

CONTENT ANALYSIS ON THE GUEST EXPERIENCE OF PARK VISITORS IN ENCHANTED KINGDOM, LAGUNA

JUGO, T. E.^{1*} – BARILEA, A. F.¹ – NATIVIDAD, R. M. P.¹ – ESPLANADA, D.¹

¹ *College of Tourism and Hospitality Department, De La Salle University, Dasmariñas, Philippines.*

**Corresponding author
e-mail: jtc0523[at]dlsud.edu.ph*

(Received 12th December 2022; accepted 04th February 2023)

Abstract. During the pandemic, the implementation of safety protocols allowed theme parks to reopen with a certain capacity which gave tourists mixed experiences during their stay at the theme park. On the other hand, the growing popularity of social media led to the creation of websites such as Facebook where online reviews can be posted on the official Facebook page of different establishments. In this study, the researchers used qualitative content analysis by utilizing Microsoft Teams Excel and the Experience Economy Theory to identify the guest experience of park visitors in theme parks during the pandemic through utilizing the 4 Realms of Experience which are Entertainment, Educational, Escapist and Esthetic. The results show that majority of the online reviews mentioned the Escapist realm while the Entertainment realm was the least mentioned experience. Furthermore, most of the online reviews were negative which mentioned “queue times” and “safety protocols” as the main factor that negatively affected their experience. This study aims to improve the management’s understanding of the guest experience during the pandemic in Enchanted Kingdom in Santa Rosa, Laguna and suggested recommendations based on the results gathered from each realm of experience to contribute in the betterment of the guest’s experiences.

Keywords: *theme park, guest experience, online reviews, content analysis, Experience Economy Theory*

Introduction

Tourism is one of the most affected sectors as livelihood of people, public services, health, economy, and opportunities suffered from the effects of the pandemic (UNWTO, 2021). The IATF or Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases issued different safety protocols corresponding to different community levels to allow businesses to operate at a certain capacity (Talabis et al., 2021). Theme parks are among the establishments allowed to operate at a certain capacity under COVID-19 safety protocols. In particular, Enchanted Kingdom is one of the few theme park establishments allowed to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic. Safety protocols allowed the establishment to slowly recover from the after effects of the pandemic. Furthermore, the use of social media in posting personal evaluations about products and destinations are excellent in providing insights regarding the personal experiences of tourists. Hence, this study aims to explore the guest experience of park visitors of Enchanted Kingdom in Santa Rosa, Laguna.

Enchanted Kingdom first opened in October 1995 in Santa Rosa, Laguna founded by Cynthia and Mario Mamon. After decades of providing excellent service to tourists, it became one of the most iconic, largest and go to theme park destination in the Philippines. Enchanted Kingdom provides excellent service and experience that cater all ages and instill unforgettable memories within the theme park. However, temporary closure of Enchanted Kingdom was issued at different times from 2020 to 2022. On March 14, 2020, Enchanted Kingdom issued the first temporary closure of the theme

park to adhere to the order of the government against the COVID-19 pandemic. The temporary closure lasted until October 12, 2020. On October 13, 2020, Enchanted Kingdom reopened with the application of safety protocols derived from DTI Memorandum Circular No. 21-08 within the theme park. Specifically, 30% park capacity, mandatory use of face masks and face shields, strict checking of body temperature upon entry, vaccination cards, physical distancing and sanitary station are installed and implemented within the establishment. On March 22, 2021, Enchanted Kingdom issued the second temporary closure of the theme park in accordance to the IATF Resolution No. 104 Series of 2021 that placed Laguna under General Community Quarantine or GCQ. The theme park was closed until June 4, 2021.

Enchanted Kingdom resumed operations on June 5-8, 2021, and closed on June 9, 2021 in connection with the government's declaration of extended GCQ with heightened restrictions. On October 28, 2021, Enchanted Kingdom issued the schedule of resuming the theme park's operations on November 6, 2021. Changes in park capacity were applied. The theme park increased the total park capacity from 30% to 50%. On November 20, 2021, the theme park increased the park capacity to 70% and removed the mandatory protocol of wearing face shields for park visitors within the theme park. On January 5, 2022, Laguna was placed under Alert level 2 wherein Enchanted Kingdom voluntarily issued a suspension of operations within the theme park until January 16, 2022. As the Alert Level in Laguna increased to Alert Level 3, the theme park extended the suspension of operations until February 24, 2022. On February 25, 2022, the theme park reopened with a 70% park capacity, mandatory wearing of face masks, strict checking of body temperature upon entry, vaccination cards, physical distancing and proper sanitation stations inside the theme park. On March 5, 2022, the management of Enchanted Kingdom allowed a 100% park capacity within the theme park. The safety protocols were derived from Memorandum Circular No. 21-08 Series of 2021 issued by the Department of Trade and Industry and approved by the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases in the Philippines wherein attractions such as theme parks should base the implementation of safety protocols on the issued criteria of the Department of Health (DTI, 2021).

