CUSTOMER LOYALTY THE DISNEY WAY

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Customer loyalty is an essential component of the entertainment industry. Some would argue that it is essential to all industries. The Walt Disney Company has mastered customer loyalty by developing strong connections with their guests. Other industries can benefit from incorporating Disney techniques and craft appropriate services into their operations. It has been argued that for business organizations the most important emerging, market cohort to build loyalty programs is the Millennial cohort, because of its' size and unique perspective. This paper investigates consumer values of both Millennials and Baby Boomers. Three brands, representing 3 different industries, are identified and described in terms of how Disney strategies can be applied to meeting the needs of appropriate target audiences. Results of the study indicate that the Millennial consumer expectation is significantly different from the Baby Boomer expectations (e.g., more emphasis on social contribution, and nature, less on price). Businesses need to recognize the different expectations of market place segments and provide appropriate products and services to meet those expectations.

Keywords: Customer loyalty, Price, Total customer experience.

Introduction

Customer loyalty is important to a business because it ultimately determines whether or not the business will be successful. Generating new customers (recruiting) has been shown to be much more expensive that generating repeat business (Saleh 2014). For the purpose of this paper customer loyalty is defined as, creating a long-lasting relationship with customers. It includes satisfying their needs: physical, intellectual and emotional. It is important to create an experience and make a personal connection with customers to ensure they feel special and well taken care of. The most important tactic for the customer relationship management effort is to determine what customers value about their relationship with your company (Newell 2002). Customer loyalty also contributes to promoting positive word of mouth. This in turn generates new customers in a more authentic manner.

Some organizations are better than others at creating loyalty. Disney is regarded as a company that is very successful in building and maintaining customer loyalty (Allerton 1997). The methods that Disney employs to build customer loyalty can be used in many industries to enhance customer satisfaction. This paper examines how other industries can use Disney's customer loyalty strategies to enhance their businesses. In this paper, customer loyalty was investigated using an "interview" strategy with college students (Millennials) and Baby boomers, living in Connecticut. The industries investigated include: Home Remodeling Centers, Grocery Stores and Beer Manufacturing.

This paper focuses primarily on Millennials because they have recently been consumers of the Disney experience. Also, they will soon be parents of the next Disney generation and they will be

significant spenders in the American economy. It is important that Disney continues to build on customer loyalty to ensure that Millennials stay loyal to the company as they continue to age. Millennials will play the most significant role in Disney's future.

Literature Review

Millennials

According to Ordun (2015), Millennials are the second largest population in American history. He sees this as both an opportunity and a challenge. Ordun defines millennials as "the first generation that doesn't need an authority figure to gain access to information, resulting in a unique and advanced group of workers."

Erikson (1959) stated (as cited in Brock 2018), that American Millennials are in stage five of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This stage is about "Ego Identity vs. Role Confusion and Intimacy vs. Isolation." McLeod (2013) add his, says that Millennials "are focused on becoming independent, and begin looking into the future in terms of careers, relationships, and building those relationships."

Ordun (2015) adds that, "With 75% of this generation are still single, demographers and scholars have noted that perhaps other goals and priorities have out-shined the focus of older generations on the family and home." Millennials are very different from other generations as they are not as focused on getting married and having children as previous generations. They are more concerned about following their dreams. Generations before them got married and had children younger. (Guven Ordun, 2015).

In a research study by Edelman (2010), it was found that "Millennials have a strong sense of brand awareness and loyalty, which they often share with their personal network."

Similarly, Yarrow and O'Donnell (2009), found that Millennials expect a solid relationship with companies based on their feelings and reasons why they chose to purchase from certain companies (Ordun, 2015). Millennials will not settle for companies that do not create an emotional connection with their customers (Ordun, 2015). They will no longer be loyal to the company or trust them (Gurau, 2012).

Millennials choose companies with mission statements that align with their own beliefs. They purchase items that are in style and are well known among their peers.They are not just focused on price as they believe it is important to support the environment and give back to others (Ordun, 2015).

