

Enchanted since childhood:
Place attachment and the role of online media in the relationship between
Efteling and fans

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ABSTRACT

The theme park industry has seen a large increase in attendance and revenue in the past few decades, yet research on this topic has remained limited to the various Disneyland and Universal parks across the world (Williams, 2020). Efteling belongs to the top three theme parks in annual attendance in Europe, yet almost no research has been done in relation to this park that opened in 1952 in the Netherlands. As both the theme park and the online social media industries have grown rapidly, the role of fans, visitors, and park management is examined within this recent concomitant phenomenon. Therefore, the aim of this research is to find out how social media platforms have changed the perception and behavior of fans and visitors towards Efteling.

The focus of this research has therefore been twofold. First is the concept of place attachment in relation to fans of Efteling, which was researched according to the framework of place attachment (Manzo & Perkins, 2006) within the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Second is how fans of Efteling have utilized social media in relation to the park and how this use has changed the relationship between the fans and management. A mixed-method approach with an emphasis on the qualitative using grounded theory was used by conducting eight in-depth interviews with fan group moderators and employees of Efteling management, distributing an online survey amongst Efteling fans, and engaging in participant observation of a fan event in Efteling.

By analysing the findings according to the three dimensions of place attachment by Manzo and Perkins (2006), it was evident that fans of Efteling are attached to the theme park on cognitive, affective and behavioural levels. Efteling fans were found to be both dedicated and critical from often visiting the park that first started at a young age. The themed environment in the special Efteling style was deemed a critical element in the attachment to the park. The fan community online and in the park is sub-divided into smaller well-acquainted groups. Online social media platforms were used by Efteling fans to form communities and inform and be informed regarding Efteling and the theme park world in general. Mostly the platforms were used to share a passion for Efteling with like-minded fans. The use of social media has also created a two-way relationship between fans and Efteling management, who regarded fan group moderators as ambassadors for the theme park with whom to collaborate and grant special opportunities. Thus, both the perception and behavior of fans towards Efteling have changed a great deal in recent years due to social media, resulting in a more open and inclusive mind-set by management regarding fans and how they can contribute to the theme park.

KEYWORDS: *Efteling, fandom, place attachment, social media, theme parks*

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1. Introduction

1.1 The theme park 'Efteling'

Ever since opening on the 31st of May in 1952, with Sprookjesbos (fairy-tale forest), a café, and a playground, Efteling has always had a strong focus on fairytales (van Assendelft de Coningh, 1995). The theme park dates back to the 1930s when two chaplains created a playground in Loon op Zand (van Assendelft de Coningh, 1995). Then an additional sports ground was created in the 1950s that grew into a park with visitors enjoying the popular, extended playground area with slides and carousels (van Oudheusden, 2014). The fairy-tale forest was based on the ideas and concepts of illustrator Anton Pieck (van Oudheusden, 2014). Pieck together with photographer and filmmaker Peter Reijnders, who was responsible for the technical execution, formed the steady base of Efteling to create its distinct new character (van Oudheusden, 2014). Even though the initial fairytale feeling remained thematically important, new attractions such as roller coasters and water slides were built to attract new visitors (van Oudheusden, 2014). Thus, what started out as a small playground in the municipality of Loon op Zand, has grown to the theme park enjoyed today, where selling childhood memories has always been of the essence (van Assendelft de Coningh, 1995). The main aim of the park, according to current chairman and commercial director Fons Jurgens, in 2015, has been to maintain the core essence of storytelling as well as belonging to the top three in attendance among Europe's theme parks (Haijtema, 2015). Efteling has had to work on finding a balance between their core views and attracting visitors. In 2017, the goal of attracting five million visitors to the park was reached, as well as purchasing eight hectares of ground to further expand the park (van Es, 2018). Thus, "fairy tales are a dead serious business in Kaatsheuvel" ("Sprookjes zijn een bloedserieuze business in Kaatsheuvel") (Giesen, 2001, para. 4). Nonetheless, the so-called 'Efteling-feeling' originally designed by Anton Pieck remains of the essence with deliberate implementation in the park in every detail from the music to shaping their popcorn buckets similarly to their mascot Pardoes's hat. Even the annual report for management is wrapped in a treasury with a padlock (Giesen, 2001).

The numbers indicate that in 2017, 80% of the visitors were Dutch, 15% came from Belgium and 5% came from other countries such as England, France and Germany (van Es, 2018), so Efteling generally attracts a regional audience. Efteling set goals back in 2015 to belong to the top three theme parks in Europe and actually reached third place in 2018 according to Theme Park Associations, an international non-profit association in relation to places and experiences across the world (TEA, 2018). TEA's annual 'global attractions attendance report' indicated that Efteling was in third place behind Germany's Europa-park in second place, and Disneyland Paris in first place (TEA & AECOM, 2018). Efteling is still expanding today and the core amount of their visitors remain Dutch, which is an indication of the importance of locals to the park. Something all parks in the top three have in common is that they are actual 'theme' parks rather than 'amusement' parks - meaning that the focus of the park is on themes and storytelling rather than rides and thrill-seeking

amusements only (Lukas, 2013; Levine, 2019). Efteling emphasizes their fairytale narrative, Disneyland Paris implements the narratives from the films by Disney (as well as Pixar and Lucasfilm), and the focus of Europa-Park in Germany is on European themed attractions.

Efteling was voted 'Best Theme Park of the Low Countries' in a 2019 online survey regarding Dutch and Belgian theme parks and zoos (Efteling, 2019), indicating the appreciation expressed by both Dutch and Belgian visitors. In total, 94% of the Dutch population has visited Efteling at least once and the park speaks to a diverse group of people as it offers attractions for a variety of ages, including a boat trip for the elderly, rollercoasters for teenagers, and a fairy-tale forest for everyone (van Keken, 2019). Thus, it appears that Efteling may form a place of attachment to many people from both the Netherlands and Belgium. However, the people from the province of Brabant itself also have a particularly deep connection to the park by indicating a preference for visiting Efteling over their widely celebrated carnival festivities (van de Griendt, 2017). In addition, research regarding what makes inhabitants of Brabant proud of their province has indicated that Efteling makes the top ten list amongst other aspects like geniality, brain port, the language, and once more carnival (Verschuren, 2019). In addition, Efteling was built for storytelling with the aim to create childhood memories (van Assendelft de Coningh, 1995). To study how theme park fans and visitors interact with each other, and with the park management, is an important and socially relevant topic for research.

Previous research on place attachment in relation to theme parks and local visitors has been conducted by McCarthy (2019). The research on the sense of place attachment of local visitors of Disneyland in Southern California indicated that the theme park yields cognitive, affective and behavioral characteristics for fans in Southern California (McCarthy, 2019). Furthermore, the research addressed the rise of social media and how this enabled Disneyland to communicate with local fans through different social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube (McCarthy, 2019). This led to an expression online of fandom regarding the theme park and possibilities for fans to organize meets and events at the park (McCarthy, 2019).

Given the fact that much has been written and researched in relation to other prominent theme parks across the world such as Disneyland on various topics such as semiotics (Gottdiener, 1982; McCarthy & Cheung, 2018) and marketing (Matusitz, 2010; Yao, 2017), close to nothing has been written about Efteling except for a paper dating back to 1995 comparing Efteling to EuroDisney, now known as Disneyland Paris (van Assendelft de Coningh, 1995). The paper describes how EuroDisney's opening in 1992 led to an expansion of the theme park market in Europe, an overall increase in customers, a higher quality standard, and an opportunity for theme parks to increase the price for their entrance tickets (van Assendelft de Coningh, 1995). Also Williams (2020), points out that research on theme parks has remained limited to the various Disneyland and Universal parks across the world (Williams, 2020). This is a clear indication of a gap in the research related to Efteling, which belongs to the top three of Europe's most visited theme

parks and continues to grow and attract visitors both offline and online, making the park and the relationship with its visitors a worthy topic of research. In addition, the theme park industry itself has been rapidly rising with over half a billion visitors for the larger theme parks across the world for the first time, which translates to 7% of the world's population (TEA & AECOM, 2018). Especially in the European theme park market attention has been paid to showing the parks off as destinations by themselves and investing in overnight stays (TEA & AECOM, 2018). Within the context of the global theme park industry, Efteling has also made a name for itself in 2017 by winning a THEA (Themed Entertainment Association Award) with the unique dark-ride 'Symbolica'. Furthermore, Theme Park Insider, which is "a consumer's guide to the world's top theme parks" (Niles, n.d.-a, para. 1), has also posted consistently positive reviews of Efteling and awarded the park as 'Best Theme Park' in both 2017 and 2018 (Niles, n.d.-b).

Thus, as both the theme park industry and the use of social media continues to grow, the role of fans and visitors and the implications of social media use by both fans, visitors, and park management are important topics for research. Therefore, the research question of this study is, 'How have social media platforms changed the perception and behavior of fans towards Efteling?' The following sub-questions have been created to help the main research question by scaffolding, (1) 'How have fans developed a sense of place attachment to Efteling?', (2) 'How have Efteling fans used social media in relation to the theme park and other fans?' and, (3) 'How has the use of social media changed the relationship between park management and fans?' The first sub-RQ is the key to setting the foundation of the study by first explicating the relationship of fans to Efteling. Subsequently, the study can then proceed to look at the various ways that social media has changed the relationship between fans and the theme park.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Place attachment and theme parks

As indicated in the previous section, theme parks are an industry by themselves and can be linked to what Pine and Gilmore (1998) call the ‘experience economy’ in which they distinguish between the selling of experiences and the selling of goods. The authors argue that a clear line can be defined in economic offerings from first selling commodities, to selling goods, to selling services, and selling experiences as the last step (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). “An experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates memorable events” (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 98). According to the authors, there are ‘four realms’ which an experience should adhere to, these are entertainment, education, aesthetic and escapist (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Giving the experience a theme and using it consistently, signalling positivity, investing in memorabilia and speaking to all five senses are given as principles in designing an experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). The authors even describe how Disneyland is a frontrunner in the richest kind of experiences that yields all the different realms (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

When looking at the four different realms and the principles given, it can be seen how these can also be applied to Efteling theme park. Efteling has an especially large focus on endorsing their theme and the narrative of fairy tales throughout the park and in their memorabilia of goods and items offered for sale. While it can be argued that the attractions in Efteling are the source of entertainment, the fairy tales used in the park always have a moral making them educational, with aesthetics naturally paid attention to in every detail. The fairy tale theme of Anton Pieck, and the park is escapist in offering a distraction from everyday life. Therefore, just like Disneyland, visitors are able to engage in all four realms of the experience economy.

Building on this notion of the experience economy more in relation to the visitors of theme parks, a realm these spaces fits well into is that of place attachment. Important to address is the notion of ‘place’ itself. Cresswell (2004), points out the difficulty of defining the term. Place is a notion embedded in culture, nature, history, and geography, yet can also constitute a figure of speech (Cresswell, 2004). One can be in place – in the sense of a home environment, yet one can also have the sense of being out-of-place, and it is therefore a notion very much created by humans themselves (Cresswell, 2004). Research by Oldenburg (1999) also emphasizes the variety of meanings that spaces can have and the importance of differences between them. He suggests that a balance should be found between the domestic realm, the working environment, and a place where one can be social and form a community (Oldenburg, 1999). This theory on the importance of having a third place for relaxation in which people can be social, relates well to theme parks as stand-alone ‘worlds’ in which people can distract themselves from their daily lives. Cross and Walton (2015) identified in their book about American theme parks at Coney Island and the English theme park Blackpool, that already at the beginning of the twentieth century these parks served as spaces for immersion by

offering relaxation and distraction to industrial workers. However, the general public opinion, even though it changed over time, initially was that these places served as escapism for crowds seeking pleasure (Cross & Walton, 2015).

Lukas (2013), discusses the notion of place in the form of ‘immersive worlds’ which are places where people want to be, spend time at, and get lost in. It is both the place as well as the thoughts and associations with that world that creates the immersion (Lukas, 2013). In relation to theme parks as immersive worlds, the author notes that a great park is able to incorporate storytelling in every detail of the park, making it seem as if space is useless without a story to go along with it. Other important aspects in designing space are creating a captivating atmosphere, ensuring to instill a consistent mood for visitors, and applying cohesive theming to create a specific image in the mind of visitors in relation to the space (Lukas, 2013). According to the author if this is done well it will lead the visitor to immerse with the space. He notes that there are in fact five levels of immersion ranging from the visitor not being absorbed by the space at all, to incorporating it entirely into their lives (Lukas, 2013).

Further research on immersion and the experience of the visitor in relation to theme parks has been conducted by Waysdorf and Reijnders (2016) specifically in relation to The Wizarding World of Harry Potter (WWOHP) at Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida. The authors describe how in comparison to other theme parks, WWOHP does not only use certain features or areas from the *Harry Potter* movies to create their locations, they solemnly build on these aspects (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2016). They refer to theme parks as “enclosed spaces in which the visitors enter to feel immersed in fiction” (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2016, p. 8). Through in-depth interviews and participant observation the authors created a better understanding of the experience of visitors to the park. Their research concludes that the park should be seen as a medium which enables fans to interact with the story of Harry Potter as well as being able to connect with their own fandom and other fans (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2016). Yet, the authors also argue that the double-consciousness of theme parks should be taken into account, meaning that even though the visitors are able to physically be present in Harry Potter environments, they are aware of the fact that this is created and built for them (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2016).

Also, research on place attachment in relation to Disneyland in Southern California has been conducted by McCarthy (2019), who specifically drew on the framework created by Manzo and Perkins (2006). This framework draws upon different perspectives on place attachment and how people interpret and interact with their community. Within this framework the cognitive, behavioral and affective dimensions can be found. The cognitive dimension relates to “place identity and community identity”, the behavioral dimension relates to “participation in community planning, preservation, and development efforts”, and the affective dimension relates to “one’s emotional relationship to the neighborhood or specific places within it” (Manzo & Perkins, 2006, p. 343). Research by McCarthy (2019) indicated that local visitors can indeed have a bond with the theme

park on a cognitive, affective and behavioral level. Regarding the cognitive dimension, most people had already visited Disneyland at a young age with fond memories of the park, some places had particular meaning to some individuals, some people decide to propose and get married at Disneyland, and others choose to show their bond with Disneyland through their choice of clothing or by hosting fan events (McCarthy, 2019). When it comes to the affective bond people have with Disneyland, many of the Southern Californian passholders said Disneyland was their favorite place to spend time with friends or family (McCarthy, 2019). Regarding the behavioral dimension the results indicated that “Disneyland fans in Southern California see the park as a community space and their actions reflect a sense of joint responsibility” (McCarthy, 2019, p. 600-601). This sense of joint responsibility is reflected in various ways such as helping other park visitors by giving directions, taking photos, or cleaning up (McCarthy, 2019).

Furthermore, the research by McCarthy (2019) addresses the rise of social media and how this enabled Disneyland to communicate through different social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube (McCarthy, 2019). It also led to an expression of fandom regarding the theme park online and possibilities for fans to organize meets and events (McCarthy, 2019). The fact that previous research has indicated that people do feel a sense of place attachment regarding theme parks makes it worthwhile to see whether this is the case for Efteling as well, especially given the rise of social media that could have had an influence on these relationships in the past several years. Similar to this research paper, the framework of place attachment, with the cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions, by Manzo and Perkins (2006) will be used as a framework in the analysis. The sense of place attachment of passholders and fans of Efteling and their use of social media to interact with one another and the park comprise the intersection of this research.

2.2 Participatory media, online social groups and fandom

Important for this research is to take into account that the media landscape has been changing drastically over time. Media scholar Henry Jenkins attempts to map out these changes in his book ‘Convergence Culture’ which addresses the relationship between the three notions of ‘participatory culture’, ‘collective intelligence’, and most importantly ‘media convergence’ (Jenkins, 2006a). In short, participatory culture refers to the blurring of the roles of the passive audience and the active producers of media and this gives way for the rise of collective debate and meaning-making (Jenkins, 2006a). Media convergence relates partly to the media industry and its platforms, but more importantly the definition of convergence as “a word that manages to describe technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes depending on who’s speaking and what they are talking about” (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 3).

