	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Rural	67	33.5
Semi – Urban	77	38.5
Urban	56	28
Total	**200**	**100**
Sources of Awareness	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Electronic Media	49	24.5
Print Media	33	16.5
Friends/Relatives	99	49.5
Others	19	9.5
Total	**200**	**100**
Recently visit the theme park	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Yes	137	68.5
No	63	31.5

Total	200	100
Preference of theme parks	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Black Thunder	65	32.5
KovaiKondattam	29	14.5
Maharaja theme park	20	10
Chill Out	19	9.5
Athisayam	31	15.5
Wonderla	36	18
Total	**200**	**100**
Most preferable activities in theme park	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Water Rides	101	50.5
Dry Rides	39	19.5
Performed Shows	9	4.5
Adventure Programs	30	15
Others	21	10.5
Total	**200**	**100**
Frequency of visiting the theme park	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Only once in a year	56	28
Sometimes	103	51.5
Often	32	16
Every month	9	4.5
Total	**200**	**100**
Opinion about the cost of theme park	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Yes	136	68
No	64	32
Total	**200**	**100**
Overall experience about the theme park	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Excellent	35	17.5
Good	122	61
Average	39	19.5
Bad	4	2
Total	**200**	**100**
Recommend others to visit the theme park	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Yes	171	85.5
No	29	14.5
Total	**200**	**100**

The socio-economic profile of the respondents reveals that,

- ❖ The majority (64%) of the respondents are male.
- ❖ The majority (40%) of the respondents comes under the age group of upto20 years.
- ❖ The majority (64.5%) of the respondents are unmarried.
- ❖ The majority (58%) of the respondents are graduates.
- ❖ The majority (47.5%) of the respondents are student.
- ❖ The majority (37%) of the respondents' monthly income ranges from Rs.20,001 - Rs.40,000.
- ❖ The majority (57.5%) of the respondents belongs to the nuclear family.
- ❖ The majority (63.5%) of the respondents belongs to the family size of 3 - 5 members.
- ❖ The majority (38.5%) of the respondents are in semi - urban area.

The profile of the respondents based on study related variables reveals that,

- ❖ The majority (49.5%) of the respondents are aware of the theme park through friends and The relatives.
- ❖ The majority (68.5%) of the respondents are visiting the theme park recently.
- ❖ The majority (32.5%) of the respondents prefer mostly Black thunder.
- ❖ The majority (50.5%) of the respondents prefer water rides.
- ❖ The majority (51.5%) of the respondents visit the theme park sometimes.
- ❖ The majority (68%) of the respondents' opinion is too expensive.
- ❖ The majority (61%) of the respondents' opinion about the theme park is good.
- ❖ The majority (85.5%) of the respondents recommend others to visit the theme park.

7.2.FACTORS INFLUENCING THE VISITORS' PREFERENCE TOWARDS   THEME PARKS – WEIGHTED AVERAGE SCORE RANKING ANALYSIS

The factors influencing the visitors' preference towards theme parks is then analysed by applying weighted average score ranking technique. The ranking of the factors influencing the visitors' preference towards theme parks is shown in Table 7.2.

TABLE 7.2
FACTORS INFLUENCING THE VISITORS' PREFERENCE TOWARDS THEME PARKS – WEIGHTED AVERAGE SCORE RANKING ANALYSIS

Weighted score points (w)		9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Total score ∑WX	Weighted average Score($\overline{X}_W$)	Rank
Rank		I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX			
Factors													
Entertainment	X	10	10	9	6	6	15	33	68	43	637	14.16	IX
	WX	90	80	63	36	30	60	99	136	43			
Adventure programs	X	10	15	11	21	23	43	46	19	12	829	18.42	VI
	WX	90	120	77	126	115	172	138	38	12			
Thrills	X	6	13	11	30	28	28	24	30	30			

