Marketing charm of magic kingdom: An analysis of Disneyland’s marketing strategies

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Abstract. The success and impact of Disneyland, a trailblazing theme park created by Walt Disney in 1955, has been a subject of great interest and study in the field of marketing and entertainment. By identifying successful marketing practices and suggesting strategic recommendations, this essay can contribute to Disneyland's future growth and impact in an ever-changing entertainment landscape. The essay began with an introduction to Disneyland's historical background and significance in the theme park industry. It highlighted the park's role in popular culture, local employment opportunities, and economic benefits. The essay then focused on a comprehensive analysis of Disneyland's marketing strategies using the 4P model: product, price, place, and promotion. It examined how Disneyland created and delivered magical experiences, combined value-based and competitive pricing strategies, utilized physical and digital distribution channels, and employed various advertising and promotional methods. The essay concluded with strategic suggestions for Disneyland's future development, emphasizing content innovation, theme park advancements, global expansion, and brand collaborations. The suggestions aim to solidify Disneyland's position as a global leader in the entertainment industry, offering diverse, innovative, and captivating experiences. Overall, this essay provided insights into the marketing strategies behind Disneyland's success and offered recommendations for its continued growth and impact.

1 Introduction

Disneyland, inaugurated on July 17, 1955, in Anaheim, California, by Walt Disney, marked a revolutionary moment in the theme park industry. Built on a former orange grove spanning 160 acres, the $17 million project aimed to provide a family-oriented park blending nostalgia, fantasy, and futurism. Despite initial challenges, including operational issues and counterfeit tickets, Disneyland's launch signaled a new era in amusement parks. Over the years, Disney expanded globally with parks in Anaheim, Orlando, Tokyo, Paris, Hong Kong and Shanghai. Disney's theme parks, synonymous with magical experiences, continue evolving, innovating, and captivating audiences worldwide, maintaining their status as symbols of joy, imagination, and family bonding.

The success of Disneyland has made it a model for the theme park industry and led to the development of the global theme park industry. Inspired by Disneyland, many new theme parks have appeared around the world, and the theme park industry has become an important entertainment industry. At the same time, Disneyland plays a leading role in popular culture. Many of the attractions, characters and stories in Disneyland have profoundly impacted popular culture. For example, the "Space Mountain" attraction in Disneyland inspired the creation of the "Star Wars" movie series. In addition, each Disneyland creates many local employment opportunities, promotes tourism development, and generates good economic benefits.

Disneyland’s marketing strategies significantly contribute to its success. This essay conducts a comprehensive analysis of Disneyland's marketing strategies through the lens of the 4P model. Starting with the product element, this essay explores how Disneyland creates and delivers magical experiences, emphasizing thematic attractions, character interactions, and storytelling. Moving to pricing, Disneyland combines value-based and competitive pricing strategies, categorizing ticket prices by age groups and experience types. The distribution channels, discussed under the place element, show a fusion of physical and digital experiences, enabling global accessibility. Finally, in the realm of promotion, Disneyland's multifaceted approach, integrating traditional and digital channels, is explored. The essay concludes with strategic suggestions for Disneyland's future development, focusing on content innovation, theme park advancements, global expansion, and brand collaborations. Through these strategies, Disneyland can solidify its position as a global leader, offering diverse, innovative, and captivating experiences in the entertainment landscape.

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2 Disneyland overview

Disneyland, the trailblazing creation of Walt Disney, revolutionized the theme park industry with its opening in Anaheim, California, on July 17, 1955 [1]. Constructed on a 160-acre site previously occupied by orange groves, this $17 million venture welcomed visitors into a world of nostalgia, fantasy, and futuroism [2]. Disney’s ambition was to craft a family-oriented park where both adults and children could find joy and excitement together. Despite initial challenges, including operational glitches and counterfeit tickets, the park’s launch signified the dawn of a new era in amusement parks [3].

Over the decades, Disney expanded globally, launching parks in Orlando, Paris, Tokyo, and Hong Kong. Each park uniquely caters to its cultural context while preserving the essence of the original Disneyland. The incorporation of cutting-edge technologies and popular intellectual properties from Marvel and Star Wars has further diversified Disney’s appeal. Each of the five parks has its unique theme park. For example, the new theme park, which opened in Shanghai at the end of 2023, is the world’s first Zootopia. In this park, he has recreated scenes from the movie. Comprised of habitat neighborhoods, Zootopia is a melting pot where Zootizens of all shapes and sizes, colors and stripes have a home they thrive [4].