When it comes to convergence, Jenkins (2006a) notes that it is the mediums, which grant us access to media content, which change rather than the content itself. Neither do new media eliminate previous forms, the new and old forms simply co-exist and co-evolve (Jenkins, 2006a). However, it

resembles more than just a shift between devices and media, it also changes the ways in which large forces, both producers and audiences, within the media world work (Jenkins, 2006a). Within this new frame of media usage, the power given to the people in terms of offering them a variety of content and access has increased, yet at the same time only a few large companies dominate the media field which has fueled a debate on whether the media is too controlled or lacks any form of control at all (Jenkins, 2006a). Jenkins sketches a future in which the decisions and compromises made by the audience and the producers of media will determine what the public culture will look like (Jenkins, 2006a). Important for this research is the increase of power and voice shifting to the audiences in terms of media content. More specifically in relation to fandom as with the rise of the internet and social media, platforms are provided for fans to share ideas and form communities. An interesting aspect for this particular research is the role of Efteling management as they have their own social media channels and content with a similar role as large media companies, as sketched by Jenkins (2006a), and how the platforms created by Efteling fans complement the platforms and media usage. Childers, Lemon, and Hoy (2018) point out that for years marketers have collaborated with brand ambassadors who have a specific following. Therefore, it should be taken into consideration that these fans who use social media in relation to Efteling could purposely or unintentionally act as brand ambassadors for the theme park. The ways in which Efteling does or does not collaborate with these fans becomes an important aspect in relation to their own branding and advertising strategy. Important to note is how Williams (2020) draws upon the notion of ‘immaterial labour’, introduced by Arvidsson (2005). This concept relates to independent and unpaid work by consumers for brands (Arvidsson, 2005). Williams (2020) connects this notion to the online information sharing and building of communities by theme park fans.

In relation to fandom, Jenkins (2006) emphasizes that many fans possess great knowledge regarding the object of their fandom which enables them to be good critics. Also Lukas (2013) discusses how the way in which management or operators deal with criticism by guests or loyal visitors is important and that criticism should be regarded as an effort to improve the quality of, in this case, the theme park. The criticism by fans today can also be shared and spread online through social media platforms (Lukas, 2013). Furthermore, actual collaborations on projects can be formed when criticism is taken and responded to in the right way (Lukas, 2013).

Jenkins argues that there are five dimensions of levels of activity in which fans can engage (Jenkins, 2013). The first level relates to how receptive fans are and how attentively they watch, read or follow the objects or topic of their fandom after which they elaborately discuss their findings with other fans (Jenkins, 2013). The second level relates to the amount of detail fans put in their criticism regarding their fandom. For example, in their writings about the topic, in how they fill the gaps in a storyline, they can even add to or go beyond the original object (Jenkins, 2013). On the third level, fans are spokespersons as they talk back through their criticism to the producers of their topic or objects of fandom who generally tend to be the ones in power (Jenkins, 2013). On the fourth level,

fans make and shape their own creative productions and practices in the form of fanart which can blur the lines between the actual creative producers and fans (Jenkins, 2013). On the final and fifth level, fans create and shape their own social community (Jenkins, 2013). These different levels show the variety of ways in which fans can express themselves in relation to their fandom. They are an indication of the importance of fans not only for in-group knowledge, but also for the extensive knowledge they can offer the companies and owners in charge of the object of their fandom. In this research this relates to whether and how fans of Efteling contribute through their fandom and communities to the theme park according to these five dimensions. In addition, a relationship might be present between these five levels of activity that fans can engage and the levels of immersion as discussed by Lukas (2013), where visitors of the park may completely adapt it into their lives. Specifically in relation to theme park fandom, Williams (2020) notes that the emotional connections fans have gained through previous visits and associations they have with the theme park are important as they can give insight as to why fans currently prefer specific aspects of the park. Williams (2020) also discusses how within theme park fandom having inside information and practices in relation to special experiences or happenings is vital for establishing differentiation within this culture.

In an interview in relation to the 20th anniversary of Jenkins' seminal text 'Textual Poachers', the scholar notes that the book should be read as if it captured a specific moment in time in relation to fandom and that nowadays "the word 'fan' in popular usage, is slippery and expansive enough to include a broad range of different kinds of relationships to media, from the highly individualistic to the highly social" (Jenkins, 2013, p. xiv). He says that one thing which should definitely be taken into account is the strong continuation in the form of tradition within these fan groups whereas other temporary participants as well as creatives and technology keeps changing at a fast pace (Jenkins, 2013). His notion of 'poaching' should refer to the meaning-making process endorsed by fans as well as their relation to the producers of the content (Jenkins, 2013).

The outcome of the previously mentioned study on immersiveness and experience of the visitors of WWOHP by Waysdorf and Reijnders (2016), also concluded that a new relationship was formed between fans of WWOHP and media producers as the park has become a place for hosting fan events where fans as well as producers and actors of the series are present, which according to the authors indicate that "Universal and Warner Brothers have successfully harnessed fandom" (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2016, p. 24). As within this research both Efteling fans and management are interviewed, as the outcome of the interviews in relation to their relationship will form a noteworthy aspect of the research.

2.3 The use of social media platforms for fan-related purposes

An important study which concerns the use of social media platforms by fans is by Bury (2016) concerning whether fans who used older social media platforms, for example Usenet or LiveJournal, to create a community are still active on newer and more current platforms such as

Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr. Through conducting interviews and the distribution of a survey, Bury was able to gather data regarding when these fandoms went online, the shifts of the used platforms, and fandom in relation to the rise of social media. Her research concludes that new social media platforms do not create the same sense of community as was established on older platforms whose features encouraged more in-depth discussions (Bury, 2016). This research relates well to the central question of this thesis regarding how social media platforms have changed the perceptions and behaviour towards Efteling as fans experienced the period before social media when they may have formed a community that underwent change during the rise of new platforms. Even though Bury's research only addresses the online communities, this thesis also looks into the offline communities of a theme park as well. The fact that fans of Efteling are able to not only meet online but also have a designated, local physical place to meet offline is what makes fandom in relationship to theme parks a unique topic for research.

Torres and Orłowski (2017) have researched the platform 'Meetup' which is an online network group especially designed for people to form groups online and be able to meet up offline. Their research explored how this particular platform was used by members specifically in relation to meet-ups at theme parks and noted how this platform could fill the gap when it comes to people who would like to visit theme parks with like-minded others who share the same interests (Torres & Orłowski, 2017). The outcome of the study indicated that the Meet-Up platform enables long-term relationships amongst the company and visitors. Furthermore, they state that advantages granted to passholders and loyal visitors should be sufficient, such as the discounts on food and drinks, as well as the offering of special events for annual passholders (Torres & Orłowski, 2017). Their research also indicates that there is a difference between how day visitors and passholders spend their days at the park. Whereas day visitors naturally visit less frequently and for entire days while not minding to wait in line to see the main attractions of the park, passholders are unwilling to wait in long lines for attractions, visit frequently but also for shorter time periods, and are more likely to visit a theme park only to attend an organized event (Torres & Orłowski, 2017). This relates to this research, similar to the study by Bury, in the sense that online spaces are created by and for people to form groups, however specifically in relation to theme parks, these groups are also able to meet offline. In this research the online and offline forming of fan groups is further explored in relation to Efteling specifically.

Williams (2020) notes that theme parks have gone through changes since the rise of digital media because they offer visitors the possibility to interact with the park while being away from the park. It can be enjoyable for fans and visitors of theme parks to be able to plan or participate in discussion before their theme park visit, and also after visiting (Williams, 2020). Williams (2020) also draws upon the notion of 'prosumption', first introduced by Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010), which holds that people both consume and produce, instead of only focussing on one of these aspects, and it has become especially apparent in times of social media. Williams (2020) applies prosumption to the

usage of social media, websites and blogs by fans in relation to theme parks. By this the author means that fans of theme parks who engage in and maintain social media platforms, websites, or blogs in relation to the park both consume and produce information in relation to the park, and more importantly they do so for free.

One salient topic Williams (2020) specifically mentions within theme park fandom online is the discussion or sharing of memories in relation to the disappearance of attractions. Although it might not be the case that attractions at Efteling become outdated due to their storyline, as often within this theme park the attractions are based on timeless fairy tales, the attractions might need to be replaced because of outdated systems or because they demand too much maintenance (Williams, 2020). The author draws upon the notion of 'ontological security', first introduced by Giddens (1984). According to Giddens (1984) ontological security refers to a sense of security relating to the predictable nature of keeping a routine as well as a sense of trust with people in one's environment. Williams (2020) argues that it is due to the strong emotional attachment fans feel regarding their object of fandom that when any changes appear, in this case the theme park, to their ontological security being threatened, leads to emotional responses expressed by fans (Williams, 2020). As the offline and online forming of fan groups in relation to Efteling is further explored in this research, it is noteworthy to see whether the important feature of discussing and sharing memories in relation to attractions is also evident in online Efteling fan groups.

3. Method

Mixed-methods are used in this research with an emphasis on the qualitative. According to Creswell (2014) mixed-methods should be considered a separate and relatively new approach in research as it originates from the 1980s. It assumes that qualitative and quantitative approaches each have their own strengths and weaknesses and attempt to combine the strengths of both (Creswell, 2014). The author addresses the difficulty of using mixed methods lies in the extensive workload and time-consuming task of analyzing both the obtained qualitative and quantitative data. In the case of this research mixed methods have been chosen because it is good for comparing different perspectives (Creswell, 2014). More specifically, the convergent parallel mixed method approach used a qualitative method and quantitative method for data collection after which the relationship between the collected data sets were studied to form the findings and conclusion (Creswell, 2014).

It was decided to use mixed-methods to address the different perspectives of Efteling management and the Efteling passholders and fans who use social media in relation to the park. This conducted by using interviews as the primary method, complemented by a survey and participant observation. As this research focuses on how the use of social media has changed the perception and behavior of Efteling fans, the focus on the qualitative aspects of this research is justified because “‘qualitative’ methods are used to answer questions about experience, meaning, and perspective, most often from the standpoint of the participant” (Hammarberg, Kirkman & de Lacey, 2016, p. 499). More specifically, the interviews focused on answering the sub-questions of how fans make use of social media in relation to Efteling and how the use of social media has changed the relationship between park management and fans. This was done by specifically asking questions regarding the use of online social media platforms before and after the rise of social media in terms of communicating with other fans and staff of Efteling. The survey was directed at online communities of Efteling passholders and fans to get an insight into how they use social media in relation to the park as well as the topic of place attachment and their demographics. Furthermore, participant observation created an insider perspective into events that Efteling passholders and fans attend. Using these three different methods enabled the triangulation of the findings as the data obtained by the different methods was compared and checked against each another.

3.1 Interviews

The interview participants were approached as early as January and the interviews were conducted throughout March. The target groups originally were annual passholders, fan group administrators and Efteling management. Interviewing passholders, fan group administrators and Efteling management enabled the collection of different perspectives of how Efteling serves as a place of attachment and the role social media plays in the relationship. However, after having conducted some relatively brief interviews of around 20 minutes with general fan annual passholders the data showed itself not to be rich enough in comparison to the interviews conducted with fan

group administrators that generally lasted of 60-70 minutes and were much more in-depth. Due to the scope of this thesis project, it was decided to exclude general fans from interviews and to continue with only fan group administrators and Efteling management to gain deeper insight into the use of social media and the relationship between the park, passholders and fans. The interview participants are briefly listed below, a complete overview can be found in Appendix A. Data on social media usage and place attachment by general passholders and fans was collected through the survey to complement the interviews.

- Interview 1: Moderator of website in relation to theme parks.
Participant 1, male.
- Interview 2: Efteling Facebook group administrators.
Participant 1, female; participant 2, female; participant 3, male.
- Interview 3: Efteling management employees.
Participant 1, male; participant 2, female.
- Interview 4: Administrator of one of the biggest and oldest Efteling fan groups.
Participant 1, male.
- Interview 5: Co-hosts of Efteling podcast.
Participant 1, male; participant 2, male.
- Interview 6: Administrator of Efteling fan group.
Participant 1, male.
- Interview 7: Administrator of Instagram account in relation to Efteling.
Participant 1, female.
- Interview 8: Co-host of Efteling and theme park podcast.
Participant 1, male.

Purposive sampling, a type of nonprobability sampling, was used to obtain participants for the interviews. When using this type of sampling participants are chosen based on whether the researcher deems them useful and representative (Babbie, 2010). In this research, specific Efteling fan group administrators were approached based on their use of social media in relation to Efteling to create a following or form a fan group. The majority of interview participants were approached through the email address stated on their own website/social media pages. One was contacted through the direct-messaging feature of their Instagram page, and another was approached during the participant observation of an event hosted by a fan group. In total, eight interviews were conducted and 476 minutes of interview data was collected. The interviews were conducted in Dutch, and two of the interviews were conducted with more than one fan administrator of the same group at the same time as was their preference. Also the interview with Efteling management employees was conducted with two employees concurrently. Therefore, out of the overall twelve interview

participants, four of the interview participants were female and eight were male. Their age-range was between 20 to 51 years old. All of them signed consent forms and thus gave permission for the interviews to be recorded and, if indicated on the form, for their names or the name of their fan group to be used. However, to ensure the anonymity of all interview participants only a brief description of their fan group or social media platform of activity in relation to Efteling is given.

Moreover, the participants agreed to meet at Efteling at a time of their convenience to conduct the interviews face-to-face in order for social cues to be present, thus making it easier to understand what was meant, as well as the fact that the interviews were conducted synchronously which often leads to more unforced and natural responses (Opdenakker, 2006). However, due to the unfortunate breakout of COVID-19, five of the interviews were conducted over the phone. Unfortunately, conducting interviews over the phone creates difficulty for the researcher to build an atmosphere and there is a loss of social cues (Opdenakker, 2006). Yet a benefit of this medium is that the researcher does not have to focus solemnly on the responses of the interviewees and can therefore focus on the questions and task ahead (Opdenakker, 2006). More importantly the safety of the interview participants and researcher was ensured by conducting the interviews over the phone.

Nonetheless, all of the interviews lasted between 45-70 minutes, tape-recorded and semi-structured meaning that questions were prepared as guide for the interview but the interview itself remained open enough for the input of the interviewee in a conversational style (Matthew & Ross, 2010). A separate list of questions was made for the two categories of interview participants which can be found in Appendix B. By using semi-structured interviews detailed information was obtained regarding the social world of the interview participants (Hermanowicz, 2002). The questions were categorized in such a manner that the interviews started with questions about the participants background and relation to Efteling in order to set the tone for the interview as they were relatively simple questions for the interviewee to answer. During the conduct of the semi-structured interviews, the role of the researcher was active and focused largely on probing in order to motivate the participant to share their ideas (Matthew & Ross, 2010). This way of structuring the interview was important as there needed to be enough space for the participant to share their own thoughts and ideas as to why Efteling is important to them and for what purposes they use social media in relation to the theme park without too much interference by the researcher. Probing was an important task for the interviewer in this regard as it helped the participant to tell their story. During the interview the researcher took notes in order to keep track of the important matters being discussed as well as noting down any important insights. It also helped in creating a pleasant interview atmosphere by paying close attention to what participants said.

The analysis of the data was done through the use of classic grounded theory, which, was first introduced by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 and uses the method of constant comparison which exists out of the following four phases: 1. “comparing incidents applicable to each category”; 2. “integrating categories and their properties”; 3. “delimiting the theory”; 4. “writing the theory”

(Glaser & Strauss, 2017, p. 105). More specifically, this took place according to the three coding phases of open-, axial- and selective coding (Babbie, 2010). During the phase of open coding any relevant passage to the research question was identified and coded, after which during the axial coding process the codes were sorted and refined, and during the final phase of selective coding the main and overarching codes – or themes, were established (Babbie, 2010). Furthermore, the technique of ‘memoing’, meaning to reflect with written notes, was applied when using the grounded theory as it helped to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between codes and their value to the research (Babbie, 2010). By using this approach the overarching notions in relation to the use of social media and sense of place attachment regarding the Efteling theme park by Efteling management, passholders and fans were identified. For an example of the coding frame, see Appendix C.

