Choose Your Own Adventure: A Comparative Analysis

of Storytelling Elements in Selected Immersive Experience Attractions

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ABSTRACT

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF

STORYTELLING ELEMENTS IN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE ATTRACTIONS

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Stories are powerful tools used to both connect and communicate through a multitude of mediums. Movies, marketing campaigns, and experience design in theme parks are modern examples of storytelling, using various practices to bring the narrative to life. The purpose of this study was to analyze the manipulation of storytelling elements to create and build an immersive adventure experience in selected theme park attractions. A comparative analysis was conducted on the *Indiana Jones Adventure* and the *Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance* rides at Disneyland using an instrument that analyzed both experience design and storytelling practices. Findings concluded that the practices used were effective and were also customized to better fit the narrative of each ride. Recommendations include using a combination of experience design techniques and storytelling elements to involve guests in the adventure. Further implications are analyzed based on the prevalence and implementation of this story structure throughout history.

Keywords: storytelling, experience design, Disney, Hero's Journey, customer journey, immersive experience

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

<u>Background of Study</u>

A rumbling car speeds along a bumpy road and suddenly stops. A scream emanates from the vehicle as a gigantic boulder steamrolls toward them, threatening to crush the people inside. The car plunges into darkness as Indiana Jones comes into view next to the stopped boulder and a pile of rubble, looking exhausted from saving the car from destruction. While the danger is imagined for the riders, this sensation of being immersed in the ride's story is absolutely thrilling: "Our vision, like our bodies, is mobile; it becomes like a camera that absorbs the events unraveling in space and time. *We* are the fiction's center" (Ndalianis & Balanzategui, 2019, p. 30). The popular Disneyland attraction is known for putting its riders through an adventure of a lifetime as they experience the perils from the Indiana Jones movies.

Attractions like this captivate people's minds because of the story in which they are immersed. Humans are instinctively drawn to stories, since they are important tools in constructing a sense of structure and identity in human lives. It is a basic desire of most humans to be unique, to be the heroes of their own story. Self-narratives are stories which are shaped based on the experiences, feelings, and actions of the individual. Myths are stories society tells itself about itself, their overarching plotlines weaving and connecting the histories of the ancestors while serving as ultimate guides for a rewarding life. Heroic journey stories have been retold since the dawn of humankind, but to what end? "To answer the question "what does it mean to be a hero", therefore, would be to answer the

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question what it fundamentally means to be human" (Efthimiou & Franco, 2017, p. 40). From Greek Mythology and The Bible, The American Dream and the founding of Rome, films and even Disney animations, stories have become influential cultural tools that tell history, drive society, and inspire the future.

Today, stories are used as a part of marketing or design in immersive experiences, guiding the audience through a story as a method of extending a brand name or franchise. Immersive experiences like the theme park attractions at The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, Indiana Jones Adventure Ride, Pandora-the World of Avatar, and Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge, all transport the audience to fantasy worlds and bring out the sense of adventure that lies within every story. The basic structure of the Hero's Journey is familiar to most: beginning, climax, and conclusion. The question becomes: What other factors comprise these stories, and how are they implemented to construct or communicate meaning around specific moments? The purpose of this study was to analyze the manipulation of storytelling elements to create and build an immersive adventure experience in selected theme park attractions.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Academic Search Premier, Hospitality and Tourism Complete, and Google Scholar. This review of literature includes the following subsections: the significance of stories, examples and implementation of stories, and best elements and practices of experience design.

Stories are as old as time itself, from ancient myths across the world to the films and videogames of today reconfiguring the famous heroic journey. As explained by Campbell (1949), the Hero's Journey monomyth is prevalent throughout human history, and tells the story of a person who is called to adventure and goes on a quest to defeat an ultimate obstacle, returning home as a changed person: a hero. This model explains the various stages the character undergoes in the duration of the story, each stage representing a new level of meaning achieved and new character development. People innately connect with this narrative model on a deep level since, as Sonnenburg and Runco (2012) noted, "The monomyth means that all myths emerge out of a common creative imagination: It is the narrative in the human search for the ultimate spiritual meaning in life that parallels all legends of heroes" (p. 3). There is now a growing body of literature by researchers attempting to understand why stories are told throughout history and their significance beyond just historical myths and legends.