Experience Economy reflects experiences of tourists based on their participation (Chang, 2018). The 4 Realms of Experience, specifically Entertainment, Educational, Escapist and Esthetic, describe different parts of an individual's experience. Studies conducted in theme parks utilize experience economy to gather complete and genuine experiences from the park visitors. A study conducted by Lee et al. (2019), revealed factors that affect satisfaction and revisit intention of tourists in theme parks wherein effective programs and promotions were developed to enhance the guest experience of visitors. Therefore, Experience Economy is the most applicable concept to use as it provides information based on the participation of guests in a particular experience. Social Media Platforms such as Facebook are used to post personalized reviews regarding experiences within an establishment. Online reviews are a great source of information that can affect tourists' travel decisions (Chong et al., 2018). An effective online review in Facebook can prompt travel in destinations such as theme parks wherein online reviews can be used as an effective marketing tool (Maslowska et al., 2017). Furthermore, given the fact that the country is still experiencing the pandemic, majority of tourists seek online reviews as a source of information and reference for planning and traveling to destinations. The following are the objectives of the study: (1) to understand the factors that affect the positive and negative experiences of park

visitors in Enchanted Kingdom; and (2) to explain the guest experience of park visitors of Enchanted Kingdom based on the 4E's of Experience Economy.

Specifically, it is expected to answer the following questions: (1) How can the guest experience of the respondents be described in terms of entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapist? (2) What are the positive and negative feedbacks of the guests of Enchanted Kingdom in terms of guest experience? And (3) Based on the analysis, what program can be proposed to improve the guest experience in the midst of the pandemic? This study will involve online reviews from the Official Facebook page of Enchanted Kingdom. Specifically, this study will focus on the specific population of park visitors that went to the theme park in October 2020 until March 2022. This study could be beneficial to park visitors as it could provide more information and background about safety in going to theme parks during the pandemic. Also, it may benefit tourists either from domestic or international countries especially when they are planning to visit tourist destinations and tourist attractions. The information in this research could also help them understand the effects of the pandemic to the guest experience in popular attractions like theme parks.

Moreover, the findings could be beneficial to the Management of Enchanted Kingdom to implement strategies to manage the theme park to maintain top quality service and exceptional safety protocols. The findings of this study would also help the Department of Tourism (DOT) in further enhancing the quality of tourism experience in the Philippines in the time of pandemic. Being in the highest position of government agency in tourism, DOT can order all tourism establishments to implement new safety protocols to accommodate tourists present within their establishment while at the same time keeping in mind and monitoring changes brought by the pandemic. In addition, the findings of this study would also enhance the researcher's perspective towards the effects of safety protocols in the guest experience of tourists during the pandemic. Thus, this study immensely serves as a basis or reference for future researchers as they may come up with a more comprehensive inquiry about the effects of safety protocols in the experiences of tourists.

Literature review and conceptual/theoretical framework

The framework is anchored on Pine and Gilmore (1998) Experience Economy Theory which are the 4 Realms of Experience, namely: Entertainment, Educational, Escapist and Esthetic. Experience Economy comprehends the experience as of what encourages customers to be engaged towards a particular product or service. The utilization of the 4 Realms of Experience will specify the experiences of individuals on different perspectives based on their overall participation. In addition, studies claimed that tourism is a prime topic in utilizing the experience economy as it provides unique experiences in every destination. However, the implementation of restrictions affected the experience of some park visitors during their stay in theme parks (Williams, 2021).