3.2 Survey

The survey, which served as an additional method to complement the interviews and participant observation, was a quantitative tool and contained both closed and open-ended questions. It was created to provide an insight into the viewpoint of Efteling fans and visitors to the park and was made available in both Dutch and English. Both versions of the survey can be found in Appendix D. As surveys are helpful to provide insight into factual data but also to find out more about people’s ideas and thoughts (Matthew & Ross, 2010), this method was suitable. The survey was created after several of the interviews had been conducted, and distributed at the end of March in multiple online Efteling fan groups. Thus, purposive sampling was used as these Facebook groups were approached because specific knowledge of members within that group was needed (Babbie, 2010).

The survey was partly influenced by the conducted interviews, however, to a great extent it was based on and adapted from the survey used in the research by McCarthy (2019) in relation to place attachment of the local visitors of Disneyland in Southern California because its usage was successful in the past, which increases the reliability of the adapted questions in this research. The questions were adapted in such a manner that they suited the Efteling theme park rather than Disneyland in Southern California. This means that some questions used by McCarthy (2019) that specifically related to Disneyland, such the role and influence of Disneyland social clubs, had to be taken out of the survey since this phenomenon is not manifest to the same degree at Efteling. On the other hand, social media platforms which are widely used in the Netherlands had to be taken into account as well as other cultural habits of Dutch visitors may have in relation to spending a day at Efteling. As this research focused on Efteling fan groups, a question was also added asking about the different fan groups that respondents follow and why. Furthermore, from the interviews it became evident that people distinguish between different terms for Efteling fans related to the degree of commitment someone has to the park, so a question was also added regarding this matter. Naturally,

the demographic questions in relation to the nationality of the respondent and regarding the province in which they live (which in McCarthy's 2019 research was delimited to Southern California) had to be changed as well. It was assumed that most respondents would be either Dutch or Belgian considering the numbers provided by van Es (2018), which state that in 2017, 80% of the visitors were Dutch, 15% came from Belgium and 5% came from other countries such as England, France or Germany. This is why when inquiring in regard to nationality the respondent could choose between 'Dutch', 'Belgian' or 'Other' specify. This was a contingent question after which the respondent could choose their country of residence, followed by the province in the Netherlands or Belgium in which they live.

Questions were similar to the survey that McCarthy (2019) formed in relation to the three dimensions of place attachment by Manzo and Perkins (2006), namely behavior, affective and cognitive sense of place attachment. An example is the question which held statements such as whether the visitor had ever cleaned up after others, or helped a park employee which relates well to the behavioral dimension of place attachment. The affective dimension can be found in questions and statements related to Efteling as a social place or when answering a statement regarding whether it would be difficult for the respondent to move further away from Efteling. The cognitive dimension can be found in relation to the age people started visiting and how frequently.

More specifically, the first section of the survey contained delimiters of whether the participant gave consent to participate in the survey and whether they were 18 years of age or above. The second section contained questions such as whether they have an Efteling subscription, from what age they started visiting, how often they visit, with whom, whether they are passholders at other theme parks, and what they do on a typical day at Efteling in order to get more insight into their history with and commitment to Efteling. The third section concerned questions regarding social media usage and participation on online platforms and offline fan-events of the respondent in relation to Efteling. The fourth section asked questions about the respondent's favorite aspects of the park and regarding Efteling as a social place. In the final section some demographic questions were asked. For an overview of the division of these questions according to these variables within the survey see Table 3.1. The types of questions included in the survey varied from yes/no questions, to open-ended questions, as well as the use of Likert scaled questions from 1-7 (never to very often, or strongly disagree to strongly agree) to understand how strongly respondents felt about certain issues.

Table 3.1: Overview of the variables in relation to the survey questions

Variables/ concepts	Delimitating questions	Commitment to Efteling	Social media/online platform usage and fandom	Place attachment	Demographics
Questions	Q.1,2	Q.3,4,5,6,7,8, 9,10,11	Q.12,13,14,15, 16,17,18,19,20 ,21,22,23	Q.24,25,26,27, 28,29	Q.30,31,32,33, 34,35,36

Reliability, which relates to whether the research would result in the same outcome when conducted again or if conducted by another researcher (Matthew & Ross, 2010), was ensured by asking all the survey participants the same questions, in the same order, with the same answer possibilities. In order to ensure that the survey measured what it is supposed to measure, construct validity was assured through using a survey which has proven to be successful in the past (Matthew & Ross, 2010). Face validity was ensured by asking clear questions which lead to definitive answers and the use of the Likert-scale (Matthew & Ross, 2010). Furthermore, the survey was pilot-tested on acquaintances to ensure avoiding any discrepancies.

The online survey was created in Qualtrics, made available in both Dutch and English to be accessible to as many respondents as possible, and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. It was distributed online at the end of March through sharing in four Efteling fan group communities on Facebook with the approval of the administrators. A reminder was sent out in one of the larger fan groups one week after the initial distribution and shared in two more online Facebook fan groups and once on the Twitter account of one of the aforementioned fan groups to ensure a satisfying number of respondents. The data collected by the survey contributed in creating a better understanding of the passholders and fans of Efteling, and was analyzed through the use of Excel, rather than SPSS, because the approach was primarily on qualitative and this survey was an additional method in order to create a better understanding of the background, attitudes, and practices of annual passholders and fans. The survey reached 198 respondents. However, after delimiting 69 respondents who abandoned the survey at various points, the total number of respondents was 129. From the survey respondents, 61.2% were female, 37.2% male, and 1.6% of the responses did not specify. An overview of the age groups of the survey respondents can be found in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Age groups of online survey respondents (N=129).

Age groups	Percentages
18-25	31.78%
26-35	30.23%
36-45	20.16%

46-55	7.75%
56-65	7.75%
66+	2.33%

Regarding nationality, 89.1% of the survey respondents were Dutch, 7.8% were Belgian, and 3.1% chose ‘other’. From the total amount of respondents, 2.3% indicated to either be English or have a dual Dutch-English nationality. Thus, the division of nationalities was somewhat in line with the numbers provided by van Es (2018), who stated that 2017 that 80% of Efteling visitors were Dutch, 15% came from Belgium and 5% came from other countries such as England, France or Germany. Out of all the survey respondents 80.6% were Efteling passholders, meaning that 19.4% of the respondents do not have an annual subscription to Efteling theme park. A cross-variable analysis was performed between female and males, number of visits per week, age, nationality, and sense of place attachment, but none of these variables presented any significant differentiation to foreground as a finding in the data analysis. The open questions from the survey were coded, similarly to the interview and participant observation, according to the three coding phases (Babbie, 2010).

3.3 Participant observation

Originally, besides conducting interviews and a survey, some participant observations was to be conducted to provide additional insights into fan events and possible forms of place attachment visitors and fans have to Efteling. Initially the idea was to attend the opening of the Max and Morritz rollercoaster which was to be an event especially organised for passholders in late March. However, due to COVID-19 the park had to shut down and only one participant observation was conducted in early March. Nonetheless, this one observation was a significant example in the study of a fan-event that provided a great deal of insight into the world of Efteling fans, and therefore remained in the research in spite of its relative short duration of only one and a half hours. The participant observation took place during the jubilee event of one of the oldest Efteling fan groups with the permission of the leader of the group. A gathering was held for club members at the Carrousel Theatre at Efteling with a presentation on how their fan group had evolved over the past twenty years. Participant observation has proven to be a useful, but most importantly, an additional method for this research as it provides detailed knowledge of a specific group of people (Matthew & Ross, 2010) and can create a more in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon (Babbie, 2010), in this case the passholders and fans of Efteling. As approximately 100 fans attended this gathering it was important to create a template for note taking upfront, which has been added in Appendix E, in order to be able to note down the specific aspects (Matthew & Ross, 2010). Similar to the interviews, the fields notes were analysed through the use of grounded theory. In doing so, it became evident how the field notes related to the main findings of the interviews and survey.

4. Results

4.1 Data Analysis

The interviews and participant observation were coded according to the three steps of open-, axial-, and selective coding (Babbie, 2010). Appendix C demonstrates an example of the coding process. After the data had been transcribed open codes were established regarding anything significant to the research. When one interview had been transcribed and analyzed, the findings were compared to the interviews as well as the participant observation, ensuring constant comparison between the data per grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). At first, any relevant passage in the text was highlighted with a color. These could be any relevant passage from the interviews, but also behavior of people, especially for the participant observation. During the coding process of the interviews and participant observation, 697 open codes were identified. During the next step, the axial coding, the data was reorganized and its actual meaning was established (Babbie, 2010). Some of the axial codes were frequently used and formed subcategories due to the constant comparison. After the axial coding, selective coding took place in which the researcher searched for overarching codes (Babbie, 2010). The input and views of the interviewees, as well as the interpretation of the researcher and findings from the literature all contributed in defining and naming these axial and selective codes. Once the selective codes were defined, some of the codes were merged to avoid any possible overlap between categories. In total, fourteen selective codes were established after the coding and merging process of the interviews and participant observation (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Overview of selective codes.

Place attachment.
Sense of community.
Online and offline interactions with fans.
Relationship with Efteling.
Use and transformation of (social) media usage in relation to Efteling.
Goals in relation to their fan group/page/account.
Characterization of Efteling fans.
Love of theme parks.
Social relationships through Efteling.
Fan group characteristics.
Advantages and disadvantages of specific social media platforms.
Founding of the fan group/website/podcast/account.
Perspective as an employee.

4.2 Content of the results section

The focus of this research was twofold, on the one hand is the concept of place attachment in relation to fans of Efteling. On the other is how fans of Efteling make use of social media in relation to the theme park and whether this usage has changed the relationship between Efteling fans and management. During the coding process, fourteen selective codes were found (Table 4.1). Within the results and discussion section all of the different sources of data were drawn upon to answer the research question and sub-questions. Therefore, the first section of this chapter discusses the findings in relation to place attachment according to the framework of Manzo and Perkins (2006) comprising cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, that is then followed by findings in the relation to the use of social media by management and fans.

4.3 Place attachment

4.3.1 Cognitive dimension

For Manzo and Perkins (2006), the cognitive dimension relates to “place identity and community identity” (p. 343). In general, this relates to how one identifies with, or identifies oneself through, a specific place on a cognitive level, as well as how the relationships connected to the place are experienced through social interactions (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). In relation to Efteling, this relates to how Efteling fans and visitors experience the theme park as a place and identify themselves through Efteling. However, it also addresses the relationships between fans and visitors through their social interactions.

Place attachment

‘Place attachment’ is one of the core codes of this research and is therefore be touched upon frequently throughout the different dimensions. In relation to the cognitive dimension, place attachment relates to how Efteling fans and visitors identify with the theme park on a cognitive level. From the interviews, it became evident that most participants had visited Efteling for the first time at a young age. Also, most survey respondents, 87.6%, had visited Efteling before the age of 13 and 65.1% even before turning six years old. During the interviews many participants told about the first time they had visited the Efteling theme park, which they often did with their parents, and how this formed the start of their connection to this place. As one of the interviewees exemplified:

“(…) Yes, I’ve actually visited Efteling from a young age onwards. And I believe I got my first Efteling subscription at the age of five. And I’ve actually always been very fond of Efteling, and on average, ever since, I’ve visited Efteling once or twice a week. At first, which is the way it goes, with your granddad, then with your parents, then with your brother, and at a certain

moment, from when I turned fourteen, I got caught up in the Efteling fan world online and in the park” (Interview 5, March 18, 2020).

The survey showed that out of the fans who are not passholders at Efteling (19.4% of the survey respondents), most, 92%, visit the park 1-10 days per year, whereas 16.3% of the passholders of Efteling visit 1-10 days per year, and 83.7% of the passholders visit at least once per month or more frequently (Figure 4.1). Also during the interviews, it became evident that the fan group moderators all have different frequencies of visiting the park with some visiting the park multiple times each week, whereas others visit the park once or twice each month or more often during some seasons than others. All of the interviewees had an Efteling subscription, except for two interviewees who are currently in between having a subscription because they are unable to renew the subscription due to COVID-19 (Interview 8, March 28, 2020), or will have more spare time later on in the year to visit the park (Interview 4, March 13, 2020). However, this does not make Efteling a less valuable place to them. Out of all survey respondents, 92.2% agreed with the statement ‘even if I visit Efteling frequently, I do not get tired of the park’ with a five or higher, indicating their fondness towards the theme park.

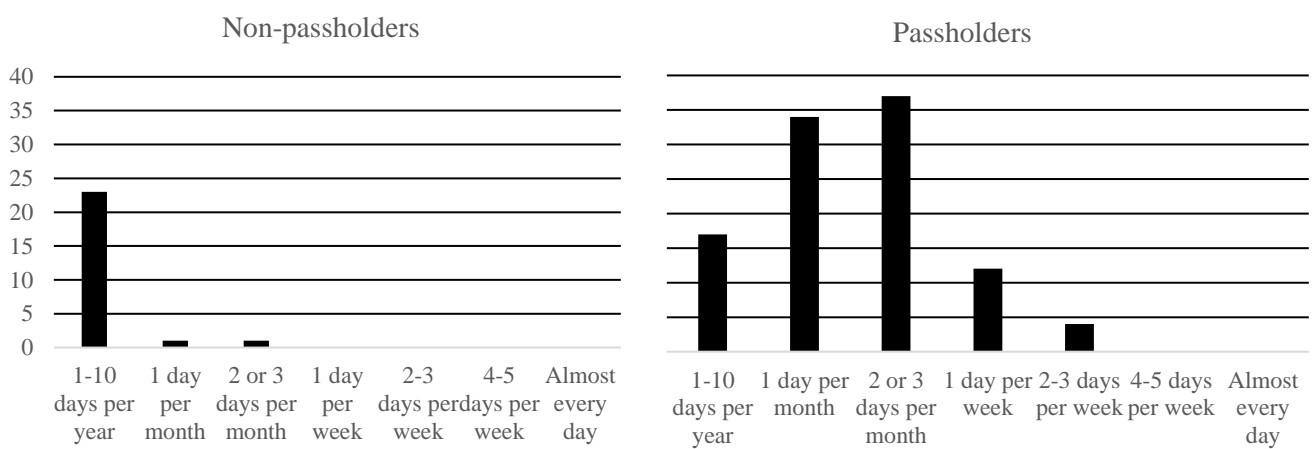


Figure 4.1: On average how many times do you visit the park in a year? (N=129)

It was also discussed in the interviews how, through various stages in life, the attachment to the park and the attachment to specific places within the park changed. One interview participant described that he first visited with his parents, then with friends, followed by friends who share the same interest in relation to theme parks, and is interested to see how this will change when becoming a parent himself (Interview 1, February 25, 2020). Throughout the different phases he was attached to different elements of the park. For example as a teenager he did not care for attractions like Droomvlucht, which is generally considered to be a family attraction, and only wanted to ride roller coasters. Another participant described how he lost interest in the park as a teenager due to other

hobbies, but the park was always present as he lived in the neighborhood and in his mid-twenties he started visiting again (Interview 5, March 18, 2020). Another interview participant mentioned how her daughter is now older and how she just recently started visiting the park without her. She discusses how different it is to experience the park on one's own in comparison to visiting with a child. Now the participant is enjoying and taking in all of the details of the theme park (Interview 2, March 8, 2020). This indicates that not only does the frequency in visits differ amongst fans of the park, but also the specific elements of the park they are interested in also can differ and change over time.