To understand humans is to understand their symbiotic relationship with stories: humans shape the narrative, and the narrative shapes history (Lewis, 2011). Stories help people to accept growth and change, challenging their old mindsets by viewing problems through a character's lens or through the implied moral of the story (Butcher, 2002). They become powerful tools in connecting with one another on a personal level: they allow others to understand core values and principles, communicate knowledge, and are used to both amuse and grab attention (Mossberg & Eide, 2017). The fact that stories have relatable characters and a plot that plays out to its conclusion is a quality which humans desire for their own lives because of the sense of closure that comes with knowing that every event served a purpose (Lewis, 2011). Apart from their historical

significance and practical uses, storytelling offers meaning around the seemingly random events that make up human lives.

Modern culture is saturated with fantastical and exciting stories, and as a result, Lewis (2011) said, "...humans are drawn to story through our residence in narrative life. This is true in our day-to-day routines, retelling our experiences, in reading novels, short stories, watching television, using the Internet, playing video games, viewing films, even our dreams" (p. 505). Many of these stories serve a certain purpose, or act as a vessel for an underlying message or lesson. Studies have found storytelling to be an effective teaching strategy, since the narrative model encourages a student's mind to explore various concepts through new perspectives and different problem solving methods (Butcher, 2006). Because of their ability to communicate human values and experience, Gruen et al. (2002) explained, "...teams at IBM have found stories useful at every stage of the development process, from early vision and innovation, through customer research, audience and feature definition, prototyping, user interface design and development, and marketing and rollout" (p. 533). In research, stories provide context to quantitative data through qualitative data, and serve as a method of analysis. Lewis noted, "Story is central to human understanding—it makes life livable, because without a story, there is no identity, no self, no other" (p. 505). Stories have become invaluable tools versatile in nature and effective when implemented in the right way.

Films are the most prevalent example of modern day storytelling with directors and writers such as George Lucas, James Cameron, and Walt Disney captivating audiences with fantasy worlds on the big screen. Walt Disney became famous for his storytelling prowess in his films, as "he focused on the narrative most conducive to the

unique potential in animation, its capacity toward realizing the wish-fulfillment of 'happiness'" (Chytry, 2012, p. 264). Walt Disney was also an influential figure in the development of immersive experiences and emotional environments such as Disneyland. Chytry points to Walt Disney's efforts in bringing emotion into his animated stories but also in bringing the excitement of the narrative into real life. Disney would come to be hailed by many as an experience-economy pioneer, as his ventures to bring the narrative to life around guests would become the start of a new experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Recently, the entertainment industry has experimented with blending of film and experience, resulting in theme park attractions which advertise a fully immersive journey into the film's narrative (Ndalianis & Balanzategui, 2019). Disneyland and Universal Studios draw millions of visitors each year, but the Wizarding World of Harry Potter in particular is unique since it "... exemplifies a push in the industry towards more immersive theming around known narrative worlds, going beyond rides and souvenirs into full, complete environments promising immersion into a favourite text" (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018, p.174). These new theme parks and attractions offer insight into what best practices might look like for experience design as the industry grows and changes with time.

Theme parks and other themed spaces are unique in how they separate themselves from the rest of reality and fully immerse their audience in another world; they combine traditionally distinct media forms into a new multisensory intermedia environment (Freitag, 2017). Designing an experience like this means engaging the audience using a variety of methods. There are four realms of an experience, ranging on the Entertainment/Educational spectrum, which describes the degree of participation; and the

Esthetic/Escapist spectrum, which describes the participant's connection to the environment (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). While designing the experience, it is important to use an overall theme, use positive cues to validate the impression, eliminate negative cues that detract from it, mix in memorabilia, and engage all senses (Pine & Gilmore). These elements serve as a guide to incorporating and immersing guests into the experience.

Further research focuses on the crucial component of guest involvement during the experience called co-creation. This is a collaborative process between the organization and participant in developing the experience and it is broken down into three stages: co-design during the anticipation stage of an experience, co-actualization during the participation stage, and co-curation during the reflection stage (Lacanienta & Duerden, 2019). Being an early pioneer of this field, many of Walt Disney's techniques in creating Disneyland would later be identified and studied as proponents for co-creation. For example, Disney turned visual framing techniques from cinematography and the use of tickets and turnstiles into positive cues to involve the participant in creating this environment (Freitag, 2017). Co-creation techniques further advance the experience by allowing guests to take ownership of the experience as it happens.