The entertainment realm is relevant to activities that are intended to attract individuals who are not into participation, such as watching live shows or attending live events. Wherein, the study of (Torres et al., 2019) concluded that entertainment provided by theme parks has an emotional effect among the guest experiences. Educational realm refers to activities that stimulate the customers' curiosity and engage individuals to learn by actively participating in captivating activities such as interacting with animals, indoor adventures or educational theaters found in theme parks. Whereas, a study found that theme park demos are excellent representations of educational

experience because guests have the chance to be a part of the show and to be reminded of the product, resulting in long-lasting customer experience. Furthermore, the educational experience of park visitors may affect the guest's loyalty towards the theme park (Hapsari, 2018).

Escapist realm is related to activities that require enthusiasm and participation, such as carnival games and outdoor rides. Which the study of Lee et al. (2019) claims that when guests get engaged in theme parks, they become captivated by events whereas they experience a new self who escapes entirely from their usual life. The Esthetic realm is described as the experiences acquired from the scenery or the setting itself, such as the designs and its architecture. In a theme park setting, the study conducted by Qu (2017) revealed that the most influential factor of guest's revisiting intention was according to their aesthetic experience. Moreover, the result of the study conducted by Niu et al. (2019) suggests that designs and services of theme parks must improve as it is crucial towards the tourists' attention. Hence, due to the pandemic, theme park settings were affected. A study revealed that safety protocols build a sense of safety and trust from tourists to the theme park (Xie et al, 2021) as safety protocols and social distancing became a necessity and are being implemented in different attractions and establishments in the world (Milman et al., 2020). *Figure 1* shows the Four (4) Realms of Experience Economy that will describe the guest experiences of park visitors in Enchanted Kingdom. Each realm will be used to analyze a particular part of the guest experience based on the participation of park visitors in the theme park.

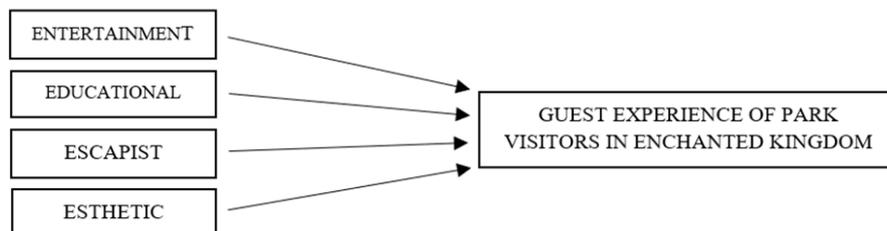


Figure 1. The conceptual framework of the study.

Materials and Methods

This study will utilize Content Analysis to examine online reviews about guest experiences from the official page of Enchanted Kingdom in Facebook. Content Analysis is a type of qualitative research design used to construct replicable and valid inferences from texts or images (Bengtsson, 2016). Content Analysis provides an in-depth understanding wherein participants' utterance can both describe and interpret the participants' experiences (Lindgren et al., 2020). Therefore, in examining the online reviews of park visitors of Enchanted Kingdom, Content Analysis is the most appropriate research design. The researchers will utilize Purposive sampling method in gathering the data needed for the study. First, this study is focused on park visitors that went to Enchanted Kingdom during the pandemic. Second, the online reviews should come from the official page of Enchanted Kingdom on Facebook. Third, the online reviews must be uploaded from October 2020 until March 2022. Fourth, the online reviews should mention the guest experience of park visitors based on the Experience Economy.

A consent letter will be given to the social media admin of Enchanted Kingdom to inform them about this study before gathering the online reviews. This study will contain online reviews from the Official Facebook Page of Enchanted Kingdom. Facebook is a social media platform that is widely used, accessible and user-friendly for people of all ages. Data was collected from October 2020 to March 2022 wherein online reviews should contain one or more factors from the 4E's of Experience Economy (Figure 2). After collecting reviews from the Official Facebook page of Enchanted Kingdom, the researchers created a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that categorizes the evaluations according to the 4E's (Entertainment, Education, Escapist, and Esthetic) of Experience Economy and separates each review by the year it was written. Codes will be developed to classify the online reviews. For Entertainment, reviews should mention the guest experience in watching a live shows and performances such as play and music performance and watching of fireworks shows during the closure of Enchanted Kingdom are examples for this factor. For Escapism, reviews that mention the guest experience in rides such as roller coaster, carousel, bumper cars, Ferris wheel, 7D Interactive Motion Theater and queue times before riding the rides are considered part of this factor. In Esthetic, reviews should mention the theme park's setting, design, safety protocols and theme park schedules. Lastly, for the Educational factor, reviews should mention what the park visitors learned during their stay at the theme park. A number will be indicated per category corresponding to the number of times the review mentioned a code specific to each category. After classifying the reviews, the researchers will tally the data and will conduct coding comparison which will serve as a form of researcher triangulation to contribute to the overall validity of the study.