Characterization of Efteling fans

'Characterization of Efteling fans' is an important code that provides insight into the characteristics of Efteling fans on a cognitive level. The fan group moderators identify with the theme park by having made it a part of their daily lives. All of the interviewees started visiting the park from a young age and once they started or joined their fan group, page or account, it became a greater part of their lives. Five of the interviewees refer to their fan group or media platform as a hobby which takes a great deal of their time (Interview 4, March 13, 2020; Interview 5, March 18, 2020; Interview 6, March 23, 2020; Interview 7, March 27, 2020, Interview 8, March 28, 2020). One of the interviewees exemplified this by saying, "It's really just a hobby, and it is a very fun hobby which can really keep you occupied and which actually-, I barely have any spare time left now that I've come to think about it" (Interview 6, March 23, 2020). During two of the interviews respondents mentioned explicitly that they are unable to imagine not having an Efteling subscription in the future. As exemplified in one of the interviews, some already think about visiting the park at an older age: "No, I think we will have a subscription for life; yes, sometimes we say to each other 'soon the mobility scooter will come.'" (Interview 2, March 8, 2020). In this sense, the Efteling fans can be characterized as caring and attached to the theme park.

Sense of community

On a cognitive level, there are several ways in which fans of Efteling identify with the Efteling fan community. The fan group moderators share their fondness of the park with like-minded others through the use of social media and/or their fan groups. Most of them appreciate in-depth knowledge regarding Efteling which is an important characteristic of fans. As one of the interviewees notes in relation to the history of Efteling:

"Yes, yes, that's something I do search for at every theme park, to have some of that knowledge yes. I'm a type of person who really enjoys that as a way to pass time, to read about how it came to be and the choices which have been made. But Efteling is of course one large source in that regard" (Interview 6, March 23, 2020).

However, their followers, who like, comment, read, listen and/or watch their content, could be

considered less active as they do not conspicuously create content themselves, but are still a vital part of the Efteling community. Then there is the differentiation in the frequency of visits in relation to knowledge of the theme park. A difference is made between the people who visit Efteling more often and the ‘Truus from Delft’ people, a term used by three of the fan group moderators regarding day-visitors, who only visit the theme park once or twice each year and appreciate everything about Efteling as opposed to the fans who are more critical (Interview 1, February 25, 2020; Interview 6, March 23, 2020; Interview 8, March 28, 2020). As one of the interviewees exemplifies:

“In the fan world, I don’t know where it actually derives from, but what it comes down to is that at Efteling there are two kind of visitors, those are the ‘Truus from Delft’, and that’s just someone who visits Efteling once a year, or once every couple of years, and who just enjoys it. Who enjoys everything, doesn’t matter what it is, they’re fine with everything. You know, you also have the Efteling fan who is critical of everything” (Interview 8, March 28, 2020).

Overall, on a cognitive level, sharing a deep fondness regarding Efteling, above others who visit less frequently or have less in-depth knowledge, is a way that fans of Efteling identify with their community.

4.3.2 Affective dimension

For Manzo and Perkins (2006) the affective dimension relates to “one’s emotional relationship to the neighborhood or specific places within it” (p. 343). In contrast to the cognitive dimension which focusses on how people identify with, or identify themselves through, Efteling, this dimension relates to the emotional forms of place attachment to specific places and its sense of community (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). In relation to Efteling, this means that fans and visitors can experience forms of attachment to various places and aspects of the theme park, and also the experienced sense of community amongst them.

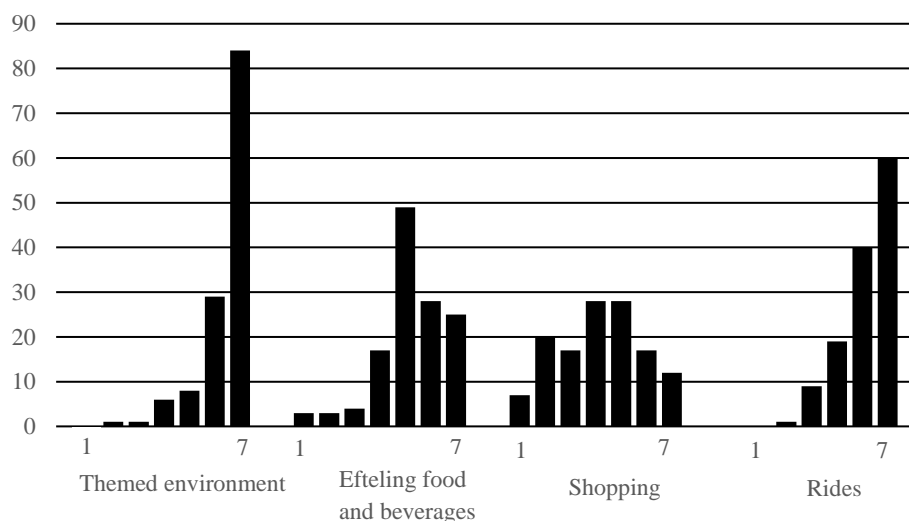
Place attachment

Place attachment within the affective dimension is an important selective code as it tells more about the emotional connections of Efteling fans to the theme park. Efteling as a place is described similarly as unique by almost all of the interviewees due to the park’s themes, authenticity, the ability it provides to get away from everyday life, and as a place to enjoy nature. One of the interviewees describes Efteling in the following way:

“Yes, Efteling is a place where as soon as you enter the gates, you enter a world where anything is possible. Besides the usual attractions, you can also just enjoy walking around in the forest. It is of course, in principle, a park to go for walks. (...). Efteling started out as a sports park and a park to go for walks, which grew per phase, and that’s something you see in the character of the park, it’s really just an attraction here, an attraction there. And partly because of the wooded

surroundings and the beautiful building style, of course originating from Anton Pieck, and in principle has created the foundation for the architecture of Efteling which has been expanded upon. It is a very unique atmosphere and experience which you cannot actually experience anywhere else in the world in the same manner. There are very few other-, in for example Europe there is no park that can compete with the level of Efteling” (Interview 6, March 23, 2020).

The themed environment of Efteling is noted as an important aspect of the theme park both in interviews and the survey. Indeed, 93.8% of the survey respondents scored the importance of the themed environment to the social atmosphere at Efteling with a five or higher, followed by rides, park employees and Efteling food and beverages (Figure 4.2). How the theming at Efteling is defined differs amongst interview participants with some of the interview participants even going as far to say that the theming of Efteling goes beyond merely ‘theming’, it should rather be seen as an integrated part of the park (Interview 5, March 18, 2020). Another interviewee explains that the theming can be found in the details and the lovely feel it has, as if it has been around for years (Interview 1, March 25, 2020). It creates a specific atmosphere which the interviewees deem is hard for other theme parks to compete with. One interview participant provides a detailed explanation of how he believes the themes of Efteling such as Tirol, mines, Incas, The Flying Dutchmen, the fairy-tales and the legends, differ much from more common, generic themes such as ‘Jungle’ and ‘The Wild West’ (Interview 8, March 28, 2020). Throughout the interviews, this particular Efteling style is defined by interviewees as uniquely style from the drawings of Anton Pieck (Interview 1, February 25, 2020; Interview 6, March 23, 2020), which appears timeless (Interview 1, February 25, 2020), and is classy and authentic through the use of materials such as stone, wood and metal which makes it ‘real’ (Interview 5, March 18, 2020).



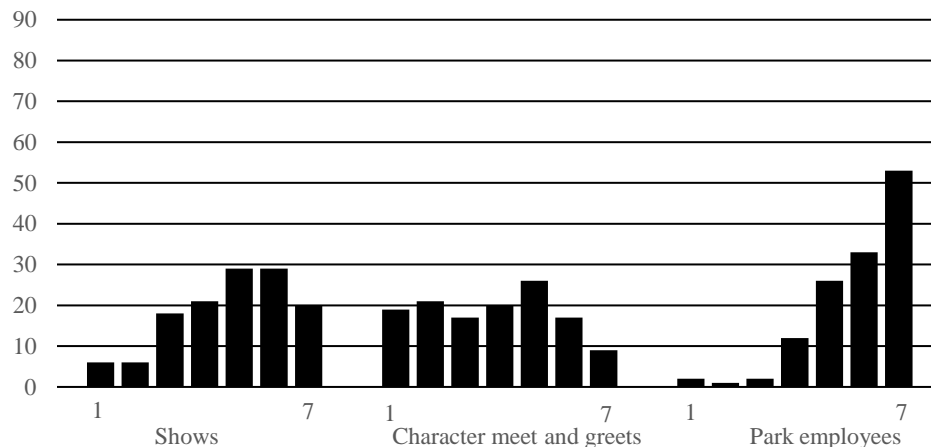


Figure 4.2: For the social atmosphere at Efteling, how important are each of the following (1. Unimportant – 7. Very important)? (N=129)

Thus, the Efteling style is of utmost importance and appears to be the element of Efteling which sets it apart from other theme parks. New attractions built in this style, such as ‘De Zes Zwanen’ (The Six Swans) are praised (Interview 1, February 25, 2020; Interview 8, March 28, 2020). Yet there also seems to be the rise of a ‘new’ Efteling style which the attraction ‘Symbolica’ exemplifies, and is described as being a little ‘louder’ and ‘brighter’ than the original style created by Anton Pieck (Interview 1, February 25, 2020). Whereas theming at Efteling was one of the most frequently mentioned assets of the park, the environment of the park as well as the kindness of the employees were often mentioned by the fan group moderators. The latter is also recognized by the survey respondents as 86.8% thought the personnel to be of importance for the social atmosphere at Efteling with a score of 5 or higher (Figure 4.2). Staff members are referred to as friendly, always in for a chat and wanting to provide a pleasant day for the visitor (Interview 2, March 8, 2020). One of the interviewees provides an inside perspective of working at Efteling, while also having a fan account in relation to the park, and the interviewee notes that when working they try to make the day of the visitor extra special by, for example, serving some extra whipped cream and cookies or giving a gift to a child for a birthday (Interview 7, March 27, 2020). Some of the interview participants reflected on the fact Efteling management will always ask how you are doing after incidents at the park (Interview 2, March 8, 2020).

In relation to theming, anything that goes against the specific Efteling style is looked at critically by the interviewed fan group moderators, such as the recently built and opened rollercoaster Max and Morritz. At the time of the interview, many fan group moderators were still careful to pass final judgment on the rollercoaster, but deemed the preview design as too colorful (Interview 1, February 25, 2020), unsuitable to the Efteling style and subtlety (Interview 5, March 25, 2020). Also

the narrative is scrutinized as the story the attraction is based on ends with two boys disappearing into the grain mill, which is not a joyful outcome (Interview 2, March 8, 2020). Yet it is mentioned that it matches the German style of the particular Efteling square where it is built (Interview 2, March 8, 2020). In addition, it is noted as being aimed at a younger target audience than most Efteling fans find themselves (Interview 1, February 25, 2020). Some deem the family coaster a possible mistake by Efteling (Interview 5, March 25, 2020). What stands out from the interview data is that most participants carefully weigh their own opinion against other perspectives as the fan group moderators try to understand why certain decisions within the park are made. Regardless, they do give their opinion, but it is often balanced and the matter at hand is looked at from various angles. In return, the employees of Efteling management notice this criticism in relation to the look of the Max and Morritz attraction, but also link it to the disappearance of the previous attraction 'De Bobbaan', also known as 'Bobslee' and 'Bob', which was an attraction many Efteling fans and passholders felt strongly positive about (Interview 3, March 9, 2020). The management employees believe that if the attraction had been built somewhere else in the park, Max and Morritz might have been received differently. The removal of Bob is frequently reflected upon throughout the interviews and the disappearance of an attraction can have an impact on place attachment as a park element which has been around for a long time, for some fans since childhood, is removed. Whereas during two of the interviews a neutral stand was taken towards its removal due to the high level of maintenance it required, during one interview it became evident that some are more emotional and do not understand its removal or replacement. One interviewee expressed that the general feeling amongst fans at first was anger which later turned to emotional, which shows how much fans care (Interview 8, March 28, 2020). Also one of the employees of Efteling management noted that the removal of Bob was in the top five online posts of that year and many emotional memories were shared by fans in relation to the attraction (Interview 3, March 9, 2020). This is in line with previous research by Williams (2020), which indicated that the discussion or sharing of memories in the disappearance of attractions is one particularly salient topic in online theme park fandom. These strong feelings of attachment to a particular place or element of the theme park is a typical example of place attachment.

Efteling as a place to escape from the real world is a recurrent theme in the interviews. This can be linked to what Cross and Walton (2015) wrote about how American amusement parks at Coney Island and the English park Blackpool at the beginning of the twentieth century served as spaces for immersion to offer relaxation and distraction, but also the notion of 'immersive worlds' (Lukas, 2013) of which theme parks are excellent examples as they are spaces designed to get lost in. In six of the interviews, the participants discussed how the park can serve as a place for fans of Efteling to get away from every day struggles and immerse themselves in this other world (Interview 2, March 8, 2020; Interview 4, March 13, 2020, Interview 5, March 18, 2020; Interview 6, March 23, 2020; Interview 7. March 27, 2020; Interview 8, March 28, 2020). This is described by one of the

interviewees the following way:

“To me Efteling is a place where you can go to completely forget about reality. Literally, let’s say the world you live in everyday, work, I don’t know, going home, that-that pat-, or how would you call it? The pattern, the same thing over and over again. When you visit Efteling then you’re truly somewhere else, then you forget about all of your worries and all of the other daily things you think about, and then you’re truly, for a moment in time, you’re in a magical world, let’s say, that’s what it is to me” (Interview 7, March 27, 2020).

In fact, two of the interviewees said that the park served as a place to escape and find peace when dealing with personal circumstances such as the illness or loss of a family member. Thus, the park can serve as a place to escape personal circumstances, to avoid reality or the struggles of everyday life and to immerse oneself in another world. Lukas (2013) noted that for ‘immersive worlds’ to be effective, storytelling needs to be incorporated into every detail of the park, a captivating atmosphere should be present, a consistent mood for visitors should be applied and cohesive theming throughout the space should be provided. Particularly the storytelling, detailed theming, authenticity and conviviality of the employees are assets of Efteling according to the interviewees and explain why Efteling is a good place for immersion.

Another important aspect of place attachment is the wish to be in close proximity to that special place. However, many of the fan group moderators do not live in near proximity of Efteling and the travelling distance is unimportant to them. One of the fan group moderators recalled in his interview that even though some of the people he moderates or works with in relation to the group live in Noord-Brabant, many also come from all over the country, from Zeeland to Groningen (Interview 4, March 13, 2020). Also in the survey it became evident that living in close proximity to the theme park is not an important factor for fans of the theme park. When being presented with the following statement: ‘It would be hard to move away from Efteling and not being able to visit as often’, only 17.1% strongly agreed, 44.2% agreed with a five or higher, meaning that 55.8% of the respondents disagreed with a four or lower (Figure 4.3). From the survey respondents the majority of the Dutch respondents, 51.7% live in Brabant, which means that the other 48.3% are from other provinces. In addition, from the overall amount of survey respondents 9.3% are Belgian. This reflects how one of the management employees of Efteling estimated that most passholders would be from the region, although, quite some do not mind to travel (Interview 3, March 9, 2020).

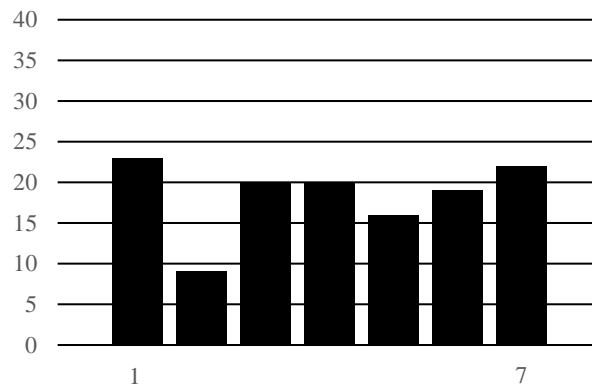


Figure 4.3: It would be very hard for me to move far away from Efteling and not be able to visit as often. (1. Strongly disagree – 7. Strongly agree) (N=129)

In comparison to the research by McCarthy (2019) in relation to place attachment of passholders of Disneyland California, which showed that 29.7% strongly agreed and 54.9% agreed with a five or higher, these outcomes are considerably lower. Yet, this can be explained by the size of the Southern California region in comparison to the size of the Netherlands as a country and the corresponding travelling distance and level of car traffic. In comparison, it can take less time for someone living on the other side of the Netherlands to travel to Efteling as it would for people in Southern California to travel to Disneyland even when living in the region. Thus it seems that travelling distance for fans of Efteling is a less important matter.