Among the variety of factors used in designing immersive experiences, the theme must be the driving force behind the design elements and various staged events in order to create a storyline that fully captivates the audience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). This unifying storyline is crucial in creating a cohesive experience for the audience. Important design elements in stories include detailed characters and settings, clear goals and obstacles, motivation, causality, and dramatic elements (Gruen et. al., 2017). Crafting a good story for immersive experiences means not only using the story model for a sense of

structure or causality to the adventure, but also involving the audience by transporting them into the narrative as participants. This is seen in *Back to the Future: The Ride*. Ndalianis and Balanzategui (2019) explained:

> ...we are woven into the narrative as its heroes. We witness story events unraveling before and above us on the screen, but we are also placed physically in a simulation ride machine whose minutely programmed motions aim to parallel the actions on-screen. Real and representational worlds collide, the aim being to make us feel as if we're 'riding the movies.' (p. 25)

The ride builds the story around the audience through a series of events which loosely follow the stages of the hero's journey model. In the Hero's Journey model, the hero goes through 17 interconnected stages throughout the story; these can be summed up in three main thematic phases of departure, initiation, and return (Sonnenburg & Runco, 2012). Of the 17, a few of the most important stages to note are the call to adventure, guidance from a mentor figure, crossing the threshold and the trials that follow, temptations and overcoming the ordeal, resurrection and mastery of both worlds. Though incredibly brief during theme park rides, these stages are often present to some degree in order to establish the participant's own story arc. All of these elements working together culminates in a magical experience called "ironic imagination" during which the participants experience a moment where "... they play with the idea that, for a brief moment, the lines between fiction and reality blur, a pleasurable pretence, made all the more so by the effort they feel the park puts into the illusion" (Waysdorf & Reijnders,

2018, p. 181). This unique marriage of narrative and physical realities can be convincing enough to the guest that the adventure truly becomes their own.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the manipulation of storytelling elements to create and build an immersive adventure experience in selected theme park attractions.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. Which practices were put into place by theme park attractions to ensure each guest had a unique immersive experience every time?

2. How were thematic elements of the story world used to leverage common touchpoints along the customer journey?

3. How effective are these immersive experience practices at producing personal and unforgettable moments with each visit?

4. How effective is the integration of storytelling elements along the customer journey in creating a more cohesive adventure experience?

Chapter 2

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to analyze the manipulation of storytelling elements to create and build an immersive adventure experience in selected theme park attractions. This chapter includes the following sections: description of organizations, description of instrument, and description of procedures.

Description of Organizations

A comparative analysis was conducted on the *Indiana Jones Adventure* ride and the *Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance* ride at Disneyland. Since its founding in 1923, The Walt Disney Company has prided itself in being a first-class entertainment and innovative-storytelling company (Disney, 2021). Walt Disney, among his many cinematic pursuits in the beginning of his career, became invested in the creative processes behind various forms of emotional environments to produce happiness. This eventually culminated in the development of the world-renowned attraction now known as Disneyland, which now hosts several million people each year. The original Disneyland in Anaheim consists of two parks: Disneyland Park and Disney California Adventure Park; it encompasses 91 different rides, three hotels, and about 500 acres in total. The "happiest place on earth," has since been regarded as a monument to the imagination and dedication of both dreamers and innovators alike (Disney).

Walt Disney was a strong advocate for unorthodox methods of production, often bringing together a multitude of disciplines to achieve a finished concept (Disney, 2021). The result was a diverse team tasked with carrying out and prototyping Disney's creative

concepts, and was later named "Imagineering." Disney's informational website states that, "Walt Disney Imagineering is the creative engine that designs and builds all Disney theme parks, resorts, attractions, and cruise ships worldwide, and oversees the creative aspects of Disney games, merchandise product development, and publishing businesses." Their multidisciplinary approach to creative concept building has led to successful storytelling in their attractions, and its *Indiana Jones Adventure* and *Rise of the Resistance* rides are a true testament to their unique "Imagineering" processes (Disney).

