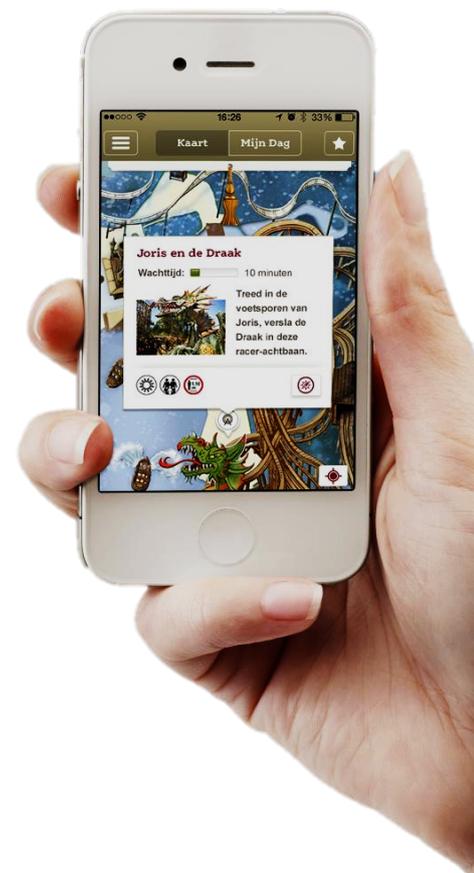


A Theme Park in Your Pocket

How an app becomes part of visiting Efteling



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Abstract

The theme park industry argues theme park apps are a golden opportunity to enhance and enrich visitor experiences. However, limited literature is available that actually substantiates this assumption. The purpose of this research was to explore how an app becomes part of a theme park visit by conducting a case study research. Over 4 million visitors enter the magical world of Efteling each year of which a majority is carrying a smartphone in their pocket and have access to the Efteling-app. Three research steps were undertaken to: identify the promised Efteling experience, determine how the app would feed into this experience, and analyse how this was put into practice. A set of qualitative methods, mainly content analysis, was used to address these three research questions one by one. The findings suggest the Efteling-app does enhance the visitor's experience by mainly fulfilling a functional role. However, the role of the Efteling-app extends beyond the obvious and some managerial recommendations are in place. First, it is important to keep track of the shortcomings of the app's usability, as these seem to hamper the enriching role of the app. Second, further development of the app towards addressing hedonic needs might be a good strategy to enhance the role of the app both on- and off- site. Last, it is important for Efteling's management to consider the substitution effect of implementing such an app.

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1 Introduction

The role of smartphones in our daily lives is undeniable, the four-inch interactive screen and our pockets have become inseparable over the recent years. Not only do smartphones simplify communication, they also provide fast access to all information needed in daily life, anywhere anytime. Over the years the capabilities of the devices significantly increased, now supporting thousands of mobile applications (apps).

“As society has become networked, and networks have become ubiquitous through the use of mobile telephones, societal practices are undergoing a radical transformation, none more so than in the domain of travel” (Dickinson *et al.*, 2014, p. 84). The tourist industry rapidly took up mobile technology and is now providing a wide range of applications supporting tourists in their activities (Dickinson *et al.*, 2014; Wang *et al.*, 2012). The location awareness capabilities of smartphones are an important aspect for the tourist industry as travel is in nature very much about mobility.

Even tourism enclaves that encapsulate the tourist from the outside world and in which mobility is highly planned have welcomed smartphones and provide apps. The theme park is an often studied and interesting example of a tourism enclave (Clavé, 2007; Johns and Gyimóthy, 2002; Lewis and Clacher, 2001). Theme parks are very much a product of the experience economy and offer tourists a unique experience through theming. Key to the success of theme parks is the fact that a packaged leisure experience reducing uncertainties related to for example parking, places to eat and things to do is offered (Gottdiener, 1997; Lewis and Clacher, 2001). In recent years there has been a great interest in designing theme park apps, as they are a golden opportunity to reach out to and communicate with the guests of the theme parks to enrich or enhance the visiting experience (Ostergaard, 2013). However, limited literature on mobile apps for theme parks is available. Although some literature is available on how visitors’ temporal activity patterns change as a result of using mobile apps (Brown *et al.*, 2013; Konidala *et al.*, 2013), only little is known about the user’s non-physical response. Yet I think exploring the role of an app in a theme park visit might provide important information for attraction management, as an app is argued to influence the experience. Therefore my thesis’ main research question is: *How does an app become part of a theme park visit?*

I will be conducting a case study research. A case study excels at bringing an understanding of a complex issue and adds strength to that what is already known. Conducting a case study will result in a rich and holistic account of the phenomenon, which will advance the field’s knowledge base. I will be using Efteling as my case study. Efteling is a Dutch amusement

park located in Kaatsheuvel, a village located in the province of North Brabant. Efteling's foundations date back to 1933, when two chaplains planned to start a sports park south of Kaatsheuvel. Two years later the sports park was founded and a playground soon followed. This playground was further developed and in 1950 the Efteling Nature Park Foundation was created. In May 1952, the Fairy Tale Forest first opened its doors; visitors paid 80 cents (€ 0.36) to enter the magical world. From the 1980s onwards the park introduced other attractions to become more than just a Fairy Tale Forest. Furthermore, over the years a hotel, a holiday park, a golf park, a theatre and a number of television shows have all become part of Efteling.

"There are very few Dutch people who do not get a warm feeling inside when they hear the word "Efteling" (Van Assendelft de Coningh, 1994, p. 190). About half of all Dutch above the age of ten have been to Efteling at least once and a significant amount of international visitors are also warmly welcomed (Van Assendelft de Coningh, 1994). Efteling once a sports playground has been transformed into "one of the best theme parks in the world, all without losing its character as a producer of childhood memories" (Clavé, 2007, p. 44). Where 222,941 people visited Efteling back in 1952, Efteling now welcomes over 4 million visitors each year. Quality has always remained at the very heart of the company's strategy and Efteling has become part of Dutch cultural heritage.

Efteling serves as an adequate case as it recently introduced its Efteling-app on November 18th, 2013. In addition my role as the researcher will be influenced by the fact that I am employed at Efteling. In the context of my research, I will be an insider-researcher carrying a great deal of knowledge. I intend to provide applied knowledge for Efteling's marketing management by studying what role the app plays. At first, I will critically review the established knowledge useful for framing my thesis. Based thereon I will present my conceptual framework and introduce my three research questions to come to answer my main research question. Then my methodology, results, discussion, limitations, future research, implications and conclusion will each be discussed.

2 Literature Review

This research deals with the role of an app in mediating the theme park experience. Theories useful for explaining this mediation are explained, because they constitute the theoretical basis for my methodology. Specifically, a literature review of theme park experiences, tourism media milieus, and theme park apps will be carried out.

2.1 Experience

Experiences are fundamental to theme parks and tourism in general. "While the experience itself lacks tangibility, people greatly value the offering because its value lies within them, where it remains long afterwards" (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p. 19). The attractiveness of theme parks is often explained in terms of delivering an experience (Johns and Gyimóthe, 2002). A diverse range of study fields has addressed (tourist) experiences.

Psychology is core to understanding any kind of experience and serves as a good starting point for discussing theme park experiences. Psychology focuses on the personal realm, which "encompasses all the elements of a tourist experience which are within the individual" (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010, p. 11). From this perspective experiences are argued to be reflective and inherently personal (Botterill and Crompton, 1996). According to Botterill and Crompton (1996) the experience cannot be separated from tourists' psychological processes and emotional states. Framing the theme park experience using a psychological perspective often involves discussing motivation. Theme park visitor's motivation is often identified with notions of escape. Today's tourist seeks for experiences to escape the everyday routine and the daily responsibilities of adulthood (Cutler and Carmichael, 2010; Gottdiener, 1997). The theme park experience is in turn an answer to this desire. Oh *et al.* (2007) in their article on tourist experiences consider three components of escape: *getting-away*, *immersing-into-destination*, and *partaking-a-different-character*. All three components are considered to be relevant for the theme park visitor.

Discussing theme park experiences using psychology provided some relevant background knowledge. However, literature specifically addressing the theme park experience using a psychological frame remains scarce. Although Bigné *et al.*'s (2005) article analyses how visitor emotions influence satisfaction and behavioural intentions by testing two competing model, this approach is akin to the body of service literature in general, and fails to emphasize theme park specific aspects. Nevertheless, psychological aspects are essential for understanding theme park experiences and will be included in my research, as one cannot make claims on experiences denying psychology.

Another field of study used to understand (tourist) experiences is the marketing management field. From this perspective studies are not simply carried out to understand a certain phenomena, instead providing applied knowledge is core. This field of study highly focuses on shaping the outcome of the experience and is most prevalent in theme park literature (f.e. Geissler and Rucks, 2011; Lewis and Clacher, 2001; Milman, 2009; Pikkemaat and Schuckert, 2007). The growing demand for theme park experiences has exacerbated the trend towards evaluating experiences to work towards best practice (Trischler and Zehrer,

2012). Below I will explore the established knowledge used to frame the theme park experiences in this field of study.

Theme parks combine fun, entertainment, education, escapism, and aesthetics (Geissler & Rucks, 2011), however, escapist notions predominate (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). In theme parks "it is not just about entertaining customers; it is about engaging them, (Trischler and Zehrer, 2012, p. 59). The theme park "must introduce cues that together affirm the nature of the desired experience for the guest" (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p. 79). Berry *et al.* (2006) in their article on service clues outline three main clue categories. Functional clues relate to the technical quality of the offering, revealing reliability and competence of the service. Mechanic clues concern the tangibles associated with the service, the sensory presentation of the service. Last, humanic clues emerge from the behaviour and appearance of service providers.

Core to the theme park experience is the idea of theming. Although Pine and Gilmore (1999) argue, "every experience has a theme and discovering a theme is central to experience design" (p. 73), theme parks intentionally theme. According to Clavé "the aim of theming for theme parks is to facilitate the organization of a complex, recreational proposal around a single conceptual resolution" (2007, p. 32). The theme provides the product with content and is the most relevant part of the visitor's experience (Clavé, 2007). Furthermore, theming relates to the notion of escape, as according to Jansson (2007) theming is the ideal type of encapsulation. The theme park encapsulates the visitor into a dream world apart from the daily life. Wong and Cheung (1999) identified 7 theme types: adventure, fantasy, futurism, history and culture, international, movie, and nature. Although "it is extremely challenging to attempt to match the motive for visitation directly with a specific theme" (Wong and Cheung, 1999, p. 329), the theme type is an important aspect for a person's motivation to visit a theme park.