Characterization of Efteling fans

‘Characterization of Efteling fans’ is an important code that provides insight into the characteristics of Efteling fans. When interview participants were asked to define Efteling fans, the description would always be that they are dedicated, but most of all, critical. This sense of being critical could both be positive and negative. Positive in the sense that fans notice small things at the park which a day visitor would barely notice and which Efteling could benefit from a change. Negative in the sense that every detail of the park is often scrutinized and the criticism can be taken to a far degree or gone into a great deal of detail. Examples given were that if Efteling were to color a specific wall blue, the fans might argue that green would have been better (Interview 4, March 13, 2020), as well as every loose stone or indication of deferred maintenance (Interview 3, March 9, 2020). This is in line with what Jenkins notes in relation to fans, namely: “a lot of fans carry a large amount of intellectual capital around with them. They are very good critics; they are very good theorists.” (2006, p. 13). In fact, one of the most prominent aspects of the interviewees as fans of Efteling was that they appreciate in-depth information in relation to the theme park. As they know the park well, it is particularly the background and inside information fans that appreciate. One interviewee elaborately discussed his fondness of the Eftepedia website, which is similar to a Wikipedia for Efteling (Interview 6, March 23, 2020). His fondness in relation to the park began by

coming across the background story of the attraction Spookslot, which interested him to such an extent that he kept reading more into the stories behind the rest of the park, and now he proudly says that he thinks he has read almost every page of Eftedia (Interview 6, March 23, 2020). This extensive knowledge he likes to put to use together with the other moderators of their shared fan group in a pub quiz organized by one of the oldest and largest Efteling fan groups (Interview 6, March 23, 2020).

Another example is that of the two podcasters who did small-scale research amongst their listeners which indicated that they are known for their in-depth approach and ability to look at matters from different angles (Interview 5, March 18, 2020). This was also mentioned by respondents in the survey of this research and other interviewees. They take on an investigative journalistic approach for some of their episodes such as their ‘history’ episode, which they thoroughly prepared and researched, thus enabling them to present new information to their followers (Interview 5, March 18, 2020). As one of the fan group moderators explained in his own words that they “really do some research beforehand, and yes if you’re able to uncover an entire new history which has actually never been noted down anywhere else before, and you can offer this to your listeners, yes that’s something we are really proud of” (Interview 5, March 18, 2020).

The interviewed fan group moderators clearly show signs of the five levels of activity fans engage in (Jenkins, 2013). The first level reflects how closely the fans follow and discuss the object of their fandom. This relates to the in-depth information the fan group moderators appreciate in relation to the park. However, the mediums through which they discuss Efteling have changed over time (as discussed in a separate section below). The second level relates to the amount of detail fans put into their criticism regarding their fandom (Jenkins, 2013). As became apparent during the interviews, criticism and devotion are two keywords used when describing fans of Efteling. On the third level, fans are spokespersons as they talk back through their criticism to the producers of their fandom object who generally tend to be the ones in power (Jenkins, 2013). This third level is especially portrayed by fan group moderators as they are invited to join in discussion sessions with Efteling management to let their voices and opinions in relation to the theme park be heard. On the fourth level, fans make and shape their own creative productions and practices in the form of fanart which can blur the lines between the actual creative producers and fans (Jenkins, 2013). This fourth level becomes especially apparent in an example given in one of the interviews when the fan group moderator discussed the documentaries his fan group makes in relation to the theme park and its well-known employees and how these come close in production values to Efteling’s own media (Interview 4, March 13, 2020). On the final and fifth level, fans create and shape their own social community (Jenkins, 2013), which is also exemplified as a frequently mentioned aspect and goal of the interviewed fan group moderators. The wish to go beyond simply the social media usage and to form an actual community was expressed by several of the interview participants. As one of the fan group moderators of a podcast notes:

“It may sound a little dull, or perhaps even a bit ‘wrong’, but we are really trying to build a community and try to connect people to our fan group. At the core we remain a podcast but we do try to launch a product, a brand, an experience, yes. Put a name on it. But we do try to sort of build a community with our active listeners ...” (Interview 5, March 18, 2020).

Thus, the fan group moderators are also on the fifth and final level of immersion as described by Lukas (2013), as they have entirely incorporated Efteling into their lives.

Another characteristic of Efteling fans that showed itself during the interviews was the in-group jargon and terms used by Efteling fans. This includes the aforementioned term ‘Truus from Delft’, which is a term used for people who only visit Efteling once a year and who like almost everything within the park, and thus not as critical as fans. Then there is the difference between a ‘Eftelingliefhebber’ (someone who is fond of Efteling) and ‘an Efteling fan’ (Interview 1, February 25, 2020; Interview 5, March 18, 2020). Fan group moderators noted that being fond of Efteling simply sounds kinder and more ‘normal’ than ‘fan’ which is often associated with people who believe they are entitled to something or fans at pop concerts (Interview 5, March 18, 2020). However, they also believe that every ‘liefhebber’ is a ‘fan’ and every ‘fan’ is a ‘liefhebber’ (Interview 5, March 18, 2020). As became evident from the survey results, most respondents also had a slight favor for the term ‘Efteling liefhebber’ (61.2%), followed by the term ‘Efteling fan’ (24%), a theme park fan (12.4%), and an occasional day visitor (1.55%) (Figure 4.4).

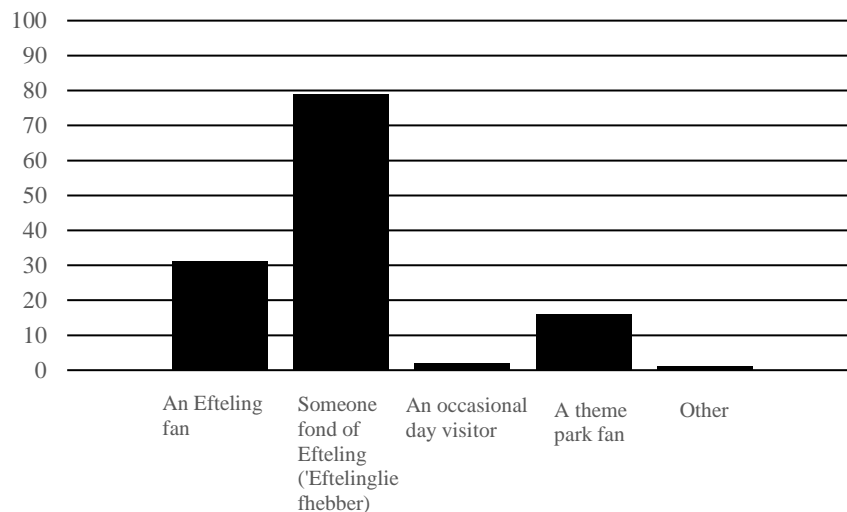


Figure 4.4: Which of the following description of Efteling visitors would be most applicable to you? (N=129).

Love of theme parks

‘Love of theme parks’ is an important code that shows that some Efteling fans also take interest in other theme parks and the theme park world in general. What became evident is that even though Efteling is considered to be the ‘main’ or ‘home’ park, many of the interviewees also showed a general fondness and interest in other theme parks. Three of the interviewees are passholders at

other theme parks. Often when providing answers, comparisons were made between other amusement or theme parks and Efteling. Strong points of other parks which were mentioned include the wide variety of collector pins at Disneyland Paris (Interview 6, March 23, 2020), the focus Disneyland has on their fans with special hosted events (Interview 8, March 28, 2020), the water attractions at Toverland and Moviepark, Europa-park for attractions and cleanliness (Interview 2, March 8, 2020), as well as its offerings in restaurants and catering (Interview 4, March 13, 2020), and the use of in-park decorations at Phantasialand (Interview 2, March 8, 2020). Whereas moderators of one fan group deem the prices at Efteling to have become ‘Disney-like’ (i.e. too high) and would like to see more discounts for passholders (Interview 2, March 8, 2020), another interviewee believes Efteling does not even come close to the prices other theme parks set (Interview 8, March 28, 2020). Previous research by Torres & Orłowski (2017) has indicated that advantages granted to passholders, such as discounts on food and drinks, should be sufficiently generous and therefore in line with the desire expressed by Efteling fans of receiving more discounts.

However, the seemingly ersatz American atmosphere, lack of history, and over-designed nature of Disneyland Paris from the beginning as well its level of maintenance were deemed negative in comparison to the organic growth of Efteling, its history and location in widespread nature (Interview 6, March 23, 2020). One interviewee in particular notes how Efteling generally leaves the older attractions and places, ‘the old gems’, intact (except the bobsleds) and that they still form actual parts of the park, which he appreciates, whereas in comparison Main Street in Disneyland has been revamped several times (Interview 8, March 28, 2020). Many of the interviewees have noted that they appreciate it when Efteling repairs or maintains older attractions and they see this as a specific asset of the park. One of the interviewees mentions: “And I believe, as long as you show as a park that you appreciate the older things by maintaining or reviving them, I find that just as important as building new attractions” (Interview 1, February 25, 2020).

Another asset mentioned is the large fanbase that Efteling has in comparison to other Dutch theme parks (Interview 8, March 28, 2020). During two interviews there was talk of the desire for a new realm called to be built called ‘Uitrijk’ (‘Out realm’), which would be an entertainment area after opening hours and for guests staying at the hotel or holiday resorts of Efteling. In this sense Efteling would become more of a multi-day resort and offer entertainment after closing hours rather than limit entertainment for guests to the opening hours of the theme park (Interview 5, March 18, 2020; Interview 6, March 23, 2020). One of the interviewees made the comparison between the Disney Village outside the gates of the Disneyland Paris parks and the possibility of an Uitrijk (Interview 6, March 23, 2020).

Some of the fan group moderators have also collaborated with or worked for other theme parks. One interviewee has made pictures that are used on the webpage of Toverland theme park (Interview 1, February 25, 2020), and one of the oldest fan groups is known for also making videos for Europa-Park (Interview 4, March 13, 2020). The fan group founder related during his interview

that the followers of the group did not appreciate this step at first. However, during their jubilee-event most people laughed when they looked back at this step the group took (Interview 4, March 18, 2020; Participant Observation, March 1, 2020). Yet both interview participants, and others, mention that they like or would like to work more with Efteling and interview participants who have done so, and, are proud to mention it. For example, two podcasters reflect upon how they are able to interview people behind the scenes at Efteling and do reporting at the park with support by Efteling management (Interview 5, March 18, 2020). Another mentions how they make video's more frequently with Europa-Park, but would like to intensify this endeavor with Efteling because the times they did work together were great (Interview 4, March 13, 2020). In relation to photography, one of the fan group moderators notes: "Yes, it would be my goal, or dream perhaps, to one day do something for Efteling or other theme parks" (Interview 1, February 25, 2020).

4.3.3 Behavioral dimension

According to Manzo and Perkins (2006) the behavioral dimension relates to "participation in community planning, preservation, and development efforts" (p. 343). In general, this relates to how people actively engage with a specific place and community by taking action through protection, maintenance, or the planning of its future (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). In relation to theme parks and Efteling, this can relate to various things, such as participating in the fan community, engaging in discussion about the theme park, in-park behavior to preserve the park, expressing hopes, and undertaking action for the future of the theme park.

Online and offline interactions with fans

'Online and offline interactions with fans' is an important selective code as it identifies various forms of interactions between Efteling fans. The participation within the community can be expressed through meet-ups within fan groups. In relation to offline events organized by the fan group moderators it was often noted that these were not the main focus of the group, but fun additional gatherings. Most often these events take place when there is something to celebrate for a fan group such as a jubilee event or having reached a certain amount of episodes or podcasts (Interview 4, March 13, 2020; Interview 5, March 18, 2020; Interview 7, March 27, 2020; Interview 8, March 28, 2020). Examples of such gatherings are pub quizzes, hosting offline podcasts for followers to attend or meet-and-greets. One participant notes that their fan group is able to host one event each year at Efteling with the help of management since budget-wise these are difficult events to organize at the theme park itself. This interviewee notes how such events can be important and how they as a fan group are able to be the bridge between the online and offline fandom, which remains of importance, for Efteling fans (Interview 4, March 13, 2020).

Sense of community

‘Sense of community’ is an important selective code within the behavioral dimension as it touches upon the way Efteling fans interact with one another. When asked how to describe the sense of community during such events one interviewee said: “for the fan-events it’s just good because everyone just feels, you know, and especially during a pub quiz, the atmosphere is really fantastic” (Interview 4, March 13, 2020). The organizing of such fan events are also an indication of the high level of dedication these fan groups have towards Efteling, which was previously mentioned as a characteristic of the fans. It takes three to four people around 2-3 months to make a pub quiz (Interview 4, March 13, 2020), and one larger charity event the fan group hosted took one and a half years to prepare (Participant Observation, March 1, 2020). Despite the fact that many hours are put into these fan groups and social media accounts, to all of the interviewees it remains a hobby often pursued besides having a part or full-time job.

When asked during the interviews how the interviewees would describe the sense of community amongst Efteling fans and fan group moderators the response was positive. Often it was indicated that the Efteling fan community is one large group who share a passion for the park, existing out of many smaller groups within which members know each other better. This also became evident during the jubilee-event of one of the biggest and oldest Efteling fan groups as the people who were waiting outside for the event to start would gather in smaller groups of people whom they actually knew better and would chat with (Participant Observation, March 1, 2020).

However, there is also a sense of community to be found amongst fan group members who might not even have met in real life. For example, during one interview it was reflected upon how several members within a fan group are supported by others. For example, one girl who is shy decided to draw in the park and received praise for it from other fan group members online, and some have even approached her while drawing at the park (Interview 2, March 18, 2020). Another example is engaging in a chat while sitting on a terrace with an elderly man who shared that he used to visit with his wife who recently passed away, and still visits on his own from time to time (Interview 2, March 18, 2020).

Also, throughout the interviews, it became evident that the ambiance between fan group moderators is positive, supportive, and that there is enough space for everyone to share their passion in relation to the theme park. This mutual support is often shown by appearing in each other’s videos or podcasts, stepping in at press events when one is ill (Interview 5, March 18, 2020), or by joining organized offline events such as the pub quiz (Participant Observation, March 1, 2020).

As for participation, involvement and preservation of the park by Efteling fans in general, the survey showed that 98.3% of the respondents have helped another visitor with park directions, providing information and/or taking a photo, 49.6% have found lost property and returned it to an employee, 28.2% have assisted an employee in the park, and 6% have bought a gift for an employee who was not a friend or relative (Figure 4.5). This indicates a social involvement of fans with the

park. In addition, 56.4% have helped clean the park by picking up trash which did not belong to them and put it in a trash bin, indicating a protective attitude in relation to preservation of the park (Figure 4.5).