The *Indiana Jones Adventure* attraction is located in AdventureLand, an area of Disneyland known for its wild-looking jungle decorations and tiki torches that emulate the exotic, untamed sense of adventure that awaits. The ride officially opened in 1995 and has remained operational since then, becoming massively successful due to the thrilling simulations of various perils and its incorporation of immersive storytelling techniques (Disney, 2021). The length of the experience depends on a few circumstantial factors; the number of people, time of day, and amount of ride breakdowns can cause a wait time range of up to a few hours, but the actual walkthrough and experience takes only about 15 minutes. A few of its main categorizations include loud, dark, scary, small drops, and thrill rides (Disney).

The second attraction analyzed was the *Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance* ride, located in Disneyland's Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge section of the park. It is one of the newest additions to Disneyland, having just opened in January of 2020 (Disney, 2021). In contrast to the jungles of AdventureLand, Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge transports guests to a rocky planet outpost filled with aliens, droids, stormtroopers, and the Millennium Falcon. The *Rise of the Resistance r*ide features many characters from the latest film trilogy in a

storyline which stands alone from the main franchise, but fits easily into the story world. It advertises cutting-edge technology that brings to life an iconic science-fiction fantasy world. The total experience averages about 20 minutes, but will often have a wait time of at least a few hours due to the number of eager guests seeking this new experience. It also includes the categorizations of: small drops, dark, scary, loud, and thrill rides (Disney).

Description of Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was a best practices guide developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). The pilot was conducted on *Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey* ride at the Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme park in Orlando, Florida. Changes were made based on the pilot to include more physical aspects of the ride such as the wait times, queuing methods, safety procedures/instructions, and the identification of a main dramatic element from scene to scene. Using the customer journey map as a guide, this instrument analyzed the various methods and touchpoints leveraged throughout the immersive experience. It identified the story elements and experience design techniques that were employed to translate the movie franchise from the big screen to the immersive space, and turn it into the guests' own unique adventure. These best practices were developed using the frameworks of experience design outlined in the Review of Literature. The elements from these frameworks were reorganized to fit along the customer journey, following the guest as they experience the ride.

<u>Description of Procedures</u>

A comparative analysis was conducted on the *Indiana Jones Adventure* ride and the *Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance* ride at Disneyland. The instrument utilized in this study was a best practices guide developed by the researcher. The data were collected during February 2021 over a two-week period in an objective, systematic manner to analyze and identify each ride's unique use of storytelling. A variety of resources were used to gather context and provide perspective. The ride's specific webpage was used to gather general information on what the ride offers to guests. Watching short trailers that advertised these rides gave a clearer view on the type of experience offered and the emotions the ride was supposed to evoke. Learning about how the rides were created in videos and documentaries like the *Imagineering Story* on Disney Plus provided further context of the techniques used from the creators' perspective. Finally, the instrument was used while watching YouTube videos of the rides and observing participant reactions to provide a first-person view of being transported into the narrative. Qualitative data were gathered and recorded with descriptions of the identified elements throughout the ride.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to analyze the manipulation of storytelling elements to create and build an immersive adventure experience in selected theme park attractions. A comparative analysis was utilized to examine the *Indiana Jones Adventure* and *Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance* ride. This chapter includes the following sections: setting the scene, building the narrative, and takeaways.

Setting the Scene: Experience Design Elements

Disneyland's *Indiana Jones Adventure* and *Rise of the Resistance* rides set the scene of their stories using immersive experience design tactics. The attractions first implemented a theme and fully committed to it through the entirety of the ride. The *Indiana Jones Adventure* was themed around an archaeological dig of ancient temple ruins, with Disney's informational website stating:

Board a rugged troop transport and enter the Chamber of Destiny. Confront inconceivable dangers, like precarious precipices over molten lava, screaming mummies, swarms of giant insects, spear-throwing wraiths, collapsing bridges, slithering snakes—and a massive rolling boulder. If you find yourself in jeopardy, only one man is brave enough—or crazy enough—to save you... Dr. Jones!

In comparison, the *Rise of the Resistance* ride is themed around a Resistance base on a rocky planet outpost. Disney's informational website advertises a chance to enter the narrative, stating:

With the First Order desperate to extinguish the spark of the Resistance, the mission is bound to have unexpected twists and turns. When your transport is captured by an imposing First Order Star Destroyer filled with legions of stormtroopers—and even Kylo Ren!—you're going to need all the help you can get. Fortunately, a covert team of Resistance fighters—including Rey and BB-8—is at the ready to give you a fighting chance to escape… and a chance for the Resistance to rise.