Online Reviews (Facebook) ▾	Entertainment ▾	Educational ▾	Escapist ▾	Esthetic ▾

Figure 2. Data analysis based 4 Realms of Experience in the Experience Economy.

Results and Discussion

This study examined the online reviews from park visitors of Enchanted Kingdom amidst the changes brought by the pandemic. The addition of safety protocols made theme parks safer. However, changes in the guest experience were experienced by the visitors during their stay at the theme park. The Experience Economy views the experience as what motivates customers to be engaged toward a specific good or service. Guest experience is essential in determining what services and products to offer or improve. The Table 1 shows the 10 generated codes from examining 76 online

reviews from the Official Facebook page of Enchanted Kingdom. Each code represents an experience, from the online reviews, corresponding to the 4 Realms of Experience in the Experience Economy. The *Figure 3* represents the number of online reviews corresponding to the specific factor in the 4 Realms of Experience Economy. Ten coded references were developed from the Seventy-six online reviews of the park visitors that visited Enchanted Kingdom from October 2020 to March 2022. The data shows that the majority (45%) mentioned the Escapist factor as the most influential factor affecting the guest experience of the visitors while the Entertainment factor (5%) was the least mentioned factor that affected the experience of the park visitors. 41% of the respondents mentioned about the Esthetic factor of the theme park while 9% of the respondents mentioned the Educational factor based on their experience during their stay at the theme park

Table 1. Codes developed based 4 Realms of Experience in the Experience Economy.

Entertainment	Educational	Escapist	Esthetic
1. Live play	1. Learning experiences	1. Rides	1. Theme park settings
2. Shows		2. Queue times	2. Theme park design
3. Performances			3. Safety Protocols
			4. Theme park schedules

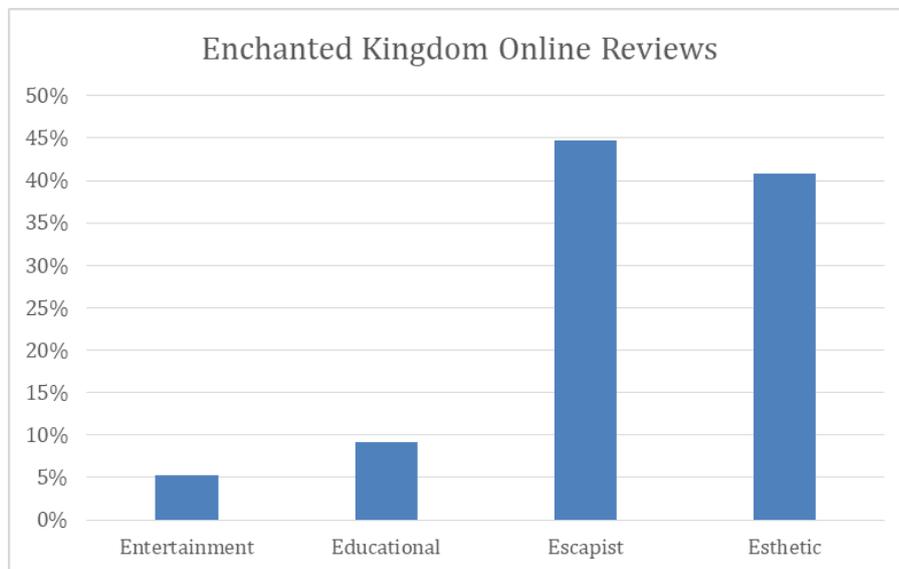


Figure 3. Results for 4 Realms of Experience in the Experience Economy.

Entertainment

Live shows and performances in theme parks were suspended during the pandemic. However, as vaccination and the cases of infections from the COVID-19 virus continue to decline. Live shows and performances reemerged on a limited basis. Only 4 online reviews were gathered from the official Facebook page of Enchanted Kingdom. The online reviews mostly mention the enjoyment they felt from watching the shows and performances in the theme park. One participant mentioned that “The show feels like traveling around the Philippines” during her time with the Aguila Theatre which implies that shows also contribute to the experience of traveling for the guests. Other participants noted the Parade and the Fireworks as the highlight of their visit showing the participants’ enjoyment even when the guests are merely watching the activity.