Edelman (2010) says that Millennials' purchase choices are the way they express themselves and show the world who they are as a person from where they shop and what businesses they support. Overall, Millennials believe that it is very important to choose brands that do good for the world. They may not have the highest form of brand loyalty as compared to other generations, but they still feel it is important to take action and support businesses that align with their beliefs.

In summary Millennials are: interested in brand beliefs that align with their own and ones that demonstrate social consciousness. Millennials are motivated to follow their dreams and build emotional connections with companies.

The Customer Experience and Customer loyalty

Customer loyalty is a crucial part of a business. Dick and Basu (1994) define it as "the strength of the relationship between an individual's relative attitude and repeat patronage). They mention that businesses are popular when they focus on customer loyalty. Wakefield and Jeffrey (1996) stated that if the customer is satisfied with the service being offered and the appeal of the location, the customer will want to stay for longer periods of time which will increase sales and positive word of mouth for the company.

Mascarenhas, Kesavan and Bernacchi (2006) believe that to be a successful business it is important to create a total customer experience and lasting customer loyalty. They state that total customer experience includes: "anticipating and fulfilling customer needs and wants better than the competition,

providing real consumer experiences and real emotional experiences, experiences as distinct market offerings, interactions and engaging memories." Similarly, to (Mascarenhas, Kesavan and Bernacchi, 2006), Millman (2010) believes that merchandise isn't what customers are looking for anymore, the customer experience is more important.

According to Wakefield and Blodgett (1999), it is imperative that a company handles poor quality service effectively because it is possible to turn a negative experience a positive experience. "The positive effect of an outstanding tangible service environment may help offset these feelings."

Milman (2010) discusses the "four E's" which include experience, entertainment, exhibitism and evangelizing. Guests are not going to theme parks for the rides but for the experience. Milman (2009) suggests that customers were "more likely to put an emphasis on the environment providing the fantasy experience, and place higher important to attribute like staff members, cleanliness, safety and security." Finally, Milman (2010) states that "modern theme parks attempt to incorporate the visitor experience into almost any aspect of the park's operation."

Disney Experience

One company that many Millennials have visited and frequently discuss with their cohorts is Walt Disney World. The Walt Disney World theme park is a great example of customer loyalty; they build long lasting relationships with their guests (Viverios 2018). Disney refers to customers as "guests" as they really care about how their customers feel. they try to take care of every guest request they receive so that the customer is happy and will share their positive experience. For example, they offer fastpasses for loss of time and listen closely to guests as they voice their concerns. Additionally, if something isn't their fault, they will still do their best to make the experience magical. For example, if a child drops their ice cream, a cast member (service employee) will provide a substitute.

The Walt Disney Company sets a good example of how to run a business. They offer a unique guest experience with cast members who are dedicated to serve guests. For many Disney is an escape and a place where everyone can bring out their inner child. Their slogan, "The Happiest Place on Earth" shows that they want customers to feel joyful and this in turn will cause them to be loyal.

Disney continuously conducts research through surveys to ensure they are fulfilling the needs of customers. In addition, Disney creates a nostalgic experience by recreating childhood experiences with Disney characters. They provide a distinct offering through their unique, high quality customer service. Mascarenhas, Kesavan and Bernacchi (2006) mention that Disney "is dedicated to the delivery of unique customer experiences." Finally, they interact and engage many of their customers through the use of their photo opportunities; where cast members walk around the park offering to take pictures of family. Digital frames and characters can be added to the pictures to showcase which park guests are visiting.

Not only does Disney provide a total customer experience, they also respond well to negative situations. Wakefield and Blodgett (1999) include The Walt Disney Company as a provider that creates an "outstanding tangible service." They state unsatisfied customers at Disney that receive compensation that will reverse their negative feelings. The compensation will motivate them to come back and continue to recommend the vacation to others.