Each of these attractions surround guests in the theme with detailed settings and iconic memorabilia from the respective movie franchises, which serve as positive cues to craft the crucial first impression of these narrative worlds. The moment the guests enter the attraction's space, they step away from reality and become immersed in the story world even while waiting in line.

The *Indiana Jones Adventure* queuing system takes guests through a winding jungle path into a haphazardly constructed archaeological site, an ancient temple filled with caves and booby traps. The theme centers more on the mystery of the temple and the dangers lurking in its ancient ruins, perpetuated by dimly lit stone corridors and wall glyphs made to imitate forgotten languages. Meanwhile, the *Rise of the Resistance* attraction capitalizes on the unmistakable gritty-space-aesthetic of the movie franchise. While waiting in line, guests are surrounded by futuristic space technology like holograms, glowing screens, buttons, droids, spaceships, and alien characters. Both rides enhance the waiting experience by making some of the displays interactive; floor-to-ceiling spiked booby traps, droids, and screens are built into the queue with limited interactive capabilities. Incorporating the queue system into the attraction in this way

maintains the immersion towards the beginning of the ride and builds suspense, keeping the guest occupied while waiting in long lines.

Entering this space, guests take their first step in co-creation by co-designing their adventure in anticipation of this experience. Carefully constructed sets of the narrative world with appropriately placed and life-sized memorabilia are used to trick the guest into believing the convincing simulation throughout the experience. Costumed cast members and ride procedures disguised as character script also serve to eliminate negative cues which may detract from the illusion. Both the Indiana Jones Adventure and Rise of the Resistance utilize the queue system as an entry into the narrative world, almost like the introductory scene into the adventure to come.

Building the Narrative: Integration of Story World Elements and Structure

With the detailed settings and backdrop of the story in place, guests are then introduced to characters, context, and ride procedures. During a brief pre-ride show, various characters from the story world are introduced as guides through the adventure. This is seen in *Indiana Jones Adventure* with the use of the character, Sallah. He narrates the short black-and-white film shown to the waiting guests, explaining the ride's safety procedures and giving context to the Temple of the Forbidden Eye. In this film, guests are established as globetrotters seeking the grandiose riches promised by the Forbidden Eye of Mara, but are also warned against looking directly into the eyes of the evil deity. *Rise of the Resistance* does something similar with BB-8's hologram transmission of Rey, who refers to guests as recruits of the Resistance tasked with keeping safe the location of a secret base. Lieutenant Bek also provides ride instructions as guests enter

the ride vehicle later on. In both short pre-ride briefings, guests are provided context about the situation and discover the main motivation to continue on this journey. However, as the story progresses and more obstacles appear, the main motivator in both rides seems to boil down to simply escaping danger. Nonetheless, providing context of the situation as well as a motivating factor allows for the guests' full investment and participation in the storyline. This helps transition guests into the next stage of co-creation as they actively participate in co-actualizing their own story based on the events unfolding before them.

Guests continue to be guided through the simulation by narration of the character guides and the characters they encounter along the way. Due to the short amount of time allotted, the rides perform a condensed version of the Hero's Journey according to the three phases of Departure, Initiation, and Return. The Departure phase was signaled by a recognizable "Call to Adventure" moment. This was identified in *the Rise of the Resistance* pre-ride show to be the mission from Rey's hologram, and included the words "Welcome to the cause." In *Indiana Jones Adventure*, guests encounter the gaze from the evil deity Mara, who says "Your destiny now lies beyond the Gates of Doom!"

These words prepare the guest for the Initiation phase of the Hero's Journey, consisting of various obstacles the guests must face as heroes in order to achieve the ultimate goal. It becomes clear that the evil deity Mara is the main antagonist or obstacle in this ride as the guests attempt to escape the temple and the dangers within. Perils are simulated inside and outside their vehicle with booby traps, poison darts, fireballs, snakes, bugs, evil spirits, and giant boulders. The *Rise of the Resistance* differs slightly since the perils are more plot oriented, with the main antagonist being the First Order.