	WX	54	104	77	180	140	112	72	60	30	888	19.73	VII
Relaxation and Refreshment	X	13	12	20	9	21	22	23	28	52	777	17.27	VIII
	WX	117	96	140	54	105	88	69	56	52			
Cleanliness	X	25	22	35	27	17	25	15	16	18	1088	24.18	IV
	WX	225	176	245	162	85	100	45	32	18			
Cost	X	38	34	29	26	25	15	11	11	11	1224	27.20	II
	WX	342	272	203	156	125	60	33	22	11			
Location	X	51	44	32	19	25	12	9	3	5	1360	30.22	I
	WX	459	352	224	114	125	48	27	6	5			
Easy accessible	X	32	30	36	29	30	12	11	12	8	1217	27.04	III
	WX	288	240	252	174	150	48	33	24	8			
Staff Behaviour	X	15	20	17	33	25	28	28	13	21	980	21.78	V
	WX	135	160	119	198	125	112	84	26	21			
TOTAL		200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200			

(**Note** X- Number of respondents, W-Weighted score points)

The weighted average score ranking analysis predicts that the location, cost, and easy accessible are the main factors influencing the sample respondents in their preference towards theme parks.

7.3.VISITORS' PREFERENCE TOWARDS THEME PARKS – FACTOR ANALYSIS

The visitors' preference towards theme parks is examined with the factor analysis. However, before applying factor analysis, the data are tested for its appropriateness. For this purpose, all the fifteen statements have been selected for determining the visitors' level of preference towards theme parks.

The component variables affecting the visitors' preference towards theme parks are given with their corresponding values in the following factor definition Table 7.3.

TABLE 7.3

VISITORS'PREFERENCE TOWARDS THEME PARKS – FACTOR DEFINITION

Factor I Priority	Skill Rides (Air hockey, racing, etc.,)	0.538
	Food items available in theme park	0.706
	Buy some souvenirs	0.598
	To prefer for location	0.483
	Selection of event based on cost	0.559
Factor II Amusement	Enjoying with friends	0.800
	To visit the theme park in summer season	0.663
Factor III Desire	Performed Shows	0.759
	Likely to go the same theme park again	0.632

Factor IV	Horror Entertainment	0.547
Purpose of visit	Adventure programs	0.551
	More Relaxation	0.549
	Entertainment with family members	0.610
Factor V	Water Rides	0.773
Games	Dry Rides	0.657

It has been observed from the Table 7.3 that Factor I named as Priority summarises the commonality of the variables namely skill rides (air hockey, racing, etc.,), food items available in theme park, buy some souvenirs, to prefer for location and selection of event based on cost.

Factor II named as Amusement summarises the commonality of the variables namely enjoying with friends and to visit the theme park in summer season.

Factor III named as Desire summarises the commonality of the variables namely performed shows and likely to go the same theme park again.

Factor IV named as Purpose of visit summarises the commonality of the variables namely horror entertainment, adventure programs, more relaxation and entertainment with family members.

Factor V named as Games summarises the commonality of the variables namely water rides and dry rides.

8.SUGGESTIONS

- ❖ It is found that, the majority of the respondents prefer Black thunder theme park. Hence, it is suggested that the management of theme park should focus more on the quality of the service to retain their visitors and also to attract new visitors.
- ❖ The study reveals that, most of the respondents are aware of theme park through friends and relatives. Therefore, it is suggested that the theme park management can construct attractive advertisements to create more awareness.
- ❖ It is inferred from the study that, the most of the respondents are influenced by the location, cost and easy accessible. Therefore, it is suggested that the theme park management should give more attention towards their atmosphere and cost of the activities at reasonable price to attract both existing and new visitors.

9.CONCLUSION

Theme parks' managements should introduce multiple experiential plans to increase their theme parks attractions for visitors. They should not only maintain activities that provide experiential attractions, but also enhance the value of the activities offered. As a result, the competition among theme parks is increasing rapidly. It is important for the theme parks to make effort to differentiate themselves from their competitors.

Therefore, the study revealed that the majority of the respondents prefer Black Thunder theme park and most of the respondents are highly influenced by location and cost. It can be concluded that the high quality of services and continuous quality improvement in the services of theme parks will definitely bring immense success to the theme parks and better services always attract more visitors. However, the better understanding of the specific perceptions of visitors is one of the essential factors that can contribute to the better business of the theme parks.

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