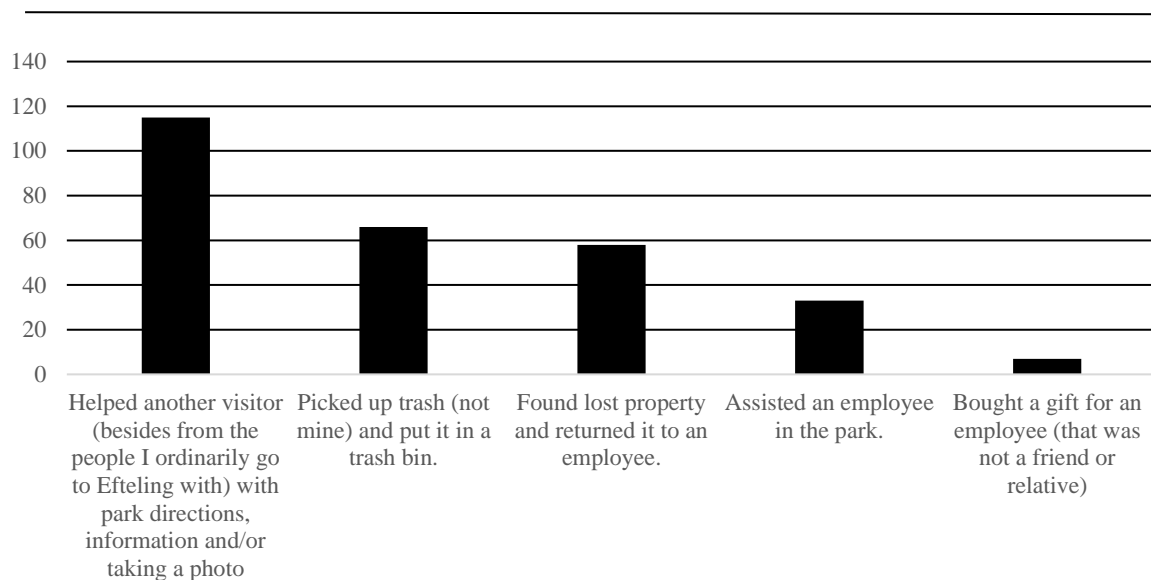


Figure 4.5: Have you ever done the following while at Efteling? (N=117)

Social relationships through Efteling

‘Social relationships through Efteling’ is an important selective code which provides insight into the relationships respondents gained through the theme park. Six out of the seven conducted interviews were with interviewees who own and/or run their fan group with one or several partners. Many of the interview participants became friends through starting their fan group together or joining one, while not having known each other a long time beforehand (Interview 1, February 25, 2020; Interview 2, March 8, 2020; Interview 5, March 18, 2020; Interview 8, March 28, 2020). This could be seen as a sign of how a shared mutual interest in a fandom object brings people closer together. All of the interview participants have met friends or other fans through Efteling. These encounters varied from meetings with like-minded others on their way to or at the park, through social media, while taking pictures at the park, through interactions with other fan group moderators, and attending events organized by fan groups. Many of the fan group moderators’ social circles have grown extensively since becoming active in the Efteling fan world. As one of the interviewees who has also worked at Efteling in the past said: “I, yes, I know all of my current friends and acquaintances through the Efteling fan world or as former colleagues who have also worked at Efteling” (Interview 5, March 18, 2020).

Place attachment

The selective code of ‘place attachment’ refers within the behavioral dimension to the active engagement of respondents with Efteling. In the survey, when asked what location at Efteling is one’s favorite for being social with family and/or friends, a multitude of different answers were provided. These could be divided into the categories of attractions, restaurants, squares, seating areas, and also entire Efteling realms. A frequently mentioned attraction is Droomvlucht, for areas it is Sprookjesbos (Fairy-tale forest) and Station de Oost, restaurants include Polle’s Keuken, and Het Witte Paard, favorite squares which are frequently mentioned are Herautenplein and the square at Station de Oost, and realms are Marerijk (Mare realm) and Ruigrijk (Tough realm), but also more general spaces such as walks between attractions or any terrace at Efteling. Furthermore, the survey showed that respondents most frequently visit the park with family members as 70.5% scored this response with a 5 or higher, followed by friends from school, work or the neighborhood where 38% of the respondents scored it a 5 or higher. However, despite the fact that the park is most often visited with family or friends, 17.8% scored attending the theme park on their own with a 5 or higher (Figure 4.6).

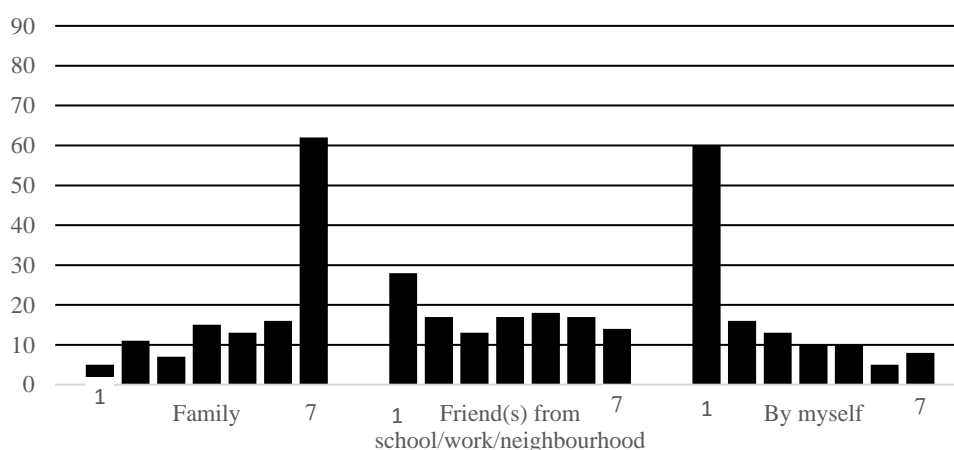


Figure 4.6: Do you typically spend a day at Efteling with (1. Never – 7 Very often)?

(Family N=129, Friends(s) from school/work neighbourhood N=124, By myself N=122).

When asked how the fan group moderators would describe a typical day at Efteling, in reply it was often asked whether their answer should be given from a passholder or day visitor perspective as their answers would differ accordingly. From the perspective of a passholder there would be less strain when visiting the park with the idea in mind that one can always return, whereas a day visitor would feel the pressure to see everything. Instead, depending on the weather, the company, or the mood, a passholder could undertake many different activities. If there are long lines for attractions, they would rather sit on a terrace and have a drink, or depending on the season they choose whether to go on rides, watch the entertainment, or enjoy nature and have a drink. As one of the interviewees noted:

“When I have a subscription, I would definitely go on attractions. But if for example the waiting line would be longer than half an hour I’m like, you know, then I will go to the terrace and just enjoy spending a day at Efteling with friends. Yes! So for me, with a subscription, it really takes away, you know, it’s more relaxed than when you buy a ticket ‘Oh, I need to go on all attractions because I need to get my money’s worth.” (Interview 4, March 13, 2020).

Another interviewee also notes that rather than visiting entire days, he only visits for parts of the day (Interview 8, March 28, 2020). This is in line with previous research by Torres and Orłowski (2017), which indicated that passholders indeed are more likely to visit a theme park for shorter periods of time or only to attend an organized event and that they are less likely to wait in long lines as opposed to day visitors.

Also 86.8% of the survey respondents when asked how likely they were to do the following: ‘Just enjoy walking around the park and being in the park, and going on few rides if any’, scored with a five or higher which is in line with the idea that passholders do not feel a need to go on all the rides as they are able to return another time. Also ‘having a drink on the terrace’, which is a typically Dutch and more relaxed way of spending time, was scored by 60.9 % with a 5 or higher, followed by ‘go on as many rides as possible’, and ‘post to my social media account(s) about my Efteling visit’ (Figure 4.7). While waiting in line for an attraction at Efteling, 93.8% of the survey respondents scored chatting with the people I went to Efteling with a 5 or higher, and 34.1% scored chatting with other visitors besides the people they ordinarily go to Efteling with a five or higher, which thus reflects the social aspect of visiting theme parks (Figure 4.8). Two of the interviewees also mentioned how they like to practice their hobby of photography at Efteling which shows that the theme park also is a place to pursue other interests (Interview 1, February 25, 2020; Interview 4, March 13, 2020).

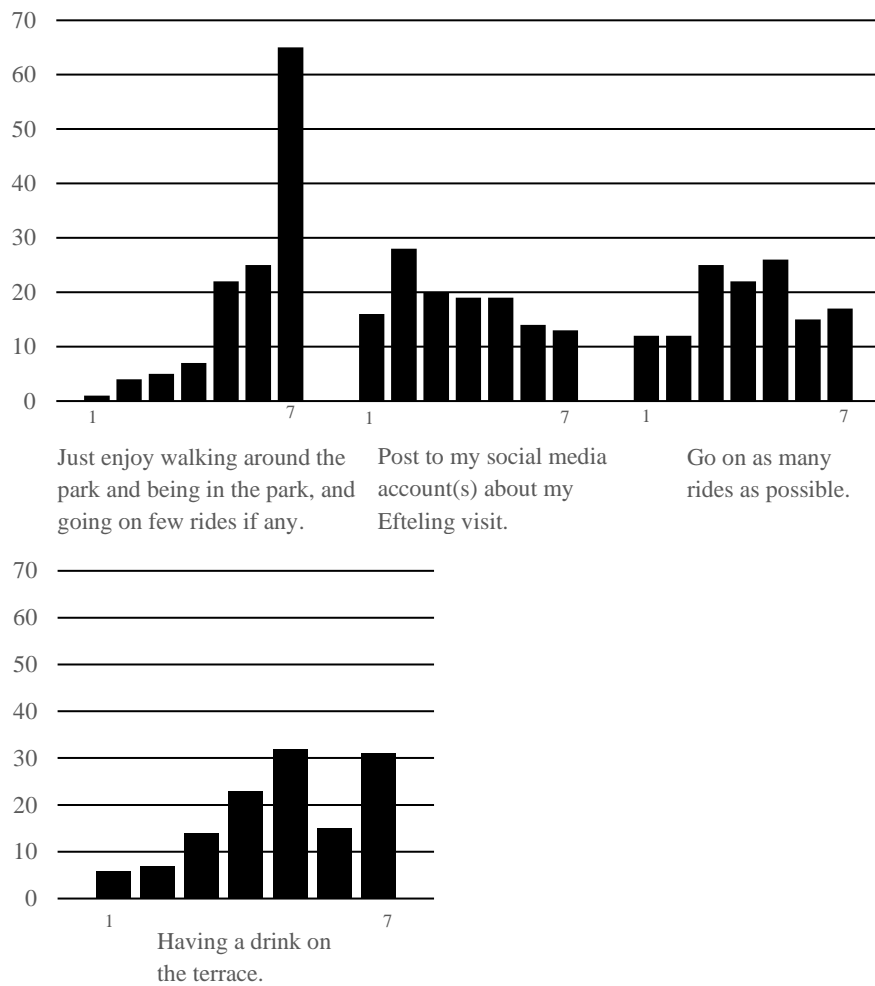


Figure 4.7: On a typical day, how likely are you to do the following? (1. Never – 7 Very often)? ('Just enjoy..'/'Post to my...'/ 'Go on as many...' N=129, 'Having a drink...' N=128).

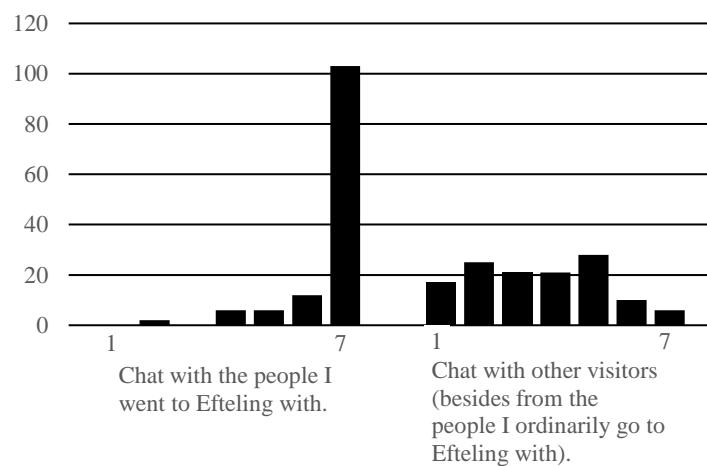


Figure 4.8: While you are in line for an attraction at Efteling, how likely are you to do the following? ('Chat with the people...' N=129, 'Chat with other visitors' N=128).

During six of the interviews, the fan group moderators specified at one point to have collected or still collect souvenirs, pins, or items from Efteling or other theme parks. A frequently mentioned reason to stop collecting items is the lack of space to put the items away or the amount of money it costs. Therefore, as two of the interviewees have mentioned, they now selectively collect items (Interview 1, February 25, 2020; Interview 6, March 23, 2020). One of the interviewees elaborately told about his pin collection and how the releasing of pins used to be done more actively by Efteling in the past, though now pins are only released during special events or occasions (Interview 6, March 23, 2020). The collection of items can be seen as a form of place attachment as it lets the collector identify with the place it was purchased at or belongs to. As was said during the interviews, the items are saved because of their memories. As the interviewees said themselves on their habit of collecting items: “Yes, because I like it or because I like the memory behind it” (Interview 1, February 25, 2020) and:

“Eh, I like to collect and I have filled-up display cabinets, but it’s so you can just, you can walk around and that you’re actually walking around in your memories. You go through the display cabinet and you think ‘Oh yes, that was then, and that was then, and oh I bought that Disney statuette last-minute and then we had to run to catch the train otherwise we wouldn’t make it home” (Interview 6, March 23, 2020).

The obtaining of the pins released by Efteling is not always an easy task. One of the interviewees provides an example in relation to the release of the ‘Bob pin’ which could be obtained when the attraction closed. Together with friends the interviewee took a final ride on the attraction, but upon getting out of the ride all of the pins were already sold-out, leaving him from that point forward to carefully strategize on how to collect pins when they are released at such events (Interview 6, March 23, 2020). Also during the participant observation, it became evident that the fan groups themselves take part in the distribution of fan-related items as they had designed their own jubilee pin to commemorate their fan group’s jubilee-event, which members of the fan group eagerly got in line for at the end of the event (Participant Observation, March 1, 2020).

Relationship with Efteling

The selective code ‘relationship with Efteling’ provides insight into the relationship between Efteling fans and Efteling management. When it comes to community planning, preservation and development efforts from fans in collaboration with Efteling management, many of the interview participants noted a positive shift in their relationship with Efteling management, more specifically with the communication department, in recent years. Whereas it became evident during the interviews that in previous years Efteling management was unsure of how to approach fans as they could be critical, now they have opened up towards fans. This is in line with what Lukas (2013) discussed in relation to how it is important to be open towards criticism and the fact that it can lead

to collaborations and aid in improving the designed space. As one of the interviewees notes:

“Yes, I think, as we have been active in the Efteling fan world for quite a while, and I really do have the impression that in the last couple of years a big, positive change has been taking place. Because it wasn’t actually that long ago that Efteling considered fans and fan media a burden. They were critical, and they wrote negative pieces and asked critical questions. And in the last couple of years this has turned around, and now they really see it as something positive and as influencers, and also a way to bind people to them. And yes, so we truly are-, I do have the feeling that we together with some other fan media are seen as a an extension of the communication. We are independent, but yes, communication answers our questions and grant us opportunities to be present at press events and to make unique content. Yes, so what they receive in return is that we are enthusiastic about Efteling and make a lot of material about. So yes, that has changed a lot” (Interview 5, March 18, 2020).

Many of the interviewees reflect fondly upon their collaborations with Efteling and their aid in, for example, assisting with recording at the park or being able to arrange interviews with particular members of the Efteling staff. The fact that Efteling acknowledges and supports the fan groups is greatly appreciated, such as when they help out with letting fan groups host events in the park (Interview 4, March 13, 2020) or when one interviewee reached a specific number of followers and Efteling sponsored two entrance tickets to the park so a give-away could be hosted within the fan group (Interview 7, March 27, 2020). Also, the meetings which are hosted by Efteling management and which some of the fan groups are able to attend to share and voice their ideas in relation to the park are often noted as quite valuable. During the interview with the employees of Efteling management, it was reflected upon how one fan with a particular knowledge of pins, as he is a pin collector, was able to help them in designing one, and how another fan came up with the idea to turn the roll of film of Pandadroom into souvenirs, which helped Efteling decide on the plans they already had in regard of how to commemorate this happening (Interview 3, March 9, 2020).