Guests are rushed to escape into space only to be captured aboard a Star Destroyer for

interrogation; they are then rescued by Finn and the Resistance, encountering blaster fire

and Kylo Ren's wrath, and then become engaged in a space battle on an escape pod. Both

of the rides attempted to engage multiple senses at once during the experience, most often

targeting the senses of sight, feel, balance, and hearing. To achieve this, a combination of

physical and visual mediums was used to match the adventure with the appropriate

feeling: speed, sudden drops, and vehicle turbulence to signify movement; puffs of air for

projectiles, weapons, or creatures; mist, mood lighting, flashing lights, or even fireballs to

signify action or violence; skits, script, and characters to signify plot progression; and

even the sheer size of memorabilia to give guests perspective. Music played throughout

to communicate emotion, plot progression, adventurous moments, and the nostalgia

factor.

The action of *Indiana Jones Adventure* relied heavily on the interplay between the

light and darkness, employing more physically-invasive immersion techniques. Eerie

mood lighting would quickly turn into flashing lights and fireballs, then just as quickly

fall into darkness as a creepy visual cue comes into view. The main dramatic elements

utilized in this ride included the shaking vehicle and physical displays of obstacles like

skeletons, characters, temple ruins, snakes, and other memorabilia. Since *Rise of the

Resistance* is a newer ride, it relied more heavily on computer-simulated action and

utilized cutting-edge technology, which combined motion-simulating techniques of past

attractions. This ride also depended heavily on background knowledge of the franchise,

context of the situation, and character script, since these elements helped tie together

causality of the unfolding events. Dramatic elements included Kylo Ren's lightsaber, blaster fire, full-sized weapons, and the computer-simulated space battle.

The guest encounters the last obstacle: the vehicle plunges into darkness as a giant boulder threatens to crush the guest from above. The theme song plays as Indiana Jones comes into view next to the boulder and rubble while the vehicle returns to the queue's loading dock. Heavy blaster fire bombards the escape pod as the guests plunge into open space, crash landing back onto the Resistance base. This final part of the Hero's Journey, the Return phase, occurs suddenly and happens right after the last major obstacle. It leads into the final stage of co-creation, as they are left to co-curate their own interpretation of the adventure and the role they played in it.

Takeaways: Overarching Storytelling Techniques

There were a number of factors which helped unify the sequence of events as a cohesive story. Both rides utilized cinematic techniques to frame each part of the ride like a scene from a movie from the guest's perspective. Both rides combined multiple forms of media for the illusion of a full-body experience. Music was employed to cultivate the desired impression during each scene. Context of the situation and motivation for action were made clear to the guest for full investment into the storyline. Cast member script helped fill the gap between ride procedure and continuing the narrative. *Indiana Jones Adventure* featured less dialogue, meaning context had to be communicated in a different manner than *Rise of the Resistance*, whose storyline was more plot oriented and featured more character script. Relying on primarily English character script may pose a few different problems due to language barriers. In either case, the combination of various

media forms in both rides provided a strong enough immersion into the story so that dialogue was not a major factor in understanding the situation as it unfolded.

After the completion of the Hero's Journey phases, the characters conclude the guest's journey by congratulating them on completing the main objective. This concluding stage of the rides ensures guests achieve a sense of closure upon leaving, and includes a celebratory welcome of the guest as an official part of the crew. Indiana Jones, in his swaggering manner from the movies, says, "Next time, you're on your own." Similarly, Finn congratulates the guests on keeping the location of the secret Resistance base safe, saying, "Alright, nice job recruits! Not what you signed on for, but hey you're resistance now!" As the guests exit the ride and walk out of its immersive space, they are left to reflect on their experience while they peruse the gift shop for a commemorative keepsake.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Stories are powerful tools used in immersive experience attractions, since they are able to communicate the human experience, either lived or fictional. When incorporated correctly, story elements have been found to amplify specific emotions, brands, and enhance a guest's overall experience through being more engaged in the storyline. This concluding chapter includes the following: a discussion of the findings, limitations of the research, conclusions based on research questions, and recommendations for the future.