Notably, Disneyland has registered more cumulative attendance than any other theme park worldwide, with over 757 million visits by December 2021. The park’s influence extends to substantial economic contributions, supporting thousands of jobs and generating significant activity in its region.

In an ever-changing world, Disney parks remain a symbol of joy and imagination. They are places where families can come together to create lifelong memories, and where children and adults alike can escape into a world of fantasy and adventure. As they continue to grow and evolve, Disney’s theme parks will undoubtedly remain at the forefront of the entertainment industry, delighting millions and carrying on the legacy of their visionary founder, Walt Disney.

In conclusion, the legacy of Disney’s theme parks is firmly anchored in their unparalleled ability to evolve, innovate, and mesmerize audiences of all ages. From their modest beginnings in Anaheim, California, Disney parks have grown into a global phenomenon, synonymous with magical and enchanting experiences. These parks are not merely amusement centers, but realms where imagination and reality intertwine, creating a mesmerizing atmosphere of wonder. This enchantment, however, extends beyond the physical realms of the parks. It is intricately woven into Disney’s marketing strategies. This study delves into the aspects of the 4Ps - Product, Price, Place, and Promotion, uncovering how Disney’s marketing approach not only complements but enhances the overall experience, ensuring that the magic of Disney remains not just in its attractions, but in every strategic move that is made. This analysis will explore how Disney’s meticulous attention to detail in its marketing efforts has been a crucial component in crafting its worldwide success and enduring legacy.

3 4P analysis

3.1 Product strategies

Disneyland, as a global entertainment giant, has a unique product strategy that sets it apart in the market. The product element of the 4P model for Disneyland revolves around its theme park experiences, which are based on beloved Disney characters. These experiences are not just about the rides, but also about the overall atmosphere, the interaction with characters, and the storytelling that is embedded in every corner of the parks.

Disneyland's core product is the creation and delivery of magical experiences. The product mix includes thrilling rides, live performances, character interactions, and themed environments. Disneyland is divided into different themed areas, such as Adventureland, Tomorrowland, and Fantasyland, each offering a unique set of attractions. This segmentation allows Disneyland to cater to a wide range of tastes and age groups [5]. This emphasis on experiential products aligns with contemporary consumer trends.

Disneyland also differentiates its product offering through special events and limited-time experiences. For example, they host special events during Halloween and Christmas, which include themed parades, shows, and merchandise. These events provide a unique selling proposition and give visitors a reason to return [5].

Moreover, Disneyland continuously innovates its product offering. They regularly introduce new attractions and shows based on their latest movies and franchises [5]. This keeps the park experience fresh and exciting and leverages the success of their movie franchises.

In addition, Disneyland’s IP derivatives play a significant role in its product strategy, contributing to a substantial portion of its revenue. Disneyland has effectively leveraged its vast portfolio of intellectual properties, which includes beloved characters like Mickey Mouse, to create a wide array of derivative products. These derivatives include toys, clothing, accessories, etc. In Disneyland, products like Mickey’s balloons, and hats are ubiquitous within the park. The strategic placement of gift shops at the exit of attractions further encourages the consumption of these derivative products. What is more, the park staff who play the role of dolls and tourists interact with each other, such as taking photos, forming a unique IP derivative [6]. This enhances the overall visitor experience by providing them with tangible mementos of their visit.

3.2 Price strategies

Disneyland's pricing strategy is a blend of value-based and competitive pricing, which aligns with its brand image of providing a unique, high-quality entertainment experience.
Disneyland adopts a high-price strategy to maintain the uniqueness and luxurious image of its brand and attract customers who are willing to pay more for unique experiences. On the other hand, the high-price strategy enables Disneyland to generate high revenues and profits to cover maintenance and the cost of operating the park. This is particularly important for Disneyland, as it offers a wide range of attractions, shows, and services that require significant investment. Additionally, high-price strategies help manage demand and control overcrowding. By charging high prices, Disneyland can limit the number of visitors and ensure visitors have a better experience.

Disneyland positions itself as a luxury entertainment destination. Its pricing strategy reflects this positioning, with ticket prices categorized by types of experiences and booking time. For instance, in California Disneyland, buying a single-day ticket costs $104, but buying a two-day ticket averages $155 a day, a three-day ticket averages $130 a day, a four-day ticket averages $112 a day, and a five-day ticket averages $96 a day [7].

Age groups also influence Disneyland's ticket prices. In California Disneyland, children under the age of three can enjoy the benefits free of cost, whereas prices are categorized separately for those between three and nine years old, and children over ten years old are categorized in the adult section [7].

Disneyland's pricing strategy also includes seasonal pricing packages for hotels, parks, and restaurants. Its packages are categorized into super value, value, moderate, regular, and high segments. It also offers special meals for Christmas and New Year's Eve with separate price segments for adults and children.