Wanhill (2002) after Kotler (1994) and Swarbrooke (1995) developed a framework describing the theme park product. Core in this framework is the imagescape in other words the theme. More tangible elements, the products and services, surround the core (f.e. attractions, brand name, quality). To complete the attraction product, augmented services are designed to ensure that all customer experiential requirements are met (f.e. queue entertainment, and handling of complaints).

In synthesis, "in order to create escapist experiences, theme parks need to establish 'cues' that consistently support the theme" (Trischler and Zehrer, 2012, p. 59). Trischler and Zehrer (2012) developed a model on 'experience clues in theme parks' by reviewing Berry *et al.* (2006) in relation to theme parks (Figure 1). 'The theme' and 'co-creation' are introduced as additional components. 'Co-creation' relates to the fact that tourists simultaneously visit

theme parks and their co-presence results in interaction. This interaction is argued to add another level of complexity, as these other visitors become part of the service process and thus the experience.

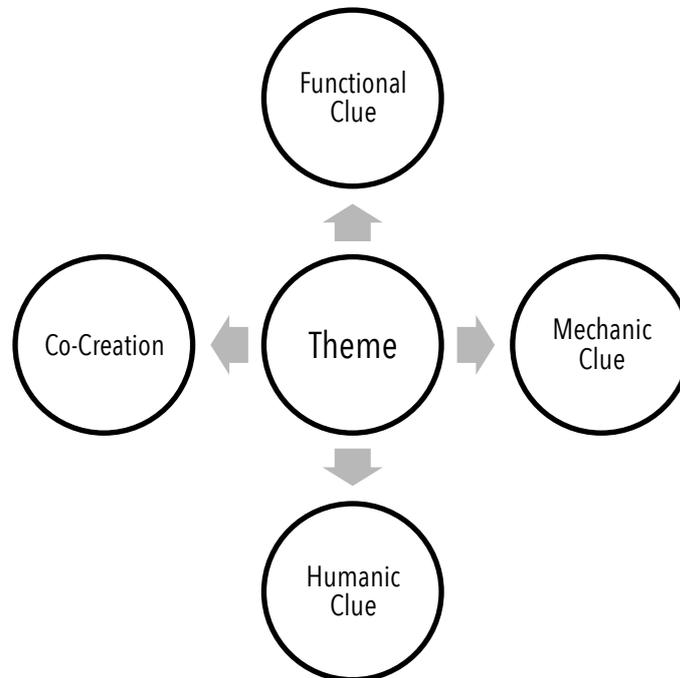


Figure 1. Experience Clues in Theme Parks

Source: Trischler and Zehrer (2012, p. 60)

As I want to focus on ‘how’ the theme park experience is altered and what this means for attraction management, my research will ground itself in the marketing and management realm. However, like other marketing management studies I will use psychological elements to reflect on the tourist’s experience in order to make claims on the success of the provided experience. I will discuss this more elaborately when discussing the role of an app in the tourist experience.

2.2 Media Milieus

The development of mass media and technology has significantly changed the tourism industry. So-called mediascapes, referring to the myriad of mediated texts surrounding people in their daily lives, have come to play a bigger role (Jansson, 2002). Following Leiper (1990), tourists first get connected with destinations through the mediascape. The mediascape mediates travel as tourists make plans according to the communicated messages (Lagerkvist, 2008). As more and more mass media mediums arose, increasingly more studies have begun studying the mediated touristic experience (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009; Wang et al., 2012). The smartphone has been one such medium providing

a wide range of information services to support both basic travel activities and micro-moments within the travel process (Wang *et al.*, 2010).

Wang *et al.*'s (2012) study on the smartphone mediating the touristic experience provides some useful insights for my research. At first it is argued that smartphones do not only mediate the tourist experience on-site, but also pre-travel and after-travel activities are changed. In the pre-consumption stage online travel agency apps can for example support the tourist in planning its trip. During the trip tourists can for example find the closest restaurants (micro-moment). Though the latter is minor these micro-moments of help are considered to increase the tourist's experience. Furthermore, Wang *et al.* (2010, 2012) argue that smartphones change tourists' behaviour. Smartphones reform the way to search and provide information, and substitute other tools for travel planning. The highly personal nature of smartphones providing focused information based on the location-awareness function causes more experiences, surprises, and exciting moments improving tourist satisfaction. The idea that using an app affects activities and emotions and thus changes the experience is key for my research. Studying psychological elements such as emotions and behaviours can be key to understanding the role of an app, as the outcome of using an app is communicated through these.

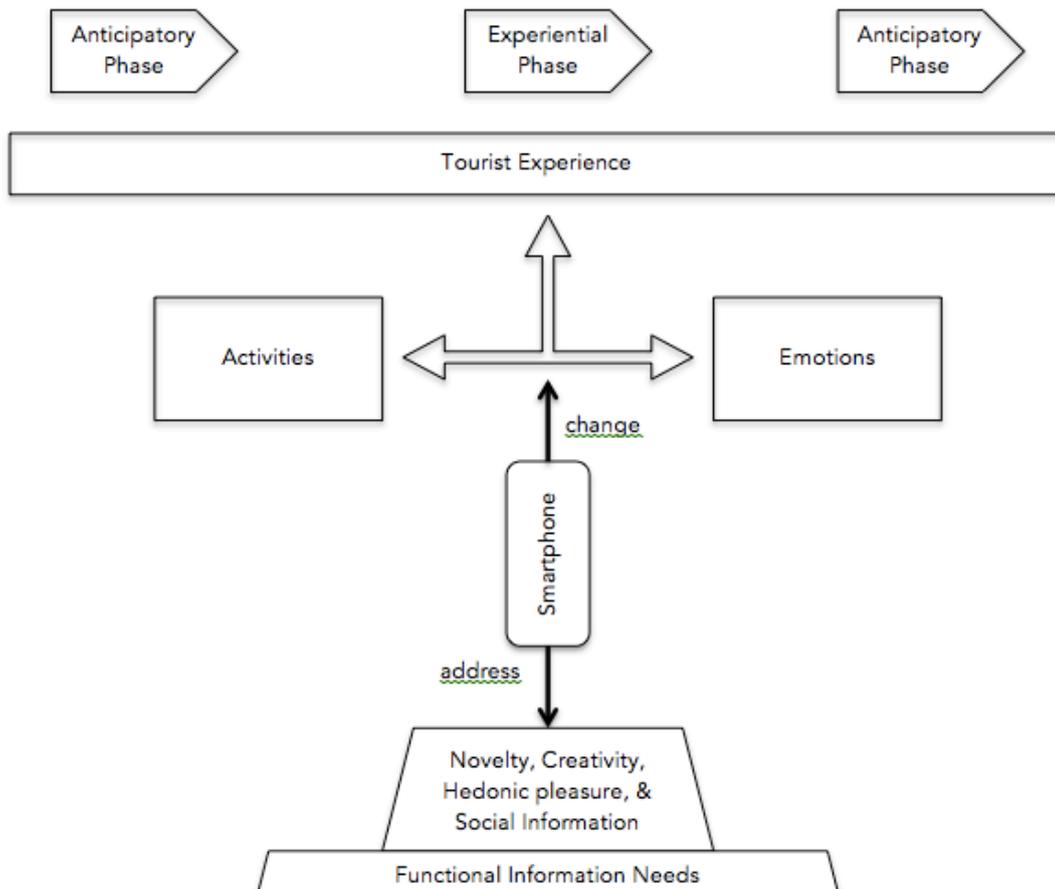


Figure 2. Mediation Mechanism of smartphones in the touristic experience

Source: Wang *et al.* (2012, p. 373)

Wang and Fesenmaier (2013) further explored the role of smartphones in transforming the tourist experience and developed additional insights. Considering the temporal dimension Wang and Fesenmaier (2013) note that “the use of smartphones “unlocks” the three-stage model of travel experience by shortening or eliminating the pre-consumption and post-consumption and extending the consumption stage” (p. 67). Fundamental changes in the travel experience may result. First of all, tourists may act more spontaneous by making on-site travel decisions as opposed to pre-trip travel decisions. Furthermore, by being connected to your social network non-stop, feedback from others may affect tourists’ activities and emotions in the consumption phase. The transformation of the three-stage model “highlights the importance of time and space in conceptualizing the foundation of the travel experience” (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2013, p. 67). Besides temporal claims, Wang and Fesenmaier (2013) discuss the concept of “decapsulation”. Decapsulation is understood as the potential of smartphones to divert the tourist away from the holiday experience through spill over effects from the daily lifestyle, habits and social relationships. Wang and Fesenmaier (2013) argue spill over effects decapsulate the travel experience by: travellers carrying out routines and habits during the consumption process to be animated (f.e. listening music and playing games), enabling travellers to stay connected with work, and leveraging the impact of mobile and network sociality. In many instances decapsulation is not argued to be negative, but as enriching the travel experience.

To conclude the smartphone has significantly changed the touristic experience. Exploring how tourists make use of an app and in what phase is important. Furthermore, emotions and behaviour can be used to make claims on how an app mediates a touristic experience.

2.3 Theme Park Apps

I will now discuss how the literature discussing theme park apps has developed. At first I will discuss how smartphones are applied in theme parks. Secondly I will review the literature relevant for understanding how the smartphone mediates the theme park experience.

The development of apps by theme parks is mainly queue management driven. Having a great number of pedestrians strolling around a theme park to visit a limited number of attractions causes queues. “The problem of queuing is quite common in theme parks” (Heung *et al.*, 2009, p. 42), and leads to dissatisfaction (Heo and Lee, 2009; Heung *et al.*, 2009). Queue management is therefore an important task for the theme park. Queue management involves among others: displaying information on ride availability and opening times (Lewis, 2001), the introduction of special pass programs (Heo and Lee, 2009), improving the waiting experience to reduce the perceived waiting time (Heung *et al.*, 2009). “To date, the most successful and widely adopted approaches to crowding mitigation in

theme parks have been based on the concept of virtual queuing or reservation” (Brown *et al.*, 2013, p. 427). The wide scale adoption of mobile smartphones has opened up new possibilities for both virtual queuing and queue management in general. Despite its growing popularity only limited literature is available on theme park apps. Although some literature is available on how visitors’ temporal activity patterns change as a result of using mobile apps (Konidala *et al.*, 2013) only little is known about the user’s non-physical response. It is however argued that smartphone apps for theme parks are a golden opportunity to connect with the guests to enrich or enhance the theme park experience (Ostergaard, 2013).