Lemon, Childers and Hoy (2018) pointed out that for years marketers have collaborated with brand ambassadors who have a specific following. Now, Efteling management also acknowledges and sees these fans as brand ambassadors as they are the ones who often share positive news related to new attractions or changes at the park. Their sentiment is stronger than that of the regular press and when they say something, compared to when Efteling management says it themselves, it comes across as more sympathetic (Interview 3, March 9, 2020). Thus, like Lukas (2013) mentioned, the spreading of the online (positive or negative) criticism of the fan is important. This also relates closely to the shift of convergence culture, as sketched by Jenkins (2008), which not only shifts discussions between mediums, but also between the people in charge and the audience. In this case that would typically have been Efteling as a company, whereas now this power is also gradually shifting towards the fans and fan groups who are able to voice their opinions and thoughts in relation

to the theme park on social media platforms. When the employees were asked whether some social media platforms are more valuable to them, the reply was that the platforms cannot really be compared and that each platform has its own distinctive assets and therefore another following (Interview 3, March 9, 2020). This enhances the idea that fans can act as social ambassadors through their preferred social media platforms.

When asked for their hope in relation to the future of Efteling, many of the interviewees said they wished for Efteling to continue on this positive path of interacting with fan groups, although some more attention could be paid to passholders specifically. As became evident during the interview with employees of Efteling, there is a policy in the making regarding the involvement of fans and a possible idea for a special evening or day set aside for passholders and fans. This indicates a willingness of Efteling to continue on this path of involving and celebrating the fans (Interview 3, March 9, 2020). According to previous research by Torres and Orłowski (2017), this is important as sufficient advantages should be granted to passholders and loyal visitors when it comes to the offering of special events and perks such as discounts. This is a positive sign as many of the interviewees indicated throughout the interviews that they wish Efteling would focus more on benefits for passholders and possibly provide a special evening or day for them. Another desire frequently expressed by Efteling fans is that they would like to see an increase in the provided entertainment at the park. As often times passholders and fans of Efteling already know the ins and outs of the park, what can really set a day apart for them is the provided entertainment. By this, they mean the characters that walk around in the park, but also some new or greater variety in the shows. As one of the interviewees mentioned in relation to Efteling entertainment:

“But it’s something that would achieve results and people who are fond of Efteling visit, besides the attraction as they have already frequently done them, for the entertainment. Because it’s just different every time. As they, you know, have five characters walking around in the fairy-tale forest, that’s something nice to follow and fun to look at because they are working together in responding to the visitors. And that’s how you can spend your days” (Interview 6, March 23, 2020).

The possible expansion of the theme park is something that excites all of the fan group moderators. Also the employees of Efteling management believe that expansion will only make the park more interesting to fans and passholders, especially if it requires several days to see the whole park (Interview 3, March 9, 2020). Interviewees also frequently mention the rumors that this new realm might be circus themed and they hope that it will be built in the typical Efteling style. Whereas some of the interviewees would like to see thrilling new attractions, one fan in particular notes that he hopes Efteling will specifically invest in themed areas, such as Sprookjesbos and Land van Laaf where people can wander around (Interview 5, March 18, 2020). Also the building of the ‘Uitrijk’, the entertainment area, is touched upon because it would make Efteling more of a destination

(Interview 5, March 18, 2020, Interview 6, March 23, 2020). The employees of Efteling management also say that there is an increase in overnight stays because it takes people more time to see the park due to expansions (Interview 3, March 9, 2020). This is also reflected in the theme index of 2018, where it was mentioned that the top European parks, which Efteling belongs to, were doing well because they were focusing on presenting themselves as destinations (TEA, 2018). From the survey respondents, 94.6% rated the following statement: ‘Efteling is a place to be proud of for the Dutch’, with a five or higher. Indicating the pride fans of Efteling feel regarding their theme park. One of the fan group moderators shared in relation to his hope for the future of Efteling that the theme park is most likely to continue to exist, that it contains a part of the Dutch DNA, and that if it were to disappear there would most likely be a national riot (Interview 4, March 13, 2020).

4.4 Fan groups, Efteling and online social platforms

Founding of the fan group/website/podcast/account

‘Founding of the fan group/website/podcast/account’ is an important selective code as it provides information on the initial reasoning behind the start of the groups and accounts by the fan group moderators. Seven of the interviews for this research were conducted with founders or moderators of Efteling fan groups who are active on different platforms varying from the large social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, to news websites and podcasts. One fan group founder and moderator has been active for twenty years (Interview 4, March 13, 2020), whereas the other interviewed moderators have been active in the past two to three years. All of the fan groups started out by the moderators took an interest in Efteling theme park or specific aspects of the park and wanted to share their passion for Efteling with other fans.

Fan group characteristics

The selective code of ‘fan group characteristics’ provides more details of the different fan groups of the interviewees. As was noted before, most of the interviewees say that when it comes to the online and offline relationships with their fan community the emphasis lies on the online part and most often offline meetings or events are undertaken for celebratory occasions such as a jubilee of reaching a certain amount of followers. When it comes to the specific characteristics of the various fan groups it is important to mention that most of these fan groups have thousands of followers. How they interact with followers often depends on the nature of the platform the fan group moderators are most active on and which additional platforms they make use of. For example, one of the podcasters mentioned how followers are able to send in questions which they will discuss during the episode as a way to interact with followers (Interview 8, March 28, 2020). Other fan group moderators ensure to actively engage in responding to comments and posts made by their followers (Interview 2, March 8, 2020). Interaction can also be found in some fan groups through organized giveaways (Interview 2, March 8, 2020; Interview 7, March 27, 2020).

All of the interviewees noted that their social media usage has an informational aspect to it.

When it comes to the content of the various fan groups, these naturally differ according to the mediums. One of the podcasts focusses on providing entertainment as well as information (Interview 8, March 28, 2020), whereas the other combines entertainment with information, but it also has an educational aspect to it (Interview 5, March 18, 2020). The news webpages all have an informational purpose. During four of the interviews it became evident that Facebook and Twitter are used for their informational aspects, which also can be combined with a social aspect (Interview 4, March 13, 2020; Interview 5, March 18, 2020; Interview 6, March 23, 2020; Interview 8, March 28, 2020). Instagram is also noted as an informational as well as a social platform (Interview 4, March 13, 2020; Interview 7, March 27, 2020). However, the TikTok platform is noted to purely have an entertainment aspect (Interview 7, March 27, 2020).

From the survey respondents, 75.1% rated with a five or higher that relaxation and entertainment is important to them when participating in online forums and social media with other Efteling enthusiasts, followed by information knowledge and exchange which was rated with a five or higher by 73.6%, followed by being a creative outlet, giving one’s opinion and influencing debate, and finally by being social and making friends (Figure 4.9).

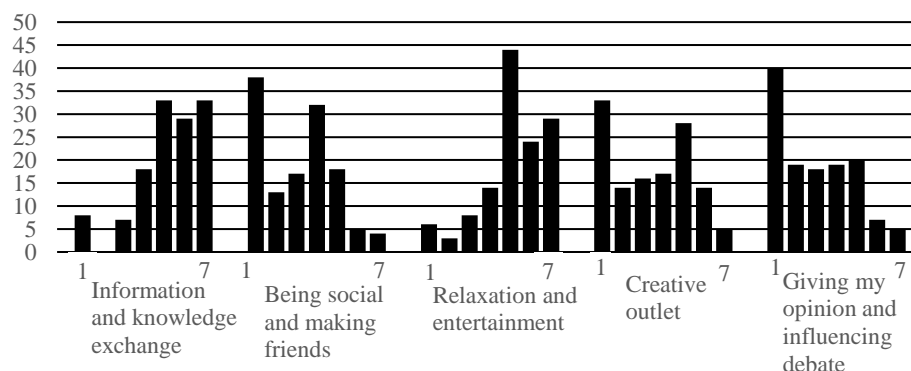


Figure 4.9: When participating in online forums and social media with other Efteling enthusiasts, how important are the following factors to you? (‘Information knowledge...’/‘Relaxation and...’/‘Giving my opinion...’ N=128, ‘Being social...’/‘Creative outlet’ N=127).

Many of the fan groups also have a schedule and aim for how many episodes or messages they want to share on a weekly basis. For the podcasters this is more on a weekly basis, whereas people with news webpages tend to want to post two to three times every week, but on Instagram accounts it is expected by the moderators and also followers to show activity on a daily basis.

In terms of knowing what works and what does not work for their platform and audience, the fan group moderators know what works well and what will generate more attention. For example, one of the podcasters ensures to always mention ‘Efteling’, even though they do at times discuss other theme parks as well, simply because the name in itself is attractive and will attract more

listeners (Interview 8, March 28, 2020). Another fan group moderator who is active on Instagram can tell that posts do better when they contain pictures of the larger highlights of the theme park as well as depicting herself in the pictures (Interview 7, March 27, 2020).

Use and transformation of (social) media usage in relation to Efteling

The ‘use and transformation of (social) media usage in relation to Efteling’ is one of the main selective codes and as thoroughly described by some of the interview participants, the Efteling fandom scene has changed significantly with the rise of social media. Whereas before fans would engage in discussion on online forums and sign up for mailing lists, this slowly shifted towards the new and rising social media platforms used today (Interview 4, March 13, 2020; Interview 6, March 23, 2020; Interview 8, March 28, 2020). As became evident during the participant observation of the jubilee-event, this fan group was actually ahead of the rise of social media by having a webpage for instant messaging similar to the current Twitter platform, as well as a place to upload and share pictures with other Efteling fans (Participant Observation, March 1, 2020). As the founder of the fan group later on reflected during the interview by saying that it is simply the way it is and that there is no competing against such larger platforms (Interview 4, March 13, 2020). Another change the interviewee noticed with the rise of social media was a shift from forums to social media took place. People were no longer being moderated regarding what they said and through this change they could speak more freely, but it was also up to Efteling to accept the possibly voiced critique (Interview 4, March 13, 2020). Here again it is important how operators and organizations deal with criticism as discussed by Lukas (2013). During the participant observation of the jubilee-event many of the younger attendees laughed at seeing the look of the older webpages and gear indicating a difference between generations when it comes to the usage of (social) media (Participant Observation, March 1, 2020).

Also the different types of fans shifted with the rise of these new platforms. The discussions which took place on the online forums now mostly take place on Twitter. As one of the interviewees described:

“Normally you would say ‘Twitter is a dying platform’, but for Efteling it’s one of the best platforms you can have. (...). Actually it became that way, you used to have the fan forums on different websites and the Efteling forum which had to stop at a given point, in 2017, I think that was. And what it actually is, is that Twitter has taken over the function of the Efteling forums. It was already going on a little, let’s say, when the forum was dying but people can actually achieve the same on Twitter as they do on a forum but it’s easier, you don’t have to log in on a website, you just have an app, and you can talk to one another. And it’s actually now the main medium amongst the die-hard fans, somewhat” (Interview 6, March 23, 2020).

Throughout the interviews it was often mentioned that the more dedicated fans who want to enter

serious discussion are active on Twitter, whereas the ‘Truus from Delft’, meaning the people who do not visit Efteling often, are more active on Facebook. However, the personal preferences in regard to social media platforms of fan group moderators also play a role in choosing to be active on a specific platform. Quite often within fan groups the moderators divide the platforms they are active on amongst themselves. For example, one of the fan groups exists out of multiple fan group moderators which all come from different backgrounds and possess different knowledge and expertise of different platforms which have joined together in creating a website but are still active on their other social media platforms as well (Interview 6, March 23, 2020). Whereas one from a podcasters duo focusses more on Instagram and Facebook, the other is more focused on Twitter (Interview 5, March 18, 2020). Some of the fan groups are also internationally oriented. For example, the fan group moderator active on Instagram purposely posts the messages in English so foreign fans of Efteling are also able to understand and follow the account (Interview 7, March 27, 2020). One of the largest and oldest fan groups also makes videos for Europa-Park and has a German following on YouTube (Interview 4, March 13, 2020).

As was frequently mentioned during the interviews, most fan groups are active on one particular platform with one particular purpose, such as the podcasters who want to share their episodes (Interview 5, March 18, 2020; Interview 8, March 28, 2020), or the main news webpage where they want to share news items (Interview 6, March 23, 2020). The other platforms are often used to remind or draw people to the main webpage or social media platform. For example, the moderators of the two different podcasts mention how they try to activate and remind their followers of upcoming podcasts on Twitter (Interview 5, March 18, 2020; Interview 8, March 28, 2020). However, some of the fan group moderators also own different groups besides their own main platform, such as the group active on Facebook which also owns a ‘carpool’ group and a ‘buy and sell’ group. However, the interviewees mention that the carpool group is not as extensively used as some members would like it to be (Interview 2, March 8, 2020).

These findings relate to the research by Bury (2016) which concluded that newer social media platforms do not create the same sense of community amongst fans as the older platforms whose features encouraged more in-depth discussion (2016). The Efteling fan group moderators do not mention a decrease in the sense of community, only a transition from the older forums to the new social media platforms.

Also communication by Efteling shifted due to the rise of social media as the communication team is currently active on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest and TikTok (Interview 3, March 9, 2020). This shift was perceived by the interviewees from Efteling management as having grown naturally and rather than being contacted via phone by visitors and fans, these questions are now asked through social media (Interview 3, March 9, 2020). In relation to social media being used by Efteling fans in relation to the park, one of the employees acknowledges that the forums are a dying medium and that a shift towards social media platforms took place (Interview 3, March 9,

2020). This shift to social media has made all of the discussions by fans more transparent and visible to Efteling management (Interview 3, March 9, 2020).

Despite the rise of social media, Efteling still uses offline forms of communications such as sending birthday cards by letter mail, the *Wonderen* magazine (Miracle magazine) with interviews of people in relation to Efteling, Efteling kids radio and arranging with newspapers to write about the park. They are aware that people using different platforms have greater or lesser connection to Efteling and so try to adjust their posts accordingly. In relation to internationalization, Efteling also has communication teams and PR agencies in other countries to make themselves known and share news in relation to the theme park (Interview 3, March 9, 2020).

Advantages and disadvantages of specific social media platforms

The selective code of ‘advantages and disadvantages of specific social media platforms’ became evident as fan group moderators often acknowledged different features of certain social media as an advantage or disadvantage. However, the fan group moderators also often focus on one specific platform due to personal preferences and interests. What also plays a role is the aforementioned sharing frequency of new content that comprises an important advantage or disadvantage of specific platforms. For example, one of the podcasters admitted that the reason for focusing on the podcast medium is because it is less time-consuming whereas, for example, Instagram requires a lot of action in terms of taking photos, but one also needs to be skilled putting together podcasts (Interview 8, March 28, 2020). In the interviewee’s own words this was described as “a podcast just requires you to sit down once and you have to be able to do it, podcasting, because I also think it’s sort of an artform, but if you are able to do it, then it’s an ideal medium.” (Interview 8, March 28, 2020). Other podcasters believe that this medium is perfect in relation to Efteling as a discussion topic because it allows them to go in-depth (Interview 5, March 18, 2020). Also Efteling management notices that podcasts are usually suitable to share very detailed information (Interview 3, March 9, 2020).

Twitter is most frequently used by fans as a channel to make announcements, share news, new episodes, and videos, or engage in discussion (Interview 4, March 13, 2020; Interview 5, March 18, 2020; Interview 6, March 23, 2020; Interview 8, March 28, 2020). Also Efteling management acknowledges that this group of followers vary in age but consists mostly of fans who are more attached to Efteling and therefore try to go more in-depth with their posts (Interview 3, March 9, 2020). However, it was also mentioned that one of its key advantages is the word limitation that ensures that messages are to the point ensuring good discussion (Interview 6, March 23, 2020), as opposed to Facebook where there are no limitations. Thus, Twitter serves as a platform to engage in discussion and has replaced the previous web forums such as discussion boards. Although it is frequently used to engage with followers, it is never really the center of a fan group. The fan group moderators of the group active on Facebook use this platform because it is easy to use and accessible to all ages (Interview 2, March 8, 2020). They find Instagram is more used by younger people and

only generates likes, whereas they find it easier to post, comment and engage with followers on Facebook (Interview 2, March 8, 2020). Also the management employees acknowledge that in particular the passholder group on Facebook, owned by Efteling management, requires more in-depth information in regard to Efteling in their posts and they estimate the age of their average Facebook follower to be around 45, whereas the users of Instagram are estimated to indeed be younger and around 35 years of age (Interview 3, March 9, 2020).