Educational

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the way on how people engage on recreational places which elevated the significance of theme parks perception as a basis for their revisiting intentions. On years 2020 to 2022, with a total of 7 online reviews. Educational experiences on enchanted kingdom prompt guests to have realizations and learn on their overall experience. Guests mostly stated a comparison between their previous and recent experiences and on how they were captivated. One way to address this is where guests mentioned that “My second time and the feeling is still the same!!! We have so much fun and enjoy talaga lahat ng rides most especially the agila experience para kaming nag travel around the phils!!!”. In addition, another as well mentioned “still enjoyable. The best we have here in PH, but out of its league compared to other theme parks in asia.” and according to some, revisiting enchanted kingdom does not stimulate excitements for them anymore. Educational experiences during the pandemic would be a primarily concern for attracting tourists as it may affect the guest’s loyalty towards the theme park (Hapsari, 2018).

Escapist

In a theme park context, esthetic realm is associated with individuals who seek entertainment by being engaged on rides as a form of escape from their everyday lives. Escapist experience is very influential on the guest’s experience (Ko et al., 2018). One of the major motivations for travel is escaping one’s routine or daily life. This study gathered 34 online reviews pertaining to the guest experience and queue times of park visitors in different rides on the theme park. Most reviews state the displeasure of guests, particularly in the queue times, as the theme park established a protocol wherein the time schedule for the operating hours of the theme park was limited. The guests also expressed their frustration on the limited availability of rides during their visit at Enchanted Kingdom as an effect of the pandemic. However, guests commend the safety protocols implemented by the theme park such as spraying of alcohol on rides before allowing guests to sit or come in and by stationing sanitary stations in different areas of the theme park to ensure the safety and well-being of the visitors present within the establishment.

Esthetic

Between the years 2020 and 2022, the researchers gathered a total of 34 online reviews for Esthetic from the Official Facebook page of Enchanted Kingdom. The reviews mostly mentioned about the setting and design of the theme park, Safety Protocols and the Theme parks schedules. One of the guests said that the theme park “Badly needs a paint job and a face lift. The theming and world building could also use some polishing and refinement”. It can be said that the overall beauty of the theme park affects the overall experience of the guests during their stay at the theme park. Another review mentioned that “there were no social distancing observed especially in lines because we are still in the middle of pandemic” implying that the safety protocols were not strictly enforced in the theme park. It was further proven by another review wherein the responded mentioned that “The lines were too crowded, NO social distancing at all- literally 1 inch between guests at ride lines”.

Conclusion

The guest experience in the Enchanted Kingdom revealed that in terms of Entertainment, such as the live shows, fireworks and performances became limited due to the effect of COVID-19. However, park goers mentioned that it still serves as the highlight of their visit since it has a contributing factor towards their enjoyment. Moreover, in relation to the guests' revisiting intentions, the educational realm most likely shows the interest of guests to define their overall experience. This is due to the guests' attentiveness to comply with the changes of the new normal in the Enchanted Kingdom. In terms of escapism, the majority of the guests displayed frustrations and displeasure towards their visit. This is due to the limited availability of the rides and its operating hours which, according to the guests, are time consuming. Lastly, the esthetic realm which' mostly pertains to the design and the implementations of the safety protocols in theme parks' is the main concern for guests. According to their experiences, the establishment and practices of the safety protocols are not strictly enforced in the Enchanted Kingdom. In addition to their reopening, some also suggested that polishing and refinement of their facilities would improve the overall beauty of their establishment.

In year 2020, it is the start of the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Philippines. Enchanted Kingdom has received numerous positive comments from guests stating that they enjoyed the ride, had a fantastic experience, are pleased with the service of the crews because of the pleasant atmosphere and cleanliness of the attractions, and that the park follows all safety regulations. But in 2021, as the amount of positive Covid tests increased, IATF required face shield policies. According to some positive feedback, some Guests said that they enjoyed Aguila and the live performances and fireworks display. However, there were more unfavorable comments on Enchanted Kingdom's Facebook page expressing that there was no social distancing, they had to wait in line for more than an hour, and that the theme park was crowded. And according to some, Enchanted Kingdom should repaint their establishment. Still in 2022, there were more negative comments on the Official Facebook Page of Enchanted Kingdom stating that there were long lines for rides and food, guests had to wait 1-2 hours per ride, there was no physical distance between guests, and that there was no staff to inform some guests about their masks.