Ostergaard’s (2013) article presents a theoretical understanding of mobile user experiences in theme parks. In Ostergaard’s theory mobile content refers to every type of content designed specifically for mobile devices, not just smartphones. Furthermore, theme parks are not considered to be limited to Disney-like theme parks but also include zoos, holiday resorts and others. Although Ostergaard’s theory defines both mobile content and theme parks in its broadest sense it does provide relevant knowledge for my research. Ostergaard (2013) presents a framework for mobile user experiences and argues it is constituted by: the environmental context, the social context, the functional context, the mobile interface and the mobile content itself. The environmental context relates to the degree to which the mobile content integrates and supports the surrounding physical objects and elements (f.e. the physical infrastructure including Wi-Fi). The social context relates to the earlier introduced co-experience. Visiting theme parks is often done in a group context and the mobile content is argued to be a potential social activity. Third, the functional aspect relates to the hardware and software functions and features of the actual mobile device. The fourth aspect is the mobile interface. Mobile interface refers to the visual design, the visual structure, the auditory design and how the design supports the usage of mobile content. At last, the mobile content, which basically is the actual content shown on the screen is argued to be core. “The most important aspect of the mobile content is that it enriches the guests’ visiting experience by helping guests achieve different tasks during their visit” (Ostergaard, 2013, p. 26). In synthesis, to obtain a good user experience most important is that the app gives meaning to the user in the given situation and context. Furthermore, the usage of the app decides whether or not the app gives meaning to the user.

Reflecting on Ostergaard’s (2013) article based on the earlier discussed, some remarks are to be made. First, Ostergaard only focuses on the on-site use of mobile content. However, stemming from the other literature apps are also argued to play an enriching role in the pre- and post- consumption phase. Furthermore, the aspect of theming is not included in Ostergaard’s article, probably because theme parks are defined in their broadest sense. However, like argued all cues the theme park signals including the app should support the theme to create the ultimate escapist experience. Especially since I will be focusing on a Disney-like case theming is highly important.

3.3 Conceptual Framework

Based on my critical literature review I have developed my conceptual framework (Figure 3). The framework explains how a theme park app mediates the visitor experience.

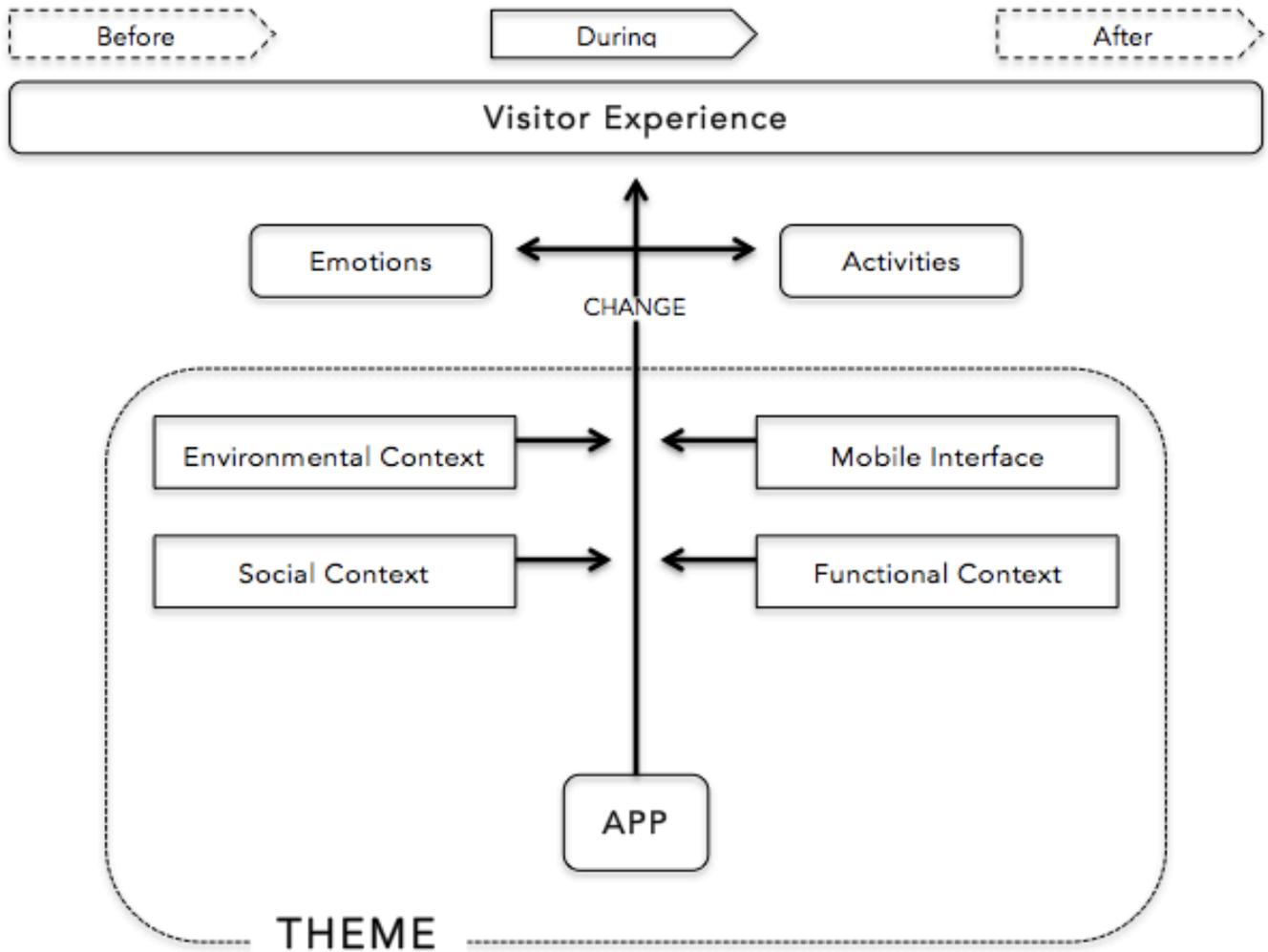


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework

Following Wang *et al.* (2012) I argue an app changes the visitor experience and exploring emotions and behaviours can identify this change. How this change is realized is primarily dependent on the content and use of the app, denoted as 'app'. However, during the visit the app should also: integrate and support surrounding physical objects and elements ('environmental context'), be a potential social activity ('social context'), function in terms of software functions ('functional context'), and be designed supporting its usage ('mobile interface'). These four aspects also resemble the earlier identified clues in theme parks: co-creation (social context), functional clues (functional context) and mechanic clues (environmental context, mobile interface). Only humanic clues are of irrelevance since using the app does not require you to interact with theme park staff. Although the four aspects are

mainly essential in understanding the on-site experience, possible usage off-site is possible. Therefore I included 'before' and 'after' to explore if and how a theme park app is used prior and/or after the visit. At last, having identified the importance of theming in relation to clues I included 'theme' as the app should coherently match the theme to ensure the ultimate visitor experience.

In answering my main research question (How does an app become part of a theme park visit?) I have developed three sub-questions. At first I will analyse what Efteling itself is actually about and what kind of experience is offered. My first sub-question is: *What kind of experience does Efteling promise its visitors?* Secondly, I will analyse how the app relates to this promised experience as a remote digital space. The focus of the second sub-question will be to analyse the mobile content. My second sub-question is: *How is the app, as presented by Efteling, supposed to add value to the Efteling experience?* At last I will discuss how the app is actually reviewed by its users and how it is claimed to mediate the touristic experience. My third sub-question is: *How does the app mediate the touristic experience of Efteling visitors?*

The three sub-questions each address aspects that build towards an understanding of my conceptual framework. All but one of the aspects are going to be explored. The issue of theming requires some further understanding. I conducted some preliminary analysis taking a closer look at the Efteling-app itself. At first sight the app seems to resemble other visually grounded Efteling clues. The Efteling-app contains the same colour scheme and fonts as the Efteling website. Second, it seems to fit the signing at for example Efteling Bosrijk where the same coloured map is used. Although there seems to be some resemblance, I will not further study the role of visual theming in mediating the theme park experience for two main reasons. First of all, it would require an additional research step including an adequate method to analyse how theming relates to an app mediating the visitor experience. Due to both time constraints and a lack of competencies in the field of visual analysis, this extra step seems to be unfeasible. Second, a visual analysis alone would not suffice, as this would only reveal how visually bound the app meets the overall theme. However, it is the visitor's perception that counts and that should be studied. All in all, it is beyond the scope of my research to study 'how' the theming of an app feeds into enhancing/enriching a theme park experience. Nevertheless, I did include this in my conceptual framework as I opine it might be relevant for understanding a theme park app. I will keep the issue in mind and look for any clues that signify if it is actually relevant for understanding a theme park app.

A number of screenshots of the Efteling-app and the other visual materials are included in the appendix (see pages 37-41).

3 Methodology

Like introduced I have conducted a case study. Conducting a case study was as an adequate method, as it could answer “how” questions and cover contextual conditions. The latter was particularly relevant for addressing Ostergaard’s (2013) aspects (environmental context, social context, functional context, and mobile interface). Furthermore, conducting a case study facilitated exploring the phenomenon using a variety of data sources to ensure multiple facets of the phenomenon could be understood.

Clarifying my role as a researcher is an important step towards building credibility. Therefore, some words should be dedicated to the double role I took before turning to an in-depth description of my methodology. My role can be described as an insider-researcher. Having a great understanding of the culture being studied and having an established intimacy, which promotes both the telling and the judging of truth, are key advantages to being an insider-researcher (Unluer, 2012). My role as the researcher/employee differed from the role of an employee alone and from the role of a researcher alone. Being an insider for instance allowed me to include insights to put my results into perspective and frame the role of an app. My double position became part of my methodology, I did not just analyse data I also became a data source.