Disney has a strong brand as they use many themes and subthemes. As Milman stated in (2010), Disney World offers the theme of Mickey Mouse which can be seen through meet and greets, Mickey shaped ice cream bars, Mickey merchandise and a parade starring Mickey. Not only does Disney offer a main character and friends, they also have subthemes. Disney World has five unique theme parks: Magic Kingdom, Animal Kingdom, Epcot and Hollywood Studios (Milman 2010). For example, Animal Kingdom is focused on showcasing animal themed rides and animal conversation. They also offer an outside shopping area called Disney Springs where guests can shop and eat after spending the day in a park.

Milman (2010) states,"theme parks including Disney create "storytelling memorable experiences featured by design, landscaping, rides, entertainment, merchandise and other experiences for all ages".

Disney themes give guests a chance to look back at their childhood and reminisce. Disney uses fantasy as an important tool to help keep customer loyalty. This is seen in their Festival of Fantasy Parade and the Fantasyland area that is a part of Magic Kingdom. This world doesn't cause you to worry about safety or security. Instead, guests are focused on experiencing the magic of Fantasyland (Milman 2010).

In summary, the Disney experience is great at meeting the millennial expectation in that they have strong customer service, offer a full unique experience including themed characters and parks.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate how other companies can use Disney's techniques to improve their customer loyalty. Disney was chosen because it is a successful company that gives customers a great experience. Millennials represent the next large wave of people that will be making a significant impact in the market place. They were chosen for this study because they have an increasing economic and influence in society.

The businesses that were chosen for this paper are: Stop and Shop, Home Depot and a Microbrewery. These businesses were chosen because they showcase a variety of needs that customers look for. In addition, consumers visit these on a weekly basis, so it is important that customers are satisfied with the service. This in turn may increase customer loyalty.

The first company that is discussed is Stop and Shop Grocery stores. This grocery store sells common groceries, produce, personal care items and bakery goods. Although they are not known for their prices, they are a convenient stop for many. While Disney is known for being entertaining, grocery stores are not. This is a potential opportunity. Stop and Shop can increase sales and keep customers in the store longer by offering activities for consumers of all ages.

Home Depot provides workshops for children and adults, for example, how to make birdhouses or how to tile a bathroom floor. They may be able to enhance the entertainment value by adding a mascot, connecting children to the store and family. Disney's Mickey Mouse character brings excitement and happiness to both children and adults. Home Depot may be able to do the same with a recognizable mascot for the growing generations. In addition, if Home Depot offers incentives for shopping at the store instead of online, for example, offering a daily gift card to a random customer, this might motivate more millennials to visit the store. They could also offer a test room where consumers can try out products before purchasing. A professional will be on hand to assist and answer questions. This may serve as a significant advantage for Millennials to shop at Brick and Mortar stores.

Finally, a Microbrewery has been chosen. Millennials are very interested in spending time with their friends at Microbreweries in Connecticut. A Microbrewery should be inviting so that customers want to stay. They could create aesthetically pleasing environments with a variety of activities such as competitive games or educational seminars.

Research Method

This paper utilized qualitative research in the form of personal interviews. Rather than utilizing focus groups, the personal interview eliminates groupthink bias. The interviewees were asked the same standard questions along with customized probing to collect as much information as possible. Three millennials and three baby boomers were interviewed. This was conducted to determine if there were significant differences between age cohorts regarding their thoughts and expectations about Disney. Another question that was asked was how other companies could successfully use Disney's techniques to improve their business. Finally, everyone was asked what they think about Disney's cast members and customer service.

Analysis

Millennials said that the most important factors regarding the Disney experience are: atmosphere, nostalgic feel, a complete customer experience and charitable involvement. On the other hand, Baby Boomers said that price, customer service and employee competence were the most crucial issues to them.

M1- Millennial one is a male college student about to graduate who has attended Disney World two times.

M2- Millennial two is a female college student that has also been to Disney World two times, once as a young child and once as an older teenager.

M3- Millennial three is a male college student that has visited Disney once as a college student. He prefers more adventurous locations.