### 3.3 Place strategies

The "Place" element in the 4P model refers to the distribution channels through which a product or service is made available to consumers. With its unique place strategy and wide reach, Disneyland has successfully attracted countless visitors around the world.

Disneyland strategically locates its theme parks in key global destinations. The physical presence of Disneyland parks in regions like California in the USA, Paris in France, Tokyo in Japan, Shanghai in China, and Hong Kong ensures accessibility for a wide range of visitors. This global distribution aligns with the company's goal of creating a magical experience for people around the world. The parks serve as flagship destinations, drawing visitors through physical channels.

In addition to physical locations, Disneyland has adeptly embraced digital channels to extend its reach. The official Disneyland website and mobile app serve as crucial online channels. These platforms not only provide essential information like ticket prices, park maps, and event schedules but also enable visitors to plan and customize their experiences. The online presence acts as a virtual gateway, making the brand accessible to a global audience even before they set foot in a physical park.

Disneyland strategically forms partnerships to expand its reach. Collaborations with travel agencies, airlines, and hotels allow the theme park to tap into broader audiences. These partnerships often include joint promotions and exclusive packages, enticing potential visitors with added value and convenience. For instance, Southwest Vacations offers Disneyland Resort vacation packages that include low-cost airline tickets, hotels, rental cars, activities, and attractions [8].

### 3.4 Promotion strategies

Disneyland employs a comprehensive and multifaceted marketing strategy to promote its brand and attract visitors. The promotion strategies of Disneyland can be analyzed through various lenses, considering the integration of traditional and digital marketing channels.

Disneyland has an extensive advertising campaign across a variety of media channels, including traditional advertising methods such as television commercials, print ads and billboards. For example, before the opening of Shanghai Disneyland, Shanghai Disneyland released its first TV advertisement, which was broadcast on Shanghai's first-tier TV stations as well as on Shanghai's bus and subway mobile TV, promoting Shanghai Disneyland in all aspects [9]. The promo video and the slogan 'Light up your dreams' used emotional appeals to create a connection with the audience, emphasizing the magical and memorable experiences awaiting them at Disneyland. By utilizing traditional advertising methods, Disneyland reaches a wide audience who may interested, resulting in higher attendance numbers and potentially increased revenue.

In the digital age, Disneyland leverages the power of social media platforms. An active presence on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter allows Disneyland to connect with its audience in real time. This allows the park to respond to customer inquiries, address concerns, and provide updates promptly. This level of engagement can enhance customer satisfaction and build a positive perception of Disneyland. Engaging content, such as behind-the-scenes glimpses and user-generated content, helps create a sense of community. Additionally, collaborating with influencers who share their Disneyland experiences amplifies the park's visibility and authenticity.

Utilizing data analytics, Disneyland tailors its marketing messages to individual preferences. Email campaigns and personalized offers are crafted based on visitor behavior and demographics. For instance, MyMagic+ wristbands allow guests to customize their park experiences, enabling personalized greetings from characters and facilitating seamless access to attractions.

When visitors feel that their preferences and needs are understood and catered to, they are more likely to develop a sense of loyalty towards the brand. This can result in repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth recommendations, further strengthening Disneyland's brand loyalty.
4 Suggestions and prospects

4.1 Enhancing diversity and personalization in Disneyland’s future

In suggesting future directions for Disneyland, the emphasis is on innovation in both content and service. The Walt Disney Company consistently demonstrates a commitment to diversity and inclusion in its storytelling and corporate culture. Their efforts in creating authentic, memorable stories and experiences that resonate with audiences worldwide are noteworthy. This includes delving into new narratives and characters from diverse cultures and aligning with their Diversity, Equity & Inclusion initiatives. Further enhancing the guest experience, Disney can leverage data analytics and AI to offer more personalized experiences in their theme parks [10]. This could involve customizing ride experiences and providing personalized merchandise recommendations. By harnessing technology in this way, Disney can significantly improve guest satisfaction and engagement, ensuring that each visit is as unique and memorable as its diverse array of stories and characters.