I have used a set of qualitative research tools to address the research questions. The three research questions were separately dealt with and every research step involved an adequate method. The three research steps will be discussed below. A list including all the data sources is included in the appendix (see page 42).

4.1 Sub-Question 1

The first step in my research revolved around analysing the promised experience. Wong and Cheung’s (1999) methodology to identify and describe a set of theme types and attributes was adopted as the theme is argued to be the main part of the theme park experience. Like Wong and Cheung (1999) a detailed review of promotion materials available was conducted. Data were collected through the Internet. Five recent (2013/2014) television commercials developed by Efteling were accessed on Youtube. Furthermore, other Youtube sources included two radiocommercials (2013/2014) and a television commercial from affiliate Albert Heijn (2014). In addition some quotes from Efteling’s official website were used and the online brochure available on the same website was extensively analysed.

The data gathered was content analysed. At first all data was transcribed verbatim. Subsequently the data was subject to open coding. Afterwards, I explored my codes and

assigned more general categories. These categories were then grouped once more to identify themes. In identifying theme types I used Wong and Cheung's (1999) theme types as a framework.

4.2 Sub-Question 2

In my second research step I identified how Efteling presents the app and what use is ascribed. The methods used resemble step 1: promotion materials distributed by Efteling were collected and subject to qualitative content analysis. Data gathered included: the app's webpage on the official Efteling website, the promotional Youtube clip in both English and Dutch, a news article from Efteling's official website, and an online article about the app in which the developers were interviewed. The clips were transcribed verbatim and content analysed. Like before, open codes were followed up by more general categories and themes.

In addition I studied a promotional poster/map, which was distributed at Efteling in the days the app was launched. This promotional material in addition to a button worn by Efteling employees was visually analysed to see what meaning was ascribed to the app and communicated to the visitors.

4.3 Sub-Question 3

My third and last research step was most extensive. My methods are broadly in line with Wang *et al.*'s (2012) methodology studying the role of apps in mediating the touristic experience. Similarly, customer reviews were gathered and analysed. However, whereas Wang *et al.* (2012) solely focus on the customer reviews that include discussions on the impact of the apps on the travel experience I have studied all that is available. Unlike Wang *et al.* (2012) I will only analyse the customer reviews of one specific app, resulting in a limited amount of customer reviews available. Analysing all that is available will give a holistic insight into how the users of the app give meaning to the app. A total of 205 customer reviews were gathered: 173 customer reviews were deducted from Google Play and 32 customer reviews from the App Store. The customer reviews included a wide range of very brief comments and a number of more elaborate reviews. Although the great majority commented on the usability of the app instead of the impact on the visit, all reviews were included for data analysis. I opted for this approach, because comments related to the usability of the app relate to the aspects identified by Ostergaard (2013) (environmental context, functional context, mobile interface, social context) and are thus relevant for my analysis.

The data gathered was subject to directed qualitative content analysis. Directed content analysis uses theory to structure the analysis by providing an initial coding scheme (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The coding scheme I developed was based on my conceptual

framework. I analysed the data looking for statements that would relate to: the outcome of using the app, the environmental context, the functional context, the mobile interface, and the social context. Within these pre-set codes recurring patterns were categorized. I also took track of the temporal setting: the use of the app either before or after the Efteling visit. Furthermore, significant patterns unrelated to the identified coding scheme were also recorded. At last, patterns and relationships between the codes were identified to see how the Efteling-app mediates the touristic experience.

5 Results

The results for each of the three research steps will be discussed below.

5.1 The Efteling Experience

Data analysis resulted in a total of 16 categories of which 13 relevant for understanding the promised experience were brought down to four themes (see Table 1), leaving aside the 3 irrelevant categories (“nature”, “call to action”, “visitors’ experiences”). Two themes related to Efteling’s general value proposition, and the other two related more specifically to Efteling’s theme types. The themes will be discussed in that order below.

Theme	Categories
Carefree (endless) escape	Overnight stay Escape Woriless Endless
Co-amazement for all	Be amazed Social activity Something for everyone Diversity of attractions
Fantasy	Enchantment Fairy tale Make believe
Adventure	Thrill rides Excitement

Table 1. Theme Grouping

Carefree (endless) escape

The first theme identified was named “carefree endless escape”. The materials often denote Efteling as “The World of Efteling” to refer to all that belongs to Efteling (hotel, golf park, theme park etc.). In addition to using this phrase it was stated that one could step inside

"The World of Efteling". This denotes Efteling as a place where people can escape the other world, the real world. Furthermore, the possibility to stay overnight was repeatedly communicated, making the Efteling experience 'endless'. Endless in the sense that staying overnight is an experience in itself and another day at Efteling Park awaits you. At last carefree relates to two aspects. First of all it relates to the escape element, illustrated by the following quote: *"Forget everything else for a while and..."*. Secondly it refers to the fact that you are being taken care of when staying overnight, illustrated by the following quote: *"you will be so pampered that you'll fill like a real prince or princess"*.

Co-amazement for all

The second theme identified was "co-amazement for all". Being amazed is an important element of Efteling's value proposition, it is even part of their current slogan: *"Wereld vol Verwondering"* (World of Wonderment). The amazement is argued to be for everyone both young and old: *"Efteling, the most wonderful getaway for everyone"*. It is stressed that there is a great diversity of attractions in the park and activities in both the hotel and the holiday park. All in all, Efteling is argued to be a perfect place for families/groups/couples to enjoy. It is very much valued as a social activity: *"Come visit Efteling with friends and family..."*.

Fantasy

Fantasy as a theme type is clearly communicated in the studied materials. The words 'enchantment' and 'fairy tales' were repeatedly used. Efteling's former slogan, which was still used in some of the studied materials, was also fantasy themed: *"Efteling... fairy tales do exist"*. The fantasy theme predominates and is also extended to the overnight stays as illustrated: *"Enchanting Efteling fairytales are all around you at the Efteling Hotel"*.

Adventure

The second theme type identified was adventure. Phrases like "breath-taking rides/attractions" and "exciting adventures" were commonly used to portray the Efteling experience. However, the adventure theme is only related to the park as no adventure like phrases are included in promoting either the Hotel or Bosrijk.

5.2 The App

My second data analysis resulted in the identification of 10 categories. The ten categories were grouped in three themes: what the app provides, what the app can be used for and what value the app carries for its users (see Table 2).

Theme	Categories
Provides	Actual Information Attraction Information Personalization possibility Map
Use for	Navigation On-site planning Off-site planning
Value	Get most out of day At hand anywhere anytime Miss nothing

Table 2. Theme Grouping

Provides

The app provides a number of things. First of all, it provides information about all there is to do and see in the park ('attraction information'). This information is presented in a map of the park and instantly displays the location of the attraction. Furthermore, actual information is provided by the app regarding: the weather forecast, the length of queues, and the show times. The information provided is very functional in nature, and the icons used are similar to those used in the actual park. At last, an additional service is provided by the app; the app provides the possibility to save your favourite attractions, so they are always within quick and easy reach.

Use for

The materials presented by Efteling ascribe two main uses. First, the app can be used for planning your day both on-site during your visit and off-site before departure. The provided information helps you deciding where to go and what to see. Second, the app can be used as a navigation tool. It can show you the way to your chosen attraction: "*Never before has been finding your way at Efteling so easy*".

Value

The value ascribed is that by using the app the visitor can 'get most out of their day' and 'miss nothing'. It is all about using the time you have most efficiently and the app is a tool that assists this. Furthermore, the app is 'at hand anywhere anytime' as people usually carry their smartphone around, yet you are not stuck to your smartphone non-stop as the app is purely functional. 'Anywhere anytime' also relates to the fact you can use it outside Efteling: "*With the new app the world of Efteling is always close at hand*". At last, although this is not communicated in the promotional materials, an easy to use app suitable for both young and

old is developed. All in all, the app is a tool to get most out of that what comes first, the Efteling experience.

The promotional materials (the blank map and the button) feed into the identified themes. The shape of the button resembles a map pin. The illustration on the button is the Efteling-app icon resembling a compass. Both the shape and illustration of the button relate the app to notions of a map and navigation.



Figure 4. Employee's button

The other promotional material studied was basically a blank map, which was distributed to the park's visitors. It had the shape of the regular maps distributed at the entrance, yet when unfolding the 'map' no actual map was available. In the bottom right corner it would make the reader aware of the new app available including instructions where to download it. The 'map' communicated to the user what the app would be about, a map used for navigation.

5.3 Customer Reviews

My last set of data analysis will be discussed below. At first I will discuss the findings on my pre-set coding scheme. Secondly I will present additional findings stemming from the remainder of the data. At last I will synthesize on how this all relates to the mediation of the touristic experience.

The majority of customer reviews positively rated the app, rating the app 4 or 5 out of 5, 148 records representing 72% of all the reviews. The remainder of the reviews were either negatively rated (with the rating of 1 or 2, 37 records representing 18% of all the reviews) or indifferent (with the rating of 3, 20 records representing 10% of all the reviews). Table 3 presents the results from analysing the data using the a priori identified coding scheme, I will discuss the codes with the identified categories below. Table 4 presents the mean ratings of the reviews per code to substantiate that what's discussed below.