<u>Discussion</u>

As a result of combining experience design techniques with storytelling elements, the *Rise of the Resistance* and *Indiana Jones Adventure* rides were able to effectively produce personal and unforgettable moments with every visit. These practices were a combined attempt to convince the guest that the adventure was theirs, and not only reserved for movie character heroes. An overall theme was first implemented to ensure a cohesive foundation onto which the storyline was built. This aligns with the literature, which states how the theme must be the design element which ties everything together (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). The theme was evident at every level and every scene, guiding various experience design techniques along the stages of the customer journey; these were noted in the literature to include detailed settings and characters, clear goals and obstacles, as well as motivation and context (Gruen et. al., 2017). These became especially effective in the *Indiana Jones Adventure* queuing system, where its detailed settings served to turn the long and winding wait line into an introduction to the story. In

comparison, *Rise of the Resistance* employed these experience design elements to differentiate between environments during the plot progression. In both cases, the incorporation of story world memorabilia was not random, but strategically placed throughout to add to the simulation's realism. The literature supports this, advocating the implementation of positive cues and elimination of negative cues to control the guest's impression of the immersive space (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Context and motivation were found to be especially important in building suspense and keeping the guest engaged in the action; these elements were revealed hand-in-hand at the beginning of the experience, and were conveyed in a way that emotionally tied guests to the following sequence of events. *Rise of the Resistance* was effective in providing context during its pre-ride show; its mood lighting, theme music, and dialogue conveyed the hopeful determination of the Resistance as they took on the mission, only to quickly change to ominous settings conveying fear as they were captured by the First Order. Its use of dialogue maintained a high level of audience engagement with the progression of the plot, which is strongly supported by the literature because it allows for the co-creation of their experience and allows them to interpret it through their own eyes (Lacanienta & Duerden, 2019). The literature also explained the importance of engaging the senses (Pine & Gilmore), since many of the techniques used to engage the senses can be considered both experience design and story world elements. This was seen in the movie franchise theme songs, which were synonymous with the narrative world and played at key moments to elevate the atmosphere to the desired impression of fear, excitement, or nostalgia. *Indiana Jones Adventure* maintained a constant stimulation of the senses during the ride with dark and light contrast, jungle sound effects, and dialogue. The variety of the action meant that

there was always something to be looking at no matter how many times the guest visited. Both rides were ultimately effective in combining various forms of media to give the impression of a full-body experience, as supported by the literature (Freitag, 2017).

The integration of storytelling elements was found to be essential in creating a cohesive adventure experience, with the most impactful story element being the Hero's Journey model. During the rides, the guest undergoes the same stages of Departure, Initiation, and Return as the hero (Sonnenburg & Runco, 2012), as noted in the literature. Through this structure, enough information was revealed for guests to comprehend the plot as the ride progressed, incorporating story elements into the customer journey along the way. Plot progression was aided in part by characters like Sallah from Indiana Jones and Finn from Star Wars, who acted as guides through the simulation. Cast members were also integrated as characters, and were given scripts to help fill the gap between ride procedure, guest interactions, and the progression of the narrative. This interplay between characters and guests made for an easy transition into the story world as seen in the Hero's Journey model, which according to the literature (Campbell, 1949), the hero-to-be always encounters a mentor figure to help guide them on their quest. The *Rise of the Resistance* centered its guest experience around being a character, a recruit of the Resistance escaping the First Order. The ride also incorporated several characters from the most recent franchise whose dialogue helped to progress the plot. This was found to be both its strong suit and its weak point, since the dialogue adds more detail to the action but may have left out non-English speakers as a tradeoff. *Indiana Jones Adventure* in comparison only incorporated three characters and utilized less dialogue. It stepped away from the franchise's main storylines, choosing instead to introduce the mysterious

Temple of the Forbidden Eye and the evil deity Mara as its main antagonist. This allowed

for greater freedom in cultivating the action, since the creators did not have to adhere to

the familiar formula of the same characters and plot as the movie franchise, as *Rise of the*

Resistance did. It became something that was novel and unfamiliar to the guests, relying

heavily on thrill and surprise factor instead. Guests were also able to feel this difference

in the ride vehicles, which were specifically suited to each narrative: a droid transport

vehicle in a star destroyer experienced less turbulence and shaking than a military

transport vehicle on rough jungle terrain. Vehicle turbulence and thrill drops were used

for dramatic effect in coordination with the storyline, which is strongly supported by the

literature to enhance the effect of physically moving through the action of a movie

(Ndalianis & Balanzategui, 2019), such as escaping into space or from a crumbling

temple. The rides were also consistent in including a sense of closure through the Hero's

Journey. The literature explains how this helps the guest connect the random sequence of

events and interpret it as a cohesive whole, a reassurance that the moment they just

experienced was meaningful (Lewis, 2011). Both rides concluded by welcoming the

guest as an official part of the crew, acknowledging the character development from

guest to hero that resulted from their adventure, and reminding them to come visit again.