This paper contributes to the limited knowledge regarding the guest experience of park visitors in visiting theme parks during the pandemic. Through the utilization of Experience Economy Theory, the researchers were able to find out the positive and negative experiences of park visitors as well as the experience they accumulated from the implementation of safety protocols throughout their stay at theme parks. As the pandemic is still on-going, the researchers recommend conducting a strict implementation of safety protocols to ensure the safety of park visitors and to provide more park activities such as live shows, performances and fireworks to further elevate the experience of the guests. The park may also conduct online tour programs to give a background on what to expect, what changes occurred in the theme park and what new rides were installed for the guests to look forward to. Lastly, theme parks should create a video guide regarding the newly implemented safety protocols to inform guests about what safety protocols to abide during their stay at the theme park.

Acknowledgement

This research is self-funded.

Conflict of interest

The author confirms that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bengtsson, M. (2016): How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. – *NursingPlus Open* 2: 8-14.
- [2] Chang, S. (2018): Experience economy in hospitality and tourism: Gain and loss values for service and experience. – *Tourism Management* 64: 55-63.
- [3] Chong, A.Y.L., Khong, K.W., Ma, T., McCabe, S., Wang, Y. (2018): Analyzing key influences of tourists' acceptance of online reviews in travel decisions. – *Internet Research* 28(3): 564-586.
- [4] Department of Trade & Industry (DTI) (2021): Memorandum Circular No. 21-08 Series of 2021. – DTI Philippines. Retrieved from: <https://tinyurl.com/28rw63u2>
- [5] Hapsari, R. (2018): Creating educational theme park visitor loyalty: the role of experience-based satisfaction, image and value. – *Tourism and Hospitality Management* 24(2): 359-274.
- [6] Ko, Y., Park, S., Lee, K. (2018): Railbike experience and tourist satisfaction. – *International Journal of Tourism Sciences* 18(1): 65-74.
- [7] Lee, S., Jeong, E., Qu, K. (2019): Exploring Theme Park Visitors' Experience on Satisfaction and Revisit Intention. – *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism* 21(4): 474-497.
- [8] Lindgren, B., Graneheim, U., Lundman, B. (2020): Abstraction and interpretation during the qualitative content analysis process. – *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 18: 6p.
- [9] Maslowska, E., Malthouse, E.C., Bernritter, S.F. (2017): Too good to be true: the role of online reviews' features in probability to buy. – *International Journal of Advertising* 36(1): 142-163.
- [10] Milman, A., Tasci, A.D., Wei, W. (2020): Crowded and popular: The two sides of the coin affecting theme-park experience, satisfaction, and loyalty. – *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 18: 16p.
- [11] Niu, Y., Park, H., Kirilenko, A. (2019): Theme Park Visitor Experience and Satisfaction: A Case of TripAdvisor Reviews of Three Theme Parks in Orlando. *Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally*. – *Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally* 7p.
- [12] Pine, B.J., Gilmore, J.H. (1998): Welcome to the experience economy. – *Harvard Business Review Press* 76(4): 97-105.
- [13] Qu, K. (2017): The impact of experience on satisfaction and revisit intention in theme parks: An application of the experience economy. – *Iowa State University* 80p.
- [14] Talabis, S.D.A., Babierra, A.L., Buhat, H.C.A., Lutero, D.S., Quindala, K.M., Rabajante, J.F. (2021): Local government responses for COVID-19 management in the Philippines. – *BMC Public Health* 21: 1-15.
- [15] Torres, E., Milman, A., Park, S., (2019): Customer delight and outrage in theme parks: A roller coaster of emotions. – *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration* 22(3): 338-360.

- [16] Williams, R. (2021): Theme Parks in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic. – Pandemic Media Official Portal. Retrieved from:
<https://pandemicmedia.meson.press/chapters/space-scale/theme-parks-in-the-time-of-the-covid-19-pandemic/>
- [17] United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2021): Tourism and COVID-19-Unprecedented Economic Impacts. – UNWTO.Retrieved from:
<https://tinyurl.com/2p9e9kw8>
- [18] Xie, P., Luo, J. (2021): Investigating visitor attitudes towards the reopening of theme park: an application of the push-pull-mooring model. – Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing 38(8): 867-880.