	Definitions (grounded from customer reviews*)	Cases	% (N=205)
Outcomes (app)			
a. Good/great value	"perfect app," "it is a great app," etc.	77	38
b. Handy	"super handy," "a great tool," etc.	50	24
c. Entertaining	"cool app," "this is a nice app," "awesome," etc.	33	16
d. Bad	"works very poorly," "bad," etc.	13	6
e. Worthless	"worthless app," "absolutely no added value," etc.	11	5
f. Reasonable	"mwah," "reasonable," etc.	3	1
Outcomes (visit)			
a. Efficiency	"see if something is worth walking for," "wont get lost," "get most out of your day," etc.	10	5
b. Good value	"makes a day at Efteling even better," "really adds something," etc.	6	3
c. Essential	"how can you still visit Efteling without," "essential for all day visitors," etc.	3	1
d. Home experience	"for dreaming somewhat more at home," etc.	2	1
Functional Context			
a. Not all options operate as supposed	"unable to make an Efteling account," "cannot see the waiting times," "app does not save my favourites," etc.	17	8
b. Battery drain	"guzzles battery empty," "exhausted battery after half a day of scarcely using the app," etc.	10	5
c. App crashes/error messages	"crashes again and again," "what a hassle, continuously shows error messages," etc.	8	4
d. Takes too much memory	"the app is too big," "the app is very big due to the graphics," etc.	6	3
e. Slow response	"loading takes very long," "loading the map takes ages," etc.	5	2
f. Data drainer	"consumes a lot of data, while not even using it," etc.	2	1
Mobile Interface			
a. Looks nice	"Super interface, beautiful map," "The app looks nice," "Compliments to the designers and developers," etc.	17	8
b. Easy in use	"easy to operate," "works smoothly and logical," "it is an easy app," etc.	5	2
c. Questionable use of icons	"I would have chosen another clearer icon," etc.	3	1
Environmental Context			
a. Failing Wi-Fi	"Wi-Fi covers only limited areas in the park," "need more Wi-Fi spots in the park," etc.	10	5
b. Bad mobile coverage in Efteling	"mobile coverage in park needs improvement, loading of app impossible," "frequently no internet access," etc.	9	4
c. Location awareness in Efteling impossible	"it did not recognize me being in the Efteling," "app struggles with determining my location," etc.	4	2

*Translated by author from Dutch to English

Table 3. Codes and categories (frequencies and definition)

	Cases	Mean Rating
Outcomes (app)		
a. Good/great value	77	4.57
b. Handy	50	4.52
c. Entertaining	33	4.42
d. Bad	13	1.23
e. Worthless	11	1.09
f. Reasonable	3	2.00
Outcomes (visit)		
a. Efficiency	10	4.50
b. Good value	6	4.67
c. Essential	3	4.67
d. Home experience	2	4.50
Functional Context		
a. Not all options operate as supposed	17	2.12
b. Battery drain	10	2.20
c. App crashes/error messages	8	1.88
d. Takes too much memory	6	2.67
e. Slow response	5	2.60
f. Data drainer	2	2.00
Mobile Interface		
a. Looks nice	17	4.29
b. Easy in use	5	4.00
c. Questionable use of icons	3	3.33
Environmental Context		
a. Failing Wi-Fi	10	3.10
b. Bad mobile coverage in Efteling	9	2.11
c. Location awareness in Efteling impossible	4	2.25

Table 4. Mean ratings categories

Outcomes

Two types of codes relating to the outcome of the app were identified: outcomes related to the usability of the app itself and outcomes related to impact of the app on the Efteling visit.

As one might expect based on the overall rating of the app the app was most frequently described as being of good/great value (77 cases, 38%). The second most frequently app outcome relates to the app being handy (50 cases, 24%), which is followed by the app being

entertaining (33 cases, 16%), bad (13 cases, 6%), worthless (11 cases, 5%), and reasonable (3 cases, 1%). Although it could be argued the comments on the usability of the app say only little about the impact on the actual visit, some comments are to be made. First of all, the category related to the app being handy bears to my opinion greater meaning. Something can only be understood as handy in relation to its greater context, so the app is considered to be handy in relation to a visit to Efteling. Secondly, the app itself seems to be more than a tool as the app is often commented on as being entertaining. Romy for example commented, *"this is a nice app, I use it at home and of course in Efteling itself"*, or Jelmer who wrote *"an app full of wonders"*.

Although significantly less cases explicitly related their app review to the Efteling visit a number of categories did emerge. As expected from that what is stated above the app makes the visitors more 'efficient' in terms of planning and activities (10 cases, 5%). Furthermore, visitors described the app as helping them to get a "good value" out of their trip (6 cases, 3%), and some even considered the app as an essential part of the Efteling visit (3 cases, 1%). At last a pair of reviews considered the app as a way to continue the Efteling experience at home, it was thus seen as an extension of the theme park experience (2 cases, 1%). The former three categories seem to be highly related, they all surround this of idea of getting most out of your day. "Efficiency" is related to the activities undertaken and "good/great value" and "essentiality" are both related to the resulting emotions.

Functional Context

Whereas the codes related to the app's outcomes discussed above were generally positive in nature the functional context mainly comprises of negative comments. Most frequently users commented on the fact that not all options operated as supposed (17 cases, 8%). However, a couple of these comments weren't actually functionally grounded failures, instead the users had wrong expectations. Elke for example commented *"I cannot even see the waiting times so downloading makes no sense"*, but she was simply unaware of the fact you can only see the waiting times when being in the park. Furthermore, the app was considered to be a battery drainer resulting in limited use (10 cases, 5%). Third, users experienced the app crashing or error messages popped up (8 cases, 4%). However, these types of problems seem to have been solved in the newer versions of the app, as these kinds of comments were only present in the early stages after the app's launch. Users themselves even commented on the updates, "Superunderwear" for example comments *"update, like magic the app works again and doesn't crash anymore"*. Other functionally grounded problems related to the app taking too much memory (6 cases, 3%), slow response of the app (5 cases, 2%), and the app being a data drainer (2 cases, 1%).

Mobile Interface

For the code 'mobile interface' three categories were identified. Most frequently the customer reviews included compliments on the design of the app, users thought the app looked nice and was nicely designed (17 cases, 8%). Furthermore, the app is considered to be easy in use (5 cases, 2%), and only few question the chosen signs and icons (3 cases, 1%).

Environmental Context

Comments related to the environmental context solely related to being connected in the park. Most frequently users commented on the limited Wi-Fi connection in the park (10 cases, 5%). Furthermore, general mobile coverage in Efteling was insufficient (9 cases, 4%), and a couple of users had struggles with the location awareness function in the park (4 cases, 2%). All three categories greatly influence the apps functionality, as the app's mobile content is dependent on both Internet access and location awareness. Bregje for example states, *"in Efteling there is little to no Internet access, both Wi-Fi and mobile coverage run short. Therefore you can barely use the app..."*.

Social Context

No customer reviews included statements related to the social context.

Besides the above discussed codes two additional patterns emerged. First of all, several respondents seized the opportunity to provide tips (20 cases, 10%). These tips included both points of improvement for the app developers as well as tips for fellow users. The tips were very diverse in content; it varied from functionally related tips to content related tips and many more. Freek for example stated *"a good idea maybe to include clips of attractions"*, or Maxim who commented, *"a list of attractions based on the actual waiting times is most welcome"*. Where Freek and Maxim were approaching the app developers Pim advised fellow users by stating, *"tip download fake GPS to be able to see the waiting times when not being in the park"*.

Secondly a more specific pattern slightly related to the above-discussed pattern emerged from the reviews. A significant number of respondents thought it was a pity the waiting times were only accessible in the park, they would like to have access to this information at home (14 cases, 7%). The majority said they would like to see the waiting times off-site as this would facilitate their decision making process. Benjamin for example commented, *"it would be nice to see actual waiting times when not being in the park, because as a regular guest you would know if you should or shouldn't take a visit"*. Although respondents were somewhat disappointed this did not greatly influence the app's rating (mean rating 4.07). This is probably due to users acknowledging the fact that the app is foremost designed for on-site use. Sjoerd for example rated the app with 5 stars and comments, *"really useful, but not when not being in Efteling, then you better not download it"*.

At last, a little less significant pattern emerged from the reviews. In the period short after the launch of the app a number of users responded with relief, they commented on the app using the phrase 'finally' (8 cases, 4%). The use of this phrase signifies the need for developing a theme park app.

Having thoroughly analysed the codes and categories some remarks are to be made on how the Efteling-app mediates the touristic experience. In general the mobile content (the app itself) is considered to be of good/great value, as came clear from the coding as well as the general rating of the app. This positive attitude can mainly be attributed to idea that the app serves value as it is handy, especially the actual information provided (waiting times, location awareness). Furthermore, 'handy' merely relates to on-site use, as the mobile content being off-site differs and does not include the actual information. The comments on the usability of the app are also reflected in the comments on the app's impact on one's visit. The app is acclaimed to add something; efficiency is core and results in an improved experience (add good value). In principle the app thus adds something, yet the context does seem to influence this mediation. Both the environmental context and the functional context hamper good usage for all. As a result not all people have access to all the mobile content available and can thus not experience the app as an efficiency tool or an enricher of the visit. Furthermore, there seem to be a number of people who just like the app for the fun of it. The mobile interface seems to be part of this as people like the looks of the app. Off-site use of the app seems to be working for some as the app provides interesting information and conveys the Efteling experience, but generally speaking it remains subordinate to on-site use. Since most of the functions are designed for on-site use, some even regard off-site use as worthless.

6 Discussion

Having presented the results for each of the research steps I will now discuss my findings. I will first discuss each of the three steps separately and see how they contribute to the established literature. Subsequently I will bring the research steps together and discuss the overall contribution.

The Efteling Experience

The first step of my research analysed the promised experienced as communicated through the promotion materials. A 'carefree (endless) escape' and 'co-amazement for all' were identified as core themes in the value proposition. Furthermore, two theme types were identified: fantasy and adventure. My findings nicely reflect the literature relevant for

understanding a theme park experience. First of all, Efteling's value proposition adequately feeds into the idea that visitors are motivated by a desire to escape the everyday world, as identified by the theme 'carefree (endless) escape'. Secondly theming the experience is core for a theme park, the Efteling case substantiates this. The latter argument will be further discussed below.

My results resemble some of Wong and Cheung's (1999) findings on strategic theming. According to Wong and Cheung visitors are becoming more demanding and "wish to fulfil more than one level of needs in order to be satisfied" (1999, p. 329). Therefore, the theme park industry is to develop innovative themes to keep fulfilling visitor's needs. Although, preferences for themes varies from person to person defining market segments may include multi-segmentation based on combining different themes. Wong and Cheung's (1999) findings suggest combining fantasy and adventure themes to appeal to a wide range of potential visitors. Fantasy and adventure themes are both highly ranked, second and third respectively. Furthermore, whereas families with children mainly prefer fantasy themes providing entertainment for the kids, adventure themes mainly attract youngsters and solos. Combining the two themes thus results in a wide range of potential visitors and serves as a good strategy. Park managers at Efteling seem to have adopted this strategy as both fantasy and adventure themes are combined. It is even communicated that the Efteling experience will appeal to anyone.