The level of participation varies individually, but the rides have proven their combination

of techniques to be strong enough in its immersion to leave a lasting impression of

adventure with the guests. As stated by the literature, an effective journey through these

fictional worlds via the theme park attraction medium can lead to the blurring of lines

between reality and fiction: a magic moment called ironic imagination (Waysdorf &

Reijnders, 2018). *Rise of the Resistance* and *Indiana Jones Adventure* not only provided

guests with an unforgettable experience, but also the opportunity to step away from their ordinary routine and become the type of hero they see in movies.

Certain limitations come with using strictly online sources. These sources may have only shown these attractions in the best light possible to attract future visitors, and only the best quality videos were chosen to analyze its details. Using online sources may have been a limiting factor in capturing the full extent of what the guest experiences and feels in the duration of the ride. Factoring in socioeconomic, geographic, and ethnic background, the researcher may hold biases towards certain ways of life or ways of thinking, interests, and use of leisure time. As an avid fan of the analyzed franchises, certain biases toward action, adventure, and thrill experiences may be in place. To minimize bias, the researcher gathered data from a variety of resources and attempted to write as one who objectively studies the lore of these franchises. The researcher attempted to be objective in any assumptions about theme parks and their visitors, since not everyone has access to these attractions.

Disney continues to be effective in its storytelling through its *Rise of the Resistance* and *Indiana Jones Adventure* rides. Both utilized experience design techniques and combined them with storytelling elements in strategic ways throughout the rides. The result is a thrilling multisensory guest experience structured as an adventure into the story world, complete with missions, characters, obstacles, and more. The Hero's Journey structure analyzed in this study has been found to be a universal archetype throughout history and is applicable in countless mediums as a powerful tool for communicating messages and the human experience. Stories transcend time and cultures, leaving a lasting impression on those it touches. Disney as a company centers

itself on its ability to tell emotionally compelling stories, and the attractions analyzed in this study are a testament to its effective practices to involve the guest in these stories.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Utilizing a variety of experience design techniques such as a theme, engaging the senses, motivation and context, and co-creation ensured a unique experience into the story world with every visit.

2. The experience design techniques used were integrated with elements from the story world like the Hero's Journey model, characters, memorabilia, and detailed settings to help structure the adventure and deliver the correct impression.

3. The immersive experience practices in both Disneyland rides were able to effectively produce personal and unforgettable moments with every visit.

4. In both Disneyland rides, the integration of storytelling elements was effective in creating a cohesive adventure experience for the guest.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Theme park attractions would benefit greatly from the incorporation of both immersive storytelling techniques and experience design elements to engage

the guests on multiple levels, ultimately convincing them that they are the heroes.

2. Updates or reboots of the *Indiana Jones Adventure* should incorporate more characters from the franchise to better connect with guests.

3. In providing context of the situation, *Rise of the Resistance* should consider using multilingual character script or other nonverbal context clues that do not require an understanding of English.

4. *Rise of the Resistance* could have strayed further from the familiar plotline and introduced a new adventure that is not dependent on the newest trilogy.

5. Building on existing successful franchises seems to be a key strategy in creating immersive storytelling experiences like theme park attractions.

6. Further research into this topic should delve deeper into the relationship between experience design and narrative techniques throughout history, and the various methods developed to merge fiction and reality.

7. The ways in which people structure their lives using stories and self-narratives can also be analyzed to best determine which touchpoints can be leveraged to cultivate a connection with the brand.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A
Instrument

Guest Journey	What is employed?	Prominent Dramatic Element/Other Comments
Co-Design (Anticipation Stage) *Guest enters immersive space and waits in line*		
Theme		
Detailed Settings		
Positive & Negative Cues		
Memorabilia		
Guest is informed of ride procedures		
Characters		
Co-Actualization (Participation Stage) *Guest is given context of situation*		
Motivation		
Guest is guided through the simulation		
Engaging all senses		
Goals/Obstacles		
Plot/Hero's Journey • Departure • Initiation • Return		
Co-Curation (Reflection Stage) *Guest is now officially a part of the crew*		
Closure/conclusion		
Guest exits the space		