The fan group moderator of the Instagram page is the second youngest of all the interviewed fan group moderators. Already using the platform was a reason for choosing to be active here with the idea in mind that if starting out here went alright the step could always be made to become active on YouTube (Interview 7, March 27, 2020). However, YouTube is one of the more time-consuming platforms and a lack of time is why this step has not been made yet (Interview 7, March 27, 2020). Recently this moderator has also become active on TikTok, partly in collaboration with Efteling, but admits that this is a very different platform than Instagram as its sole purpose is entertainment, whereas Instagram can also be informational (Interview 7, March 27, 2020). In relation to TikTok, Efteling discussed that when they decide to become active on a new social media platform they tend to look at trends and target audiences (Interview 3, March 9, 2020). One of the Efteling management employees shared that it is more difficult to speak to children and as TikTok is a platform specifically aimed at the younger generation, it was decided to become active there (Interview 3, March 9, 2020). Finally, YouTube is the platform used to share documentaries and videos of different theme parks with other followers and fans (Interview 4, March 13, 2020; Interview 6, March 23, 2020). Content wise, one of the Efteling management employees says that different approaches can be taken. One can for example focus on inspirational or informative content, the former being more popular on Instagram, the latter scoring better with news items on Facebook when it comes to engagement (Interview 3, March 9, 2020). Also through the use of different campaigns Efteling tries to reach and speak to as many different audiences as possible. An example given is that during Valentine's Day they used their Efteling characters on Tinder (Interview 3, March 9, 2020). In relation to the sharing or announcement of news, Efteling always has to make a decision whether they will share it themselves or let national press share it for them (Interview 3, March 9, 2020).

As was mentioned before, fans of Efteling have increasingly become ambassadors for the park and the management employees believe that all of these fan accounts have a reinforcing effect on one another and encourages other fans to also start a page in relation to the park (Interview 3, March 9, 2020). A typical trait fans of the park show online, mentioned by one of the management employees, is that they will defend the park when non-fans or non-passholders critique Efteling. Another way in which Efteling embraces the fans acting as ambassadors is by reposting pictures visitors made during their visit. This is done because it gives the best representation of spending a day at the park which is more real than if a photographer were to take pictures. It is also more sympathetic, helps with the building of a fanbase, and because with all the pictures posted, Efteling

has a lot to choose from (Interview 3, March 9, 2020).

Goals in relation to their fan group/page/account

‘Goals in relation to their fan group/page/account’ is an important selective code as all of the interviewed fan group moderators have indicated certain targets for posting on their platforms and goals they want to reach in terms of content and/or followers. Some would like to create more videos on specific topics such as behind-the-scenes (Interview 4, March 13, 2020), others would like to form an actual community (Interview 1, February 25, 2020; Interview 5, March 18, 2020), and many mention that they would like to collaborate with Efteling, be invited to special occasions, or have Efteling use some of their content (Interview 1, February 25, 2020; Interview 4, March 23, 2020; Interview 5 March 18, 2020; Interview 6, March 23, 2020; Interview 7, March 27, 2020). The invitations by Efteling to some of the fan groups for certain happenings at the park such as openings of attractions or other spaces and areas in the park, as well as the meetings they host with fan groups, has instilled a certain eagerness amongst the moderators to stay relevant to the park. As one of the interviewees exemplifies:

“The amount of listeners doesn’t matter because I mean, we just like to do this. We just have to ensure that we stay relevant, because as long as stay relevant we can get things done with Efteling. Such as bringing us in touch with people who normally wouldn’t give an interview, for example” (Interview 5, March 18, 2020).

In this sense it is a two-way relationship in which the fans can act as ambassadors for the park and Efteling helps them out in return by coming to their aid when needed.

Since the fan group moderators are all active in relation to their fan group on a voluntary basis, their activity is an indication of their dedication as fans. Many interviewees mentioned the extensive time they invest in their content and group. For one group, the estimation was that it takes the moderators over 60 hours each week to respond to posts and comments (Interview 2, March 8, 2020), certain podcast episodes required extensive research beforehand (Interview 5, March 18, 2020), and the offline events can take months to years to prepare (Interview 4, March 13, 2020). Although various goals were determined by the interviewees in relation to their fan group, page or account, what was often mentioned was that the ultimate goal is to have fun with their hobby and share it with others. As one of the interviewees notes: “Some, quite a lot of people of course ask: ‘Yes, you know, what is your ultimate goal with the website?’ and yes, ultimately it’s just so I can have fun (laughter)” (Interview 4, March 13, 2020).

4.5 Summary of findings

In the cognitive dimension it became evident that fans of Efteling often attended the park for the first time at a young age. Even though, over time, their interests in specific features or places within the theme park changed according to different phases in their lives, Efteling forms a place of

attachment. On a cognitive level, the fan group moderators have incorporated Efteling into their lives through their fan groups and social media accounts.

In the affective dimension it became evident that especially the themed environment is an important factor for fans found in the typical Efteling style. The fans of Efteling are described by the interviewees as dedicated and critical, which can both be very positive, but it can also be too detailed at times. Even though Efteling remains the home park, a great deal of the fan group moderators are theme park fans and cooperate with or visit other theme parks as well. The fan group moderators demonstrate the five levels of fan activity by Jenkins (2013) and are on the fifth and final level as they want to form a community and share their passion in relation to the theme park.

In the behavioral dimension, it became evident that that the focus from the fan group moderators is on the online aspect of their fan group, page or account and that any offline events are deemed as additional and special. The sense of community is positive and it is mentioned by a great deal of the interviewees that fans of Efteling form one group, subdivided into smaller groups with people who know each other better. Also amongst the fan group moderators there is a positive and supportive atmosphere. Within the park many people have a fondness of different places to socialize and it was emphasized by the people who have a subscription that spending a day as a passholder at the park is more relaxed than as a day-visitor who tends to want to see and experience everything.

Regarding the use of social media, it became evident that fans make use of social media platforms in relation to the park to form communities, to inform and be informed regarding Efteling and the theme park world in general, but most of all to share their passion for Efteling with like-minded fans. Traits that fans of Efteling show online is that they discuss the disappearance of attractions (in this case 'De Bobbaan'), and defend the theme park against critique from non-fans or non-passholders. A majority of the interviewed fan group moderators have indicated that Efteling has opened up towards them over time and invested more in collaborating with fans. Through the interview with Efteling management, it became apparent that they are becoming increasingly invested in working with fans and acknowledge their dedication to the park. Whereas fans of Efteling can act as genuine spokespersons and ambassadors for the theme park, Efteling management helps them through providing opportunities. In addition, it was found that through the shift in usage of formerly used forums and mailing lists by Efteling fans, to the current mainstream social media platforms used today, far greater and more diverse audiences can be reached. This holds true both for the fan accounts who might encourage others to also start accounts in relation to the park, as well as for Efteling management, who are active across a variety of social media platforms today.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to find out how social media platforms have changed the perception and behavior towards Efteling. This was further explored with three sub-questions. The first set out to examine and establish the nature and characteristics of place attachment that fans feel towards Efteling as an extraordinary place in their lives. The second sub-question asked how Efteling fans make use of social media in relation to the theme park and other fans, and the third question asked how the use of social media has changed the relationship between park management and fans. Thus, on the one hand the concept of place attachment in relation to Efteling fans was examined to reveal about the fan relationship with the park, and on the other hand, the use of social media by fans was examined to see how the new platforms changed the relationship of the fans with the park over time.

This study of Efteling fans was embedded in literature regarding the concept of place attachment, theme parks, fandom, and social media platforms. This framework provided background knowledge on fans, the nature of place attachment and immersive spaces such as theme parks, and an explication of the impact of social media platforms on fan communities.

Through the analysis of seven in-depth interviews with fan group moderators, one in-depth interview with employees of Efteling management, one participant observation of a fan organized event, and an online survey amongst of Efteling fans, multiple angles on the sense of place attachment by Efteling fans and their use of social media in relation to the theme park were examined. This research focused on qualitative methods since “‘qualitative’ methods are used to answer questions about experience, meaning, and perspective, most often from the standpoint of the participant” (Hammarberg, Kirkman & de Lacey, 2016, p. 499). The use of these three different methods, as opposed to only one, was critical as it provided insight from different perspectives and ensured triangulation of the findings. Through the three dimensions of place attachment by Manzo and Perkins (2006), it became evident that fans are attached to Efteling on a cognitive, affective, and behavioral level. The fan group moderators incorporated the theme park entirely into their lives through their fan groups and social media accounts.

Regarding the use of social media it was found that Efteling fans use it to form communities, to inform and be informed regarding Efteling and the theme park world in general, but most of all to share their passion for Efteling with other like-minded fans. Efteling management has opened up towards the fan groups through collaborations and acknowledging them as ambassadors of the theme park. It was also found that through the shift in usage of formerly used forums and mailing lists by Efteling fans to the current social media platforms used today, both fans and management reach far greater and more diverse audiences.

It can thus be concluded that Efteling fans use social media in relation to the park to share their passion and to socialize with like-minded fans. In addition, social media has changed the relationship between fans and Efteling management as the theme park has become more inclusive

towards its fans and lets them act as spokespersons. This has resulted in a more genuine and real reflection of the park as it is seen through the eyes of fans and visitors.

Overall, this means that the research question of how social media has changed the perception and behavior of fans towards Efteling is answered as it is evident that social media platforms have made it easier for fans to share their passion online with other fans, change perceptions, and make Efteling more accessible. Furthermore, Efteling has opened up towards fans in recent years by permitting fan group moderators to act as spokespersons on their behalf, thus the fans have taken on the role of ambassadors for the theme park. In return, Efteling management has granted the fan group moderators special opportunities and collaborations. Therefore, more collaboration between the two parties is taking place, indicating a significant change in behavior for fans and park management. Thus both the perception and behavior of fans towards Efteling has changed in recent years due to social media. The social media platforms have made fans more visible to management and the existing fan accounts encourage others to also express their fandom. Due to the different natures of social media platforms, fans are able to be active on a platform with features that suits them best, and due to a decrease in moderation in comparison to the previously used forums, a more free and direct form of communication between management and fans is ensured. This has resulted in a more open and inclusive mind-set regarding fans and how they can contribute to the theme park.

5.1 Research limitations

A clear limitation of this research was the outbreak of COVID-19. In relation to the in-depth interviews conducted for this research, this meant that most interviews had to be conducted over the phone rather than in a face-to-face setting. This could have had an effect on the atmosphere during the interviews and the responses of the interviewees. Despite being conducted in an alternate manner, the interviews were extensive and the interviewees were able to elaborate on all questions asked. What also needs to be taken into account is that two of the fan groups, as well as the Efteling management employees, preferred to conduct interviews with their fellow fan group moderators and colleagues. If the interviews had been conducted one on one, perhaps more in-depth viewpoints of experiences could have been uncovered and discussed. However, due to the nature of their relationships and the fact that they collaborate and are at ease with one another, it was not considered a hindrance to conduct the interviews with more than one person.

More importantly, the outbreak of COVID-19 also led to the temporary closing of Efteling and therefore only one participant observation was conducted early in March. This one observation proved to be very useful in complementing the other methods, therefore more observations would have been beneficial for this research by providing more data on the in-park behavior of Efteling fans and groups.

5.2 Future research

As was indicated early in this study, little research has been conducted in relation to Efteling. Even though research in relation to theme parks has been conducted, this has been mostly limited to Disneyland and Universal parks across the world (Williams, 2020). This indicates that there are many topics which could be researched further in relation to Efteling.

The focus of this research was on the sense of place attachment experienced by Efteling fans, their use of social media in relation to the park, and the role this intersection played in the relationship between the fans and Efteling management, especially from the perspective of the fan group moderators. These topics were also addressed in relation to fans and visitors of the park through the survey. Thus, this research addressed the perspective of fans, fan group moderators, and Efteling management. More research could be conducted regarding the day-visitors of Efteling and their perception of the park in comparison to passholders. Research could also be conducted in relation to the internationalization of the park and in-park semiotics as this could undergo change due to globalization and the park management's desire to attract more international visitors. In addition, Efteling could be researched from a marketing perspective to see in what ways it distinguishes itself in the global theme park market. In short, there are still many more topics to be researched in relation to Efteling.

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Appendix A: Overview interview participants

Nr.	Interviewee	Date
1	Moderator of website in relation to theme parks. Interview participant 1, male.	25 th February 2020
2	Efteling Facebook group administrators. Interview participant 1, female. Interview participant 2, female. Interview participant 3, male.	8 th of March 2020
3	Efteling management employees. Interview participant 1, male. Interview participant 2, female.	9 th of March 2020
4	Administrator of one of the biggest and oldest Efteling fan groups. Interview participant 1, male.	13 th of March 2020
5	Co-hosts of Efteling podcast. Interview participant 1, male. Interview participant 2, male.	18 th of March 2020
6	Administrator of Efteling fan group. Interview participant 1, male.	23 rd of March 2020
7	Administrator of Instagram account in relation to Efteling. Interview participant 1, female.	27 th of March 2020
8	Co-host of Efteling and theme park podcast. Interview participant 1, male.	28 th of March 2020

Appendix B: Interview guides

Interview guide ‘Fan group moderators’ – Dutch version

Achtergrondinformatie

- Hoe raakte je geïnteresseerd in pretparken/de Efteling? Vanaf welke leeftijd bezocht je pretparken?
- Hoe zou je jouw pagina/blog/podcast omschrijven, wie is er betrokken bij het maken ervan en wat motiveerde je om ermee te beginnen? Hoeveel volgers/luisteraars heb je? Zou je ze omschrijven als actief of passief?
- Wat is het doel van je blog/pagina/podcast? (bijvoorbeeld informatieel, educatief, en/of sociaal).
- Hoe vaak post/share/upload je?
- Hoe is je pagina veranderd na verloop van tijd?
- Hoe ervaar je de interactie met volgers van jouw pagina/blog/podcast? Is die interactie veranderd na verloop van tijd?
- Hoe zou je je toekomstige doelen van je pagina/blog/podcast omschrijven? Wat zou je er graag mee willen bereiken? Zie je jezelf je pagina/blog/podcast nog een lange tijd volhouden/doen?
- Heb je ook nog ander werk en hoe combineer je dat met je pagina/blog/podcast?
- Hoe vaak ga je naar de Efteling/pretparken voor je pagina/blog/podcast? Heb je abonnementen op pretparken?
- Maak je duidelijk onderscheid tussen de bezoeken die je brengt aan pretparken voor jezelf en werk-gerelateerde bezoeken? Zijn veel van je familie en/of vrienden geïnteresseerd in pretparken – hebben zij abonnementen?
- Kun je je voorstellen om geen abonnement meer te hebben in de toekomst?

Efteling

- Hoe zou je de Efteling omschrijven aan iemand die er nog nooit van heeft gehoord?
- Hoe zou je een dag in de Efteling omschrijven?
- Wat betekent de Efteling voor jou? Heb je een persoonlijke connectie met het park, indien ja, op wat voor manier?
- Vind je dat de Efteling anders is dan andere pretparken, indien ja, waarom?
- Zijn er bepaalde karakteristieken van het park waar je meer in geïnteresseerd bent dan in andere? -
Waarom die bepaalde karakteristieken?
- Vind je dat de Efteling een goede plek is om af te spreken met andere, indien ja, waarom?
- Heb je ooit items (cadeaus/souvenirs) gespaard van de Efteling of andere pretparken? Indien ja, wat voor soort souvenirs? (of gekocht voor anderen?)
- Wat vind je van het Efteling management en klantenservice?
- Wat vind je van de manier waarom Efteling omgaat met fans?
- Wat is je hoop voor de toekomst van de Efteling? – Waar zou je graag willen dat ze in investeren? -

Hoe denk je hierover in verband met bezoekers?

-Heb je ooit punten van kritiek gevonden tegen de Efteling of het management?

Fans en (online) groepen

-Hoe zou je fans