The App

The second step of my research identified how the app as presented by Efteling is supposed to add value to the Efteling experience. My findings suggest the app provides functional information at your fingertips, which can be used for both on- and off-site planning as well as navigational purposes to get most of out of your day and miss nothing. According to Wang *et al.*'s findings tourists most frequently use travel apps to answer their functional information needs: "information to learn, increase the value of the trip, improve efficiency, reduce uncertainty and release stress" (2012, p. 375). Efteling's park managers evidently made the right decision to develop a functional app as this will most probably meet the visitors' needs. Furthermore, Wang *et al.* argue that functional information needs are highly associated with the apps of "Attraction Guides": "apps for providing tips within an attraction or a resort such as Walt Disneyland theme park" (2012, p. 374). The latter is substantiated by my findings as the Efteling-app can be considered an "Attraction Guide". At last, the Efteling-app seems to fit the "Good Value and Efficiency" scenario developed by Wang *et al.* (2012), I will discuss this in more detail below.

Customer Reviews

My third research step focused on analysing how the app mediates an Efteling visit. My findings suggest the app is a good tool and adds value to the Efteling experience by

providing efficiency. The findings substantiate the above made assumption regarding the “Good Value and Efficiency” scenario developed by Wang *et al.* (2012). According to Wang *et al.* “instant access to information support may be important in addressing emergent information needs ... meeting these needs may improve the efficiency in the travel process and maximize the value of the trip” (2012, p. 378). My findings obviously resemble Wang *et al.*’s (2012) “Good Value and Efficiency” scenario, yet the other scenarios developed by Wang *et al.* (2012) provide food for thought. The Efteling-app is highly focusing on functionality, while according to Wang *et al.* (2012) apps are also valuable tools for addressing other needs (hedonic-, innovation-, aesthetic-, and social- needs). In conclusion, there is room for Efteling’s park management to develop the app into a tool that assists in addressing multiple needs. Doing so would probably result in a greater number of people who would enjoy an enhanced experience. Based on my findings I would suggest Efteling’s management to focus on hedonistic needs as these are already signalled in my findings (“entertaining”, and “home experience”).

The latter might be put in perspective using the idea of theming. Users seem to like the interface of the app, which is obviously related to the visual theming of the app. The theming in turn articulates the Efteling experience, which would then relate to hedonistic needs. The following statement from Randy illustrates this: “*Work’s very nice. Useful app. And if you want some of the Efteling feeling at home then you can use the app off-site Efteling*”. Hedonistic needs could thus be addressed by visually articulating the Efteling experience (mobile interface and theming).

Ostergaard’s (2013) article on mobile user experiences in theme parks served value in developing my conceptual framework. However, reflecting on Ostergaard’s (2013) arguments with the current knowledge is an important step in my thesis. According to Ostergaard (2013) the mobile content constitutes the foundation of the mobile user experience in theme parks and the four aspects (environmental context, social context, functional context, mobile interface) are all essential in understanding this experience. Above all Ostergaard argues, “one cannot speak of *positive* mobile user experience if one or more of the aspects are missing” (2013, p. 28). Concerning the former statement, my findings substantiate the idea that the mobile content is core to the mobile user experience, and thus, possibly enriches the users’ visiting experience. The latter statement, however, requires some further discussion. First of all, the social context was left undiscussed in the customer reviews. Either the social context was irrelevant for using the Efteling-app or the chosen methodology was inadequate for studying the social context. Second, based on the findings the Efteling-app’s mobile interface was positively rated and the environmental context and functional context where both negatively rated. However, I argue it is not as black and white as comes clear from the results. I opine the three identified aspects can be understood as satisfiers and dissatisfiers. Both the environmental context and the functional context are dissatisfiers, if

they meet respondents' expectations they will be left undiscussed as they are considered to be a must. The mobile interface on the contrary can be understood as a satisfier, users do not have clear expectations yet they add value by contributing to user satisfaction.

Having framed the four aspects some concluding remarks on Ostergaard's (2013) framework are to be made. I think Ostergaard's (2013) framework partially holds true. I do agree on Ostergaard's notion that "the stronger the relationship between all the aspects, the stronger and more positive the mobile user experience is" (2013, p. 28). However, I do not think an app cannot enrich the users' visiting experience if one of the aspects is negatively rated. I do think the aspects influence the users' visiting experience, but in the end an app can still add value even if some of the aspects aren't fully met. Crien for example rated the app with 4 stars and wrote the following customer review:

"I have visited Efteling yesterday and tested the app. Prior to departure I saved my favourites, so I could easily find them on the map. Unfortunately, the app is graphically very demanding, and the Wi-Fi in the park is limited it constantly disconnects so loading the app takes too long. What I found really handy was the fact that you could see that the Droomvlucht wasn't running. They didn't know how long it would take. An hour later I saw on the app it was running again. Very helpful!"

At last, the role of the Efteling-app in the pre- and post- consumption phase will be discussed. My findings suggest off-site use plays a role, yet remains subordinate to on-site use. Respondents stated they would increase off-site use of the app if waiting times would always be accessible off-site. The Efteling-app would then come to play an important role in the decision making process of potential visitors. However, Efteling's park management obviously made a consciousness decision not to show this mobile content off-site. Providing off-site users access to actual waiting times might serve value for the users, but possibly jeopardizes Efteling's position. During peak days visitors might come to decide not to visit Efteling, which is obviously not beneficial for Efteling. However, building upon the above-discussed Efteling's park management could consider enhancing off-site use by meeting hedonic needs. The mobile content could be further developed making the app a medium to convey the Efteling experience. The app would then become valuable in both the pre- and post- consumption phase; potential visitors will get excited and subsequently it would make the experience endless.

Synthesis

Each of the three research steps served their individual purpose: the first research step focused on identifying the Efteling experience, the second research step explored the mobile content of the app and the third research step analysed how the app mediated the

visitor experience. However, it is the concurrence of these three steps that gives understanding to my case.

The Efteling-app can be framed using the framework developed Wanhill (2002) to describe the theme park product. Core to the Efteling experience is the fantasy and adventure typed storyline, which according to the studied materials will appeal to anyone and amaze all. Commodities and services surround the core. To complete the attraction product the augmented imagescape is developed. The Efteling-app is principally developed to be an augmented product; it is there to facilitate the visitors. However, based on my research I argue the Efteling-app can also be seen as a service itself. The app has become an entity that can be used to satisfy visitors' needs. Especially if the app would be further developed and it would come to generate memorable mood benefits for the visitor by also addressing hedonic needs. Efteling's management stressed it wants to minimize the app's presence, as the Efteling park experience is core. However, I think a proper app can become part and enhance the overall experience rather than detract the visitor from the park experience. I will now discuss some additional afterthoughts.

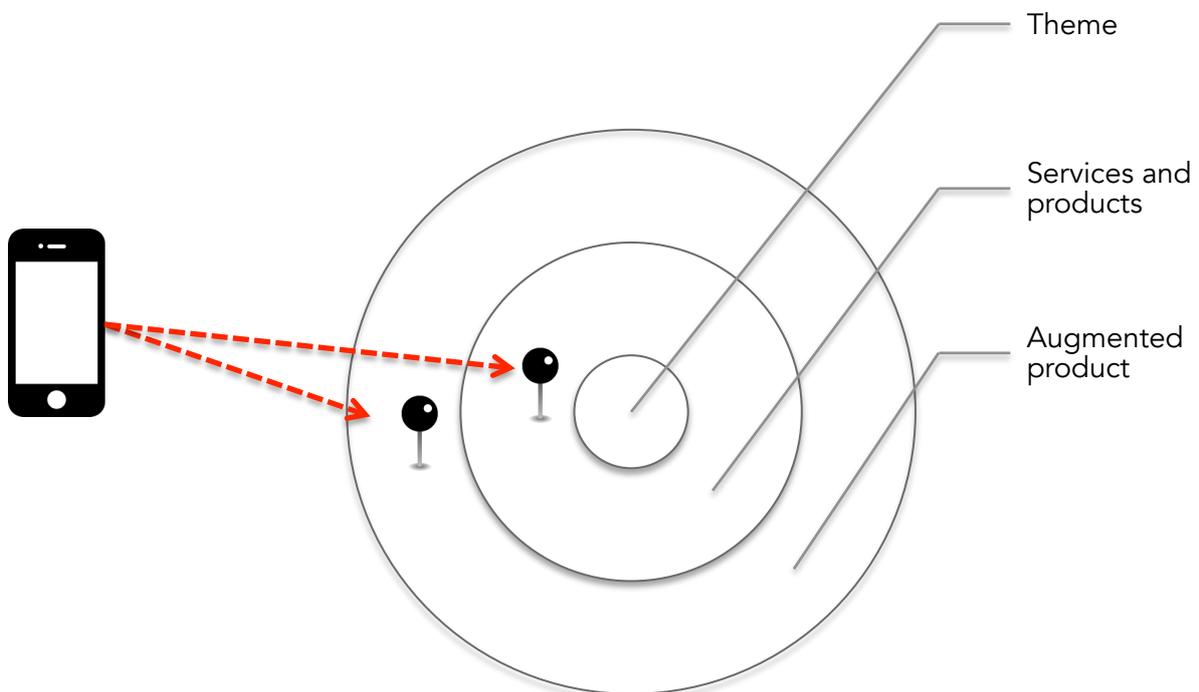


Figure 5. Framing the Efteling-app using the theme park product

First, the Efteling-app seems to feed into Efteling's overall value proposition. I identified Efteling as a "carefree (endless) escape" and the app is supposed to facilitate this carefree day by providing functional information. Although my findings mainly support this, some

cautionary notes are required. A number of users experienced a malfunctioning app resulting from errors in both the environmental- and functional- context. For example the battery drain issue: several users experienced the app as very demanding and needed to charge their phone after half a day of use. In this instance the app does not facilitate a carefree day but instead causes worries concerning the visitor's smartphone. Distraction caused by malfunctionality can be understood as a form of negative decapsulation. Using the app diverts the visitor away from the Efteling experience, and thus, decapsulates the visitor.