B1- Baby boomer one is a female who has visited Disney World multiple times and has been to Disneyland Paris as well.

B2- Baby boomer two is a female who has also been to Disney a few times, most recently in 2017.

B3- Baby boomer three is a female travel agent who has been to Disney more than one can count with her two children.

Millennials Thoughts of the Disney Experience

Atmosphere

The three Millennials interviewed said that Disney was full of "magic" for them. One of the Millennials said, "Disney has their magical touch and that's what makes them special" (M2). They also discussed how their Disney vacations were a memorable experience. Disney has both a technological and natural setting in which you can see ducks swimming in ponds and at the same time use your phone to check the park maps and get fast passes. The natural setting helps to complete the experience that Disney offers as one Millennial mentioned, "I will never forget the ponds and the ducklings and everything. That was a really good time" (M1). Another Millennial added that she also loved the technology advancements Disney has been adding. "I like how everything is kind of connected with your bracelet, magic band. When I went with my family. I don't think that was an option. You can get into hotel and get your food which is convenient, so you don't have to carry all your other stuff" (M2). In addition, one Millennial discussed how "aesthetically pleasing" the atmosphere was. "I was taken aback because of how beautiful the landscape was including Cinderella castle" (M1).

Nostalgic

Millennials discussed how Disney was very nostalgic for them in the sense that they thought Disney as a place for family bonding. "You are buying enjoyment that you can have with your friends and family and I think that is why some people you know flock there from all over" (M1). "I enjoy watching family and friends at Disney World. The kids get so excited and it is a life changing event for them. Mickey Mouse or Goofy! Even I get excited for the 5 or 6-year olds." Another respondent, "The first time I went I was young with my family, so it was fun to go back all those years later and remember what I got to do in sixth grade and Disney is such a great place" (M2). The Millennials also mentioned how Disney World made them think back to their childhood and reminisce. "When I was younger probably for me it was the rides and I'm sure they have changed but when I was younger, I just thought it was really cool just that type of theme park and how it was tied to movies and television shows" (M1).

Complete Customer Experience

Another factor that Millennials believed completed their experience was the customer service that was offered at Disney. "Cast members were all very friendly and very nice. They greeted you. They were very knowledgeable I would say and in the rides, I didn't feel they were rushing for you to go. They didn't scream next ever. They were friendly" (M2). The amount of interaction and engagement that Disney employees offer greatly stood out to Millennials. Another respondent added, "Cast Members have a natural enthusiasm with guests unlike many other businesses where it may be forced" (M3).

Millennials believed that another big component of having the complete experience was the continuing theme across all locations. The experiences they had at the hotels were the same as the parks. "I personally feel like the employees there go personally above and beyond for the people that are staying overnight" (M1). The entertainment that Disney provides throughout their company is very consistent. The Millennials also enjoyed the connection of the theme with food and merchandise including Mickey Mouse. "With Disney another word besides fun for me would be Mickey. I watched cartoons growing up and I think the two names almost go together" (M1). Another said, "When you say Disney, people automatically think of Mickey and Minnie and being happy. They are very iconic and even around the world and the fact that there are parks literally around the world, Paris, Tokyo, Disneyland in California. I think it's pretty cool" (M2).

Lastly, Millennials discussed how Disney World was very entertaining for them and their families. "I feel like Disney the first thing I think of is fun." Another added, "it is a ton of fun walking and wandering around the park. It is really fun watching people having fun in Disney" (M3).