4.2 Innovative strategies for theme park evolution

Next, the focus shifts to innovation in theme parks. Disney’s 2021 Corporate Social Responsibility Report underscores its focus on enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion through various initiatives. Implementing such values in theme park innovations can attract a broader audience and encourage repeat visits. Their commitment to environmental sustainability and community support also suggests a potential for developing new, sustainable, and inclusive attraction within their parks [11]. In addition to theme parks, it is suggested that parks can create new image IPs, such as Shanghai Disney’s Lina Belle. The popularity of Lina Belle may be attributed to its cute image and fun interactive experience [4]. Building upon these initiatives, Disney can further enhance its theme park innovation by integrating cutting-edge technologies like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR). These technologies can offer guests immersive and interactive experiences, transforming traditional attractions into dynamic and engaging adventures. Additionally, Disney could explore the development of interactive, mixed-reality games that span across the park, encouraging guests to embark on quests that seamlessly integrate with the physical environment and attractions. This approach not only deepens the immersive experience but also encourages exploration and interaction among guests, fostering a sense of community and shared adventure.

4.3 Diversity-driven global strategy

Thirdly, the discussion will turn to the aspect of Global Expansion. The appointment of Tinisha Agramonte as Chief Diversity Officer at The Walt Disney Company reflects their dedication to building a more inclusive and respectful world [12]. This focus on diversity and inclusion can be strategically incorporated into their global expansion plans. By choosing local cultures and communities in new markets, Disney can create theme parks that not only attract many new visitors, but also resonate with local audiences, and increase the number of repeat visitors who come back for more. On this basis, for new theme parks in emerging markets, Disney could benefit from deeply integrating local cultures, traditions, and stories into the park’s themes and attractions. This would not only resonate with the local population but also offer international visitors a unique cultural experience. Disney’s commitment to diversity and inclusion can be a guiding principle in this process.

4.4 Innovative partnerships for enhanced experiences

Lastly, the focus shifts to Brand Collaboration and Cross-Industry Partnerships. Disney’s strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as its dedication to sustainability and social responsibility, provides an ideal platform for engaging in collaborative efforts with industries that share similar values. These industries could include technology, fashion, or food. Such collaborations could lead to innovative partnerships that combine Disney’s storytelling expertise with the latest technology or emerging consumer trends. To maintain its leading position in theme park experiences, Disney could further incorporate advanced technologies like augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and artificial intelligence (AI) into its attractions. These technologies would offer more immersive and interactive experiences for visitors, keeping the parks vibrant and attractive. Partnerships with companies in technology, fashion, food, and entertainment could result in unique merchandise, themed attractions, or special events, all enhancing the overall appeal of Disney parks.

In conclusion, leveraging these strategies and commitments, Disney can further strengthen its position as a leader in the entertainment industry, ensuring it remains at the forefront of the entertainment industry, offering diverse, innovative, and globally appealing experiences.

5 Conclusion

This research provides a detailed examination of The Walt Disney Company, delineating its historical evolution, development, and present status as a leader in the realm of creative entertainment. From its inception, Disney has not only crafted a world of fantasy but has also strategically positioned itself as a leader in the global entertainment market. The analysis of Disney’s application of the 4Ps – Product, Price, Place, and Promotion – reveals a nuanced understanding of market dynamics and consumer engagement. This strategic approach has allowed Disney to create an immersive experience that extends beyond the boundaries of its theme parks and into the hearts of its audience.
The current state of Disney, as discussed, reflects its adaptability and foresight in navigating market trends and consumer preferences. In a world where digital transformation and cultural shifts continually reshape the entertainment landscape, Disney has shown a remarkable ability to evolve while maintaining its core values of storytelling and family-centric entertainment.

Furthermore, the suggestions and future outlook for Disney theme parks highlight the potential pathways for sustaining and enhancing their magical experiences. Emphasizing innovation in customer experience, leveraging emerging technologies for immersive storytelling, and expanding their global footprint while respecting cultural nuances, are pivotal for Disney’s continued success. These strategies are not just about sustaining a business model but are integral to preserving the unique Disney magic that transcends generations.

In conclusion, this study has systematically analyzed The Walt Disney Company, highlighting its evolution from a modest animation studio to a global entertainment powerhouse. This examination has underscored the significance of innovation, strategic marketing, and the company’s ability to remain relevant to its core values while navigating the complexities of the global market.

Despite its comprehensive scope, this research acknowledges limitations in the analysis, particularly in the depth of exploration into the economic, cultural, and technological challenges Disney faces in various international contexts. Future studies could benefit from a more detailed investigation into how Disney adapts to the rapidly changing entertainment landscape, including the impact of digital transformation on its business model and content distribution strategies. Additionally, further research could explore the implications of Disney’s corporate strategies on cultural representation and diversity, offering insights into how global entertainment conglomerates can contribute to inclusive storytelling. This study’s findings contribute to the broader discourse on the dynamics of the entertainment industry and provide a foundation for subsequent inquiries into the intersection of corporate strategy, cultural production, and global media influence.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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