Second, the app has been developed by Efteling's management to live up to the current trends. Developing the Efteling-app was probably seen as a prerequisite to keep up with the competition. My findings suggest the app's current users also articulated the need for an app ("finally"). Reactive management was carried out and the app was developed and currently serves purpose. However, following the introduction of the app, visitors now seem to articulate new needs based on the current app. It is important for theme park management to realize that needs keep developing, particularly if visitors have come to learn about the possibilities (f.e. the demand for off-site access to waiting times). Efteling's management style in terms of the app took a reactive style. However, I think investing in a proactive management style might be more valuable as this could feed into Efteling's value proposition, amazement. A proactive management style most probably results in innovative apps that amaze its users.

Third, theme park management is to consider if the Efteling-app becomes a substitute for something else. Being employed at Efteling I am frequently asked to show someone the right path, in response I kindly reply and have a little chat with the visitor after which they continue their walk. Visitors that use the app would not be approaching Efteling's employees, as they would find their answers on their smartphones. However, my superordinate at Efteling repeatedly made me aware of my role in delivering an outstanding experience, it is to be questioned if this magic interaction with Efteling's employees should become substituted by an app.

7 Limitations

Discussing my thesis' limitations is needed to put my results into perspective. I will discuss my thesis' key limitations. At first I will go through the limitations inherent to my methodology. Second, I will discuss limitations stemming from my personal involvement as a researcher.

Method wise the first limitation relates to the nature of a case study. Since a case study focuses on a single unit the issue of generalizability looms large. Generalizability is difficult as the claims made highly relate to the studied case. However, I chose to conduct a case study as it provides greater depth and is thus a good tool for developing applied knowledge. Furthermore, established work mainly focused on taking on a number of cases to develop theoretical frameworks, yet I tried to reflect on these to see what this means for practice. Conducting a case study has most definitely affected the generalizability of my findings, but I opine it is the reader not the researcher who determines what is applicable to his or her situation.

The second limitation arising from the methodology is the lack of prior research. Like discussed the research topic is very current but still in its infancy. Therefore a limited amount of prior research exists. My methods, however, were developed based upon the research available, the research that could be argued to lack credibility. My methodology is based on possibly flawed theories, but overcoming this limitation is practically impossible. Nevertheless, I think I adequately tackled this issue, as my thesis was exploratory in nature and left sufficient room for including new views.

The third and last limitation related to my methodology is the lack of available data. Choosing to study online materials made me dependent on the amount and quality of available data. This lack of data required me to limit the scope of my analysis. The customer reviews I studied were for example not discussing all the aspects of interest or over discussing others. The social context was for example left undiscussed, and especially the functional context was described in full detail. Although this is no surprise when keeping in mind I have been studying customer reviews it does significantly limit my analysis. Furthermore, where Wang *et al.* (2012) studied multiple apps and had access to a great amount of reviews enabling them to filter out a significant number of reviews including comments on the impact of an app on the touristic experience, I was limited by the amount of data available. A limited number of customer reviews including touristic experiences were identified; this did significantly affect the generalizability of my results.

Besides methodological based limitations a number of limitations arose from my personal involvement. First and probably foremost like any researcher I am biased and subjectivity is a possible limitation. The fact that I was in a double position might have exacerbated a loss of objectivity. Analysing the data definitely involved my subjectivity, as I interpreted the data. Although critics may argue differing findings may result if someone else, insider or outsider, is to undertake the exact same methods, I think this limitation is only to be solved by acceptance. However, in doing such a research I have at least not attempted to simplify something which cannot be simplified.

Second, my thesis was highly influenced by the fact that I had limited access. . I considered doing on-site research in Efteling, yet I came to conclude this would be very challenging. Despite I am working at Efteling, I regarded my position as subordinate and doing research on Efteling's territory would still require me to ask permission. Above all, Efteling has its own research group and interference from outsiders is assumed unwanted as it may harm Efteling's position by publicizing sensitive information. As I did not want to jeopardize my position I remained off-site. Although on-site research might have fostered more valuable findings, based on the above-discussed considerations I decided to approach my research topic by analysing available data.

Third, I was limited by the time at my disposal. Although elaborate descriptions and analyses are desired, I did not have the resources to devote to such an undertaking. However, I think I adequately tackled the short time frame available, as I sufficed in doing that what I envisioned to do.

8 Future Research

My research was exploratory in nature and based on my discussion and limitations I would like to suggest guidelines for future research.

My research specifically focused on one case to get a holistic understanding of the Efteling-app. Further research is needed to empirically test the proposed conceptual framework in other cases and to develop a more generic understanding. In order to test the proposed conceptual framework for multiple cases and to further develop current theories it would suffice to undertake my third research step. I included the former two research steps, as these were relevant for getting a holistic understanding and would foster applied knowledge.

Another possibility would be to conduct a case study using different methodologies. I would suggest undertaking an on-site research, as this will probably foster more valuable and directed insights on how an app mediates a theme park experience. A possible approach would be to develop Customer Journey Maps. Customer Journey Maps visualise the service process from the perspective of the visitor and can be used to test and analyse a customer experience. Customer Journey Maps also serve great value in providing applied knowledge that is easy to communicate through using visualizations. Conducting such a research would require sufficient resources (time, access etc.).

Furthermore, it is recommended that further research be undertaking to explore the following areas: theming, the social context, and the substitution effect. I consciously did not

analyse how the app feeds into the identified theme type as this was beyond the scope of my research. However, future research could include a visual analysis of the app itself and ask respondents on their opinions to see how the visual aspects of the app relate to the role of an app, and if indeed the app addresses hedonistic needs. Secondly the social context requires specific attention. For Ostergaard (2013) the social context bears great value and was even further explored in a follow-up article. My research did not explore the social context, as my methods were inadequate. Doing on-site research and observing or asking respondents will most probably foster insights on the social context. At last it would be interesting to assess the substitution effect of implementing a theme park app, as this might provide essential knowledge for theme park management.

9 Conclusion

This study set out to explore the role of an app in mediating the Efteling experience. A three-step method was developed and carried out to: identify the promised Efteling experience, determine how the app would feed into this experience, and analyse how this was put into practice. Using this approach enabled me to frame the app into the big picture, rather than seeing the app as a separate entity. Being an insider-researcher enabled me to include aspects that would be left unnoticed by an outsider-researcher.

The findings suggest that in general the Efteling-app plays a functional role in mediating the visitor's experience. The results of this study support the idea that an app can enhance a visitor's experience. However, it was also shown that both the environmental and functional context hamper good usage for all and might limit or even restrict an enhanced experience. Furthermore, this study shows that for a small number of people the app also addresses hedonic needs. The findings from this study make several contributions to the current literature. First, this study substantiated the idea that an app can mediate and enhance the visitor experience (Ostergaard, 2013; Wang *et al.*, 2012). Second, this work contributes to existing knowledge on mobile user experience as framed by Ostergaard (2013) by arguing Ostergaard's statements should be somewhat balanced. Furthermore, the findings provide evidence with respect to off-site use of theme park apps. All in all, the study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of the role of an app in mediating the theme park experience and will serve as a base for future studies.

The purpose of the current study was not just building a knowledge base, as it also set out to provide theme park management with practical implications. The findings of this study have a number of important implications for current as well as future practice. First, developing an app is a good strategy to enhance visitor experiences but should be taken with care.

Although the Efteling-app was developed to facilitate the experience it might come to play a much bigger role than expected, it might be regarded as a service in itself (Wanhill, 2002). Closely following the visitor's need is essential for Efteling to develop a sustainable app. Monitoring customer reviews might serve purpose for Efteling to identify points of improvement. In addition, further development of the app by addressing hedonic needs might possibly serve as a window of opportunity for Efteling's park management to increase off-site use of the app. At last, it is important for Efteling's management to consider the side effects of implementing the app and to develop an app that in the end fits the park's overall strategy.

To conclude, this study has shown that the Efteling-app is much more than a 23.1 MB application on your smartphone. The app plays a role in mediating the Efteling experience and should be considered an important aspect of Efteling's management strategy, as its role extends beyond the obvious.

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11 Appendix

In supplement to my thesis some documents are to be presented.

11.1 Screenshots Efteling-app

The following two pages contain screenshots from the Efteling-app. Some clarifying comments are to be made:

- Figures 2, 3 and 4 each contain a red acclamation mark in the bottom left. This is to signify the fact that the person using the smartphone is located off-site Efteling.
- Figures 5, 6, 7, and 8 each contain a red pointer in the bottom right. This is to signify the fact that the person using the smartphone is located on-site Efteling. A red dot will also be present on the map to show the user's current location.
- Figures 7 and 8 are included to show how the app looks like during the Winter Efteling.
- The screenshots are taken from the Dutch app, I will briefly go through the information presented.
 - Figure 1 presents the home page of the app including three options: the map, my day, and a login in possibility.
 - Figure 2 presents 'the map' with the four themed empires.
 - Figure 3 presents 'my day' and includes: a word of welcome, the weather, and some additional information on a running promotion.
 - Figure 4 presents the available information of a specific attraction being off-site. "Pirana: sail along in a spectacular wildwaterride"
 - Figure 5 presents the available information of a specific attraction being on-site. It includes a similar statement as in figure 4, but in addition the waiting time and the distance from the user's current location expressed in walking time are included.
 - Figure 6 presents how the app navigates the user to a chosen location, the right way is directed and the time it takes is expressed in walking time.
 - Figure 7 is similar to figure 5 yet it is themed according to the winter theme.
 - Figure 8 is also themed according to the winter theme and presents the option to filter out certain attractions on the map.