Charitable Donations

Charitable donations were also seen as very important to the millennials interviewed and they unanimously said that they are more likely to spend money at a business that supports charities. "Businesses frankly are people and Disney is composed of many staff bright and talented people. I know some larger retailers aren't likely to donate and I feel like their removing some of their humanity. Naturally I grew up wanting to help people in need, like my neighbor and If I ever run a long scale business, I would want to do that the same. I would want to establish a relationship with customers and try to make a difference" (M1). Another Millennial agreed and said that he looks for companies that support charities. During the interview he was wearing a watch by a company who plants a tree every time one is purchased. In addition, he said that, "Millennials really value sustainability, giving back and helping the community" (M3). They all believed that companies that support charities are great businesses to support. "Absolutely, it makes you feel good like you're helping them. You feel like you are giving back at the same time as you are shopping" (M2). The table below summarizes the thoughts of Millennials towards Disney.

| Millennials Thoughts			
Destress	Family bonding	Magical/magical touch	Special experience
Giving back community	Nature	Entertainment/fun	Friendly and likable cast members
Complete experience	Technology	Adapting	Giving back
Charitable donations	Customer service	Connections to other well-known media experiences	Sustainability
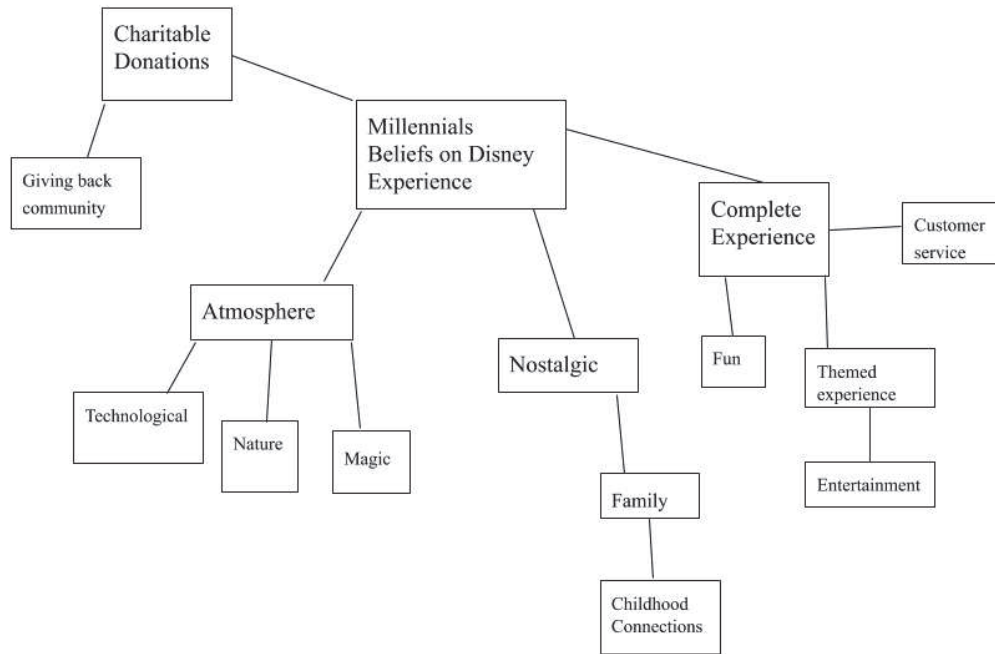
Baby Boomers thoughts of the experience

The most common themes that were found during the baby boomers one on one interviews include: price, cleanliness, customer service and entertainment. Price was important to Baby Boomers as they believed it was more important than the overall experience. One said, "I like low prices and it's one of the reasons I shop where I shop." She continued to discuss how she decides to shop at places based on their prices. (B1). In addition, cleanliness was also seen as a crucial factor. Another respondent said, "almost everything they do is totally unique from the way they train the employees to the way they pay attention to every single detail." She went on to say that the bathrooms were spotless (B1). "Cleanliness is crucial. If a place is dirty, I will not go back to it" (B2). The last Baby Boomer said, "cleanliness is so important to me. Disney is very clean" (B3).

Not only was cleanliness seen as a crucial, customer service was also identified. All the Baby Boomers had a deep personal connection at Disney with a cast member. Baby Boomer one said that when one of her children got sick at Disney World, the cast members got her children stuffed animals. They had just walked into the park, so they refunded their tickets. After they got back to the hotel room, Mickey sent them a letter saying we hope you feel better really soon. She also said, "every interaction with Disney is a positive one" (B1). Another agreed and said, "the cast members make me feel wonderful. It was a much more enjoyable experience because they have such good personalities" (B2). She went on to say, "usually when you are in Disney the staff is very friendly." Employee training was a term that was mentioned frequently by Baby Boomers., "People should be trained to do the job correctly" (B2). The third agreed, "I feel like any type of customer service-oriented field I think Disney can be transferable to it. It is all about the training" (B3).

Another concept of customer service that Baby Boomers discussed was magical moments. Magical moments are one of the major concepts that Disney has created. It is when a cast member (employee) gives away an ice cream, an outfit after getting sick or a special meet and greet with a character. There are countless actions that cast members can make to create magic. "I think cast members pay attention to great detail like if someone is wearing a button that says anniversary, birthday or celebration. I think they do a wonderful job with noticing that and making that person feel even more special" (B3). "I know I was

there one time it was my birthday and every single person noticed me. I was like this is nice" (B1). These magical moments bring entertainment to families and visitors every day. It is one of the reasons that baby boomer one continues to go there every few years.

Baby Boomers Thoughts		
Price	Personal interaction	Employee training
Fun	Cleanliness	Safe place
Family oriented	Brand new	Special
Amazing customer service	Movies	Personality is important
Happy place	Fun	Attention to detail
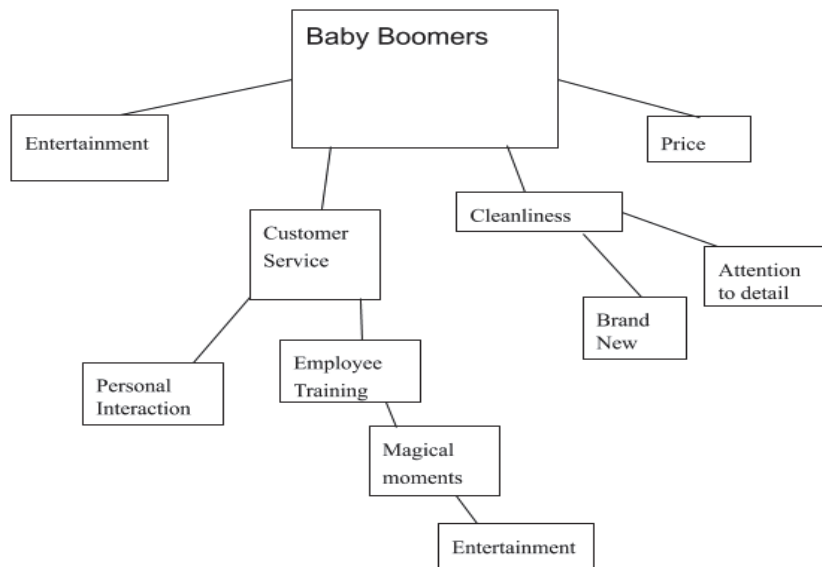
Below are recommendations that companies can make based off of what was learned from this study. Step one is to identify the specific target audience. Step two is to research the motivations of the target audience and step three is to develop meaningful services to meet the needs of the target audience. For the Home Remodeling business, the target audience is seen to be primarily Baby Boomers. Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate themes that were identified by this group. The following table lists some services that would be appropriate.

1. Home Depot- Baby Boomer focused business

High Quality Customer Service	Gives shoppers confidence to be able to do projects at home Schedule help for customers Hire staff that is experienced with projects and tools Offer a delivery service for large items Create an emergency helpline Create clear and bright signage for store inventory Take responsibility for delivery and installation (no third parties)

Cleanliness	Maintain a clean environment which is aesthetically pleasing Hourly floor checks should be done to ensure there is no dust or trash on floors
Price	Keep competitive prices to ensure that baby boomers stay loyal to the company Offer payment plans for large purchases
Entertainment	Create DIY classes for adults (Do it yourself projects) Create interactive helping tools that customers can use when at home and lost on instructions Offer demonstrations and practice sessions

For the Microbrewery, the target audience is predominantly Millennials. Therefore, it would advantageous to incorporate social responsibility, technology, natural environment and nostalgia into the service offerings. The table below indicates some strategies that could be used.