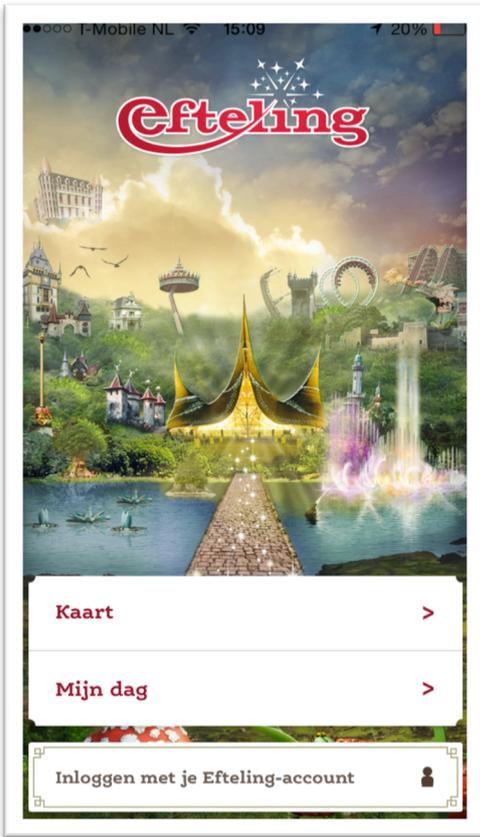


Figure 1. Home Screen Efteling-app



Figure 2. Map Efteling-app



Figure 3. My-day Efteling-app

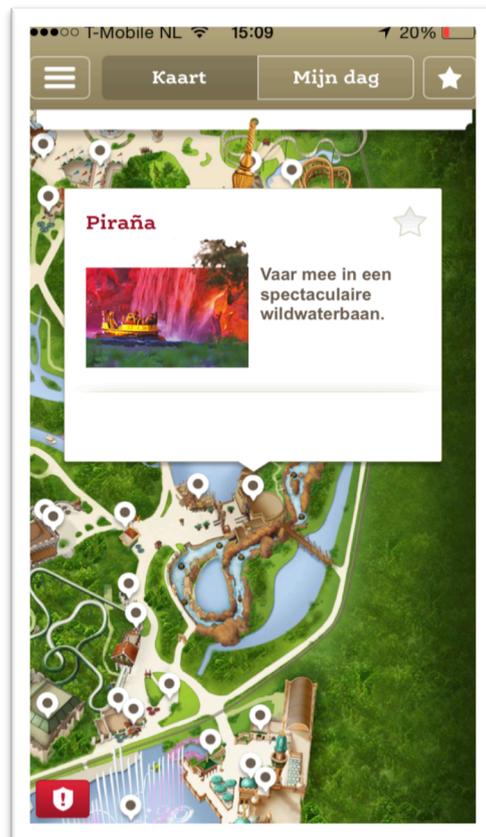


Figure 4. Specification attraction being off-site

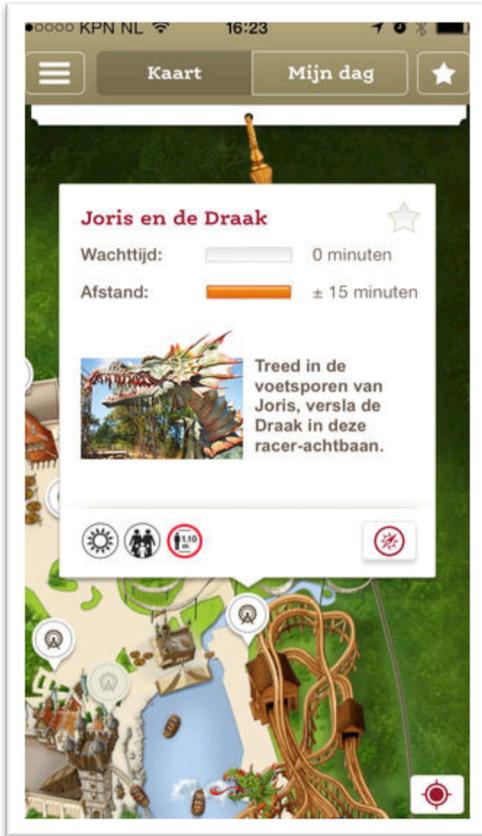


Figure 5. Attraction specification being on-site

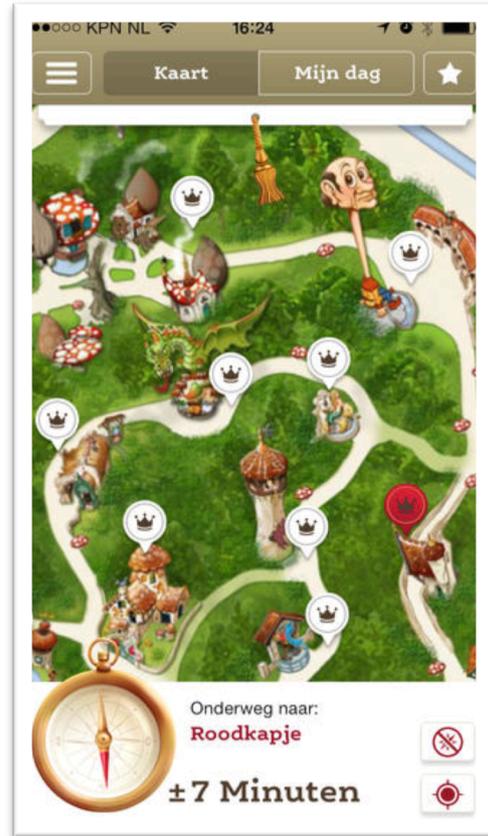


Figure 6. Navigation being on-site



Figure 7. Efteling-app Winter Efteling



Figure 8. Efteling-app Winter Efteling

11.2 Visual Material Efteling

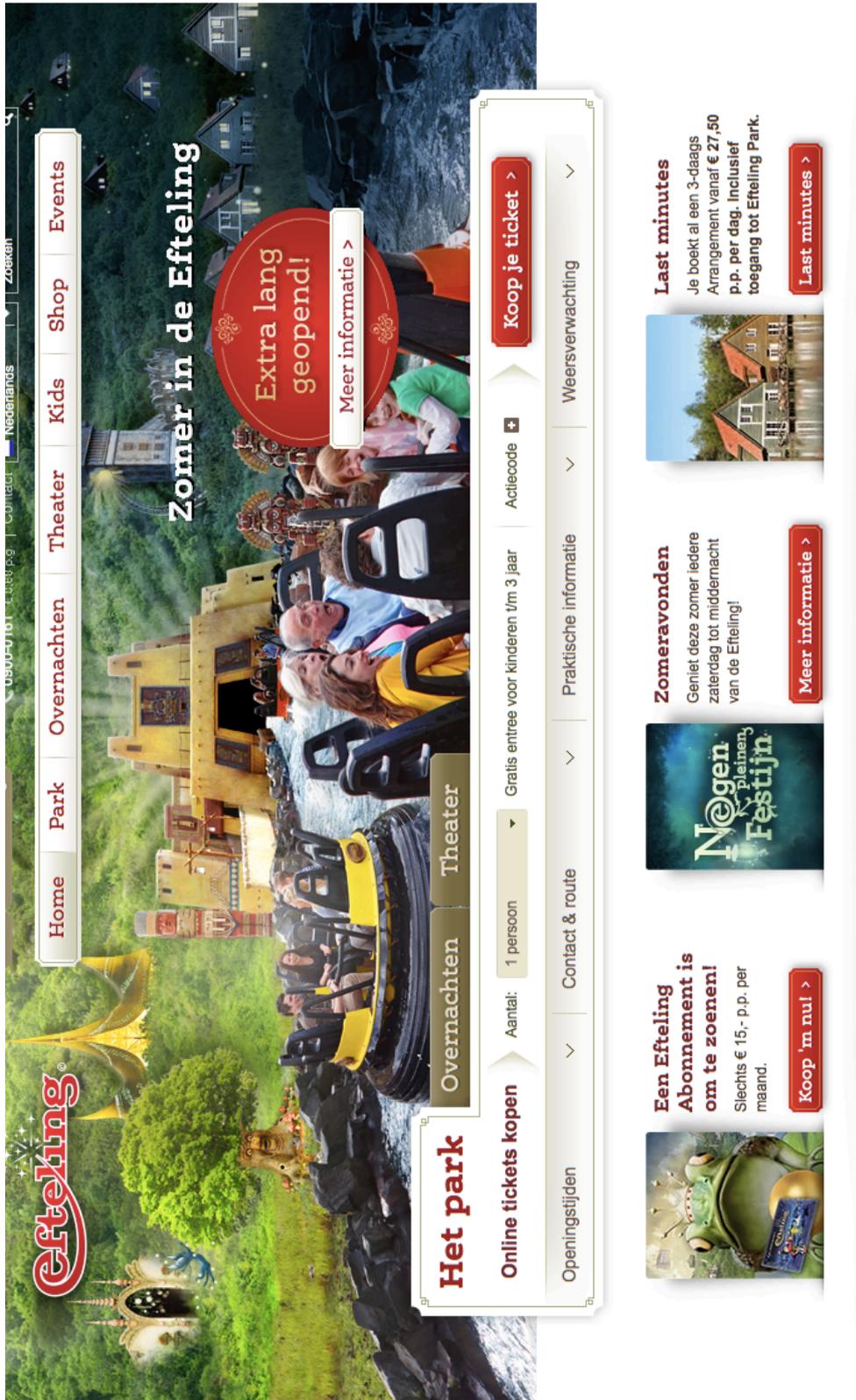


Figure 1. Screenshot Efteling website



Figure 2. Signing Efteling Bosrijk

11.3 Data Sources

Step #	Material	Source
1	Droomvlucht Efteling commercial 2014	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iPPCxjzaok
	Radiocommercial Efteling 2014	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C69iaPgwl0
	Radiocommercial Winter Efteling 2013	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwl0gFGrR6Q
	Joris en de Draak Efteling commercial 2013	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpNoZS3AYQk
	Aquanura Efteling commercial 2013	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86biNAZFbvs
	Droomvlucht Efteling commercial 2013	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zku_YRTU5oc
	Efteling Bosrijk commercial 2013	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HN8lmyvkhU8
	Efteling website	http://www.efteling.co.uk/EN/EN-Home/thepark.html
	Online Brochure Efteling	http://park-experience.efteling.co.uk/?_ga=1.26744446.235669800.1375774949
	2	Efteling website
Efteling-app youtube clip		https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vuwPTGeLnpE
Efteling-app youtube clip		https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05xM4hxsT6g#t=18
Online article Efteling website		http://www.efteling.com/NL/Over-de-Efteling/Pers-en-Publicaties/Persberichten/persberichten-persberichten/Bijna-50000-downloads-Efteling-app.html
BNDDeStem article launch Efteling-app		http://www.bndestem.nl/algemeen/multimedia/nooit-meer-de-weg-kwijt-in-de-efteling-1.4103543
Online article theme park website		http://www.rides.nl/nieuws/3149/met-de-app-door-de-efteling.html
3	Customer reviews App Store	https://itunes.apple.com/nl/app/efteling/id727498391?mt=8
	Customer reviews Google Play	https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=nl.efteling.android&hl=nl