2. Microbrewery- Millennial focused business

Complete Experience	Have fun games- indoors and outdoors Trivia nights, pong tournaments Host parties- tv shows, birthday parties Sell merchandise for themed parties ex (green brewery shirts for St. Patrick's Day Local bands
Social Engagements	Donate bottles and cans to local charities All natural, fair trade items and materials Round up purchase to next dollar for charity Support environmental charities Suggestions for customized beer flavors using products from local farmers
Balance of Technology and Natural Environment	Create an aesthetically pleasing environment Technology-determine if intoxicated through a tablet, offer games using tablets and clickers, offer big screen tvs for gaming and sports, virtual reality games Natural- themed directions, natural paintings and wood work, outdoor seating with a view for firework shows
Magic	Offer free drinks for special occasions including a birthday one and an anniversary Free special snacks for one winner a day Enter business cards into raffle
Nostalgic	Family games offered to create and flourish family bonds including game shows, murder mystery Friend games as well including assembling challenges with beer bottles Paint nights and other classes offered Photo booth offered

Grocery store shoppers include both Millennials and Baby Boomers. Therefore, it is necessary to combine the desired concerns of both groups.

3.   Stop and Shop Grocery - both generations (Millennials and Baby Boomers)

Technology	App map, paper maps Recipe apps
Complete Experience	High quality customer service Bus seniors to store Personal shoppers Offer samples and small activities for all ages Cooking demonstrations Customized meals Order pickup Offer lunch specials
Charitable Donations	Collaborate with local food banks as done now but have a volunteer there to answer questions and help others get involved Match what customers donate to food bank Offer charity events for Stop and Shop employees to attend Spread news of events on social media and newspapers to get community involved and aware
Cleanliness	Create a clean atmosphere at all times Attention to detail is important, create a button on every aisle that a customer can press for help or cleanliness problems Put signs up to show food is protected and checked for highest quality
Magical Moments	Occasionally pass out coupons, flowers or samples to make customers feel special Create a strong personal interaction Offer gift cards to the 100th customer of day Birthday coupons/gifts
Price	Continue to advertise customer specials Loyalty rewards program Buy one $50 gift card get $10 gift card free

Conclusion

The Disney Corporation has proven to be a tremendously successful organization in developing customer loyalty and creating a superior customer experience. Exploring the feelings and thoughts of Disney customers can be a valuable strategy to help create superior experiences for customers in other organizations. This project also explored two different marketing cohorts (Millennials and Baby Boomers) to determine whether their feelings and reflections differed. Results of this investigation demonstrate that there are unique themes that emerge as participants describe the Disney experience and that different target markets do express different themes.

In this paper we provided 3 different types of businesses, from 3 different industries, that had different dominant target markets and we describe categories of services as well as specific activities that can be offered to create a more Disney like experience within those businesses. We chose Millennials because they are an excellent target audience regarding spending power and size. We also chose Baby Boomers for similar reasons. In this paper we articulated the needs of the two target audiences (Millennials: charitable donations, atmosphere, complete experience and nostalgic) , (Baby Boomers: customer service, entertainment, cleanliness and price). We provided examples in industries/businesses (Home supplies - Home Depot, Supermarket - Stop and Shop, Beer Manufacturing /Serving - Microbrewery) of how the Disney experience could be translated. Some of the specific tactics may not be unique but they should be valuable in enhancing the customer experience. As trends and cultural values change, it will be necessary for all businesses, including Disney, to continually monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their offering to meet the changes attitudes, values and needs of the target audience.

Limitations

This study was conducted with a small number of in Connecticut residents, primarily Caucasian females. The focus was to develop an understanding of underlying themes within two specific groups differentiated by age. We recognize that the marketplace could be segmented by other demographics such as ethnicity, gender or geography with a larger set of consumers. It would be interesting to see if other themes emerge from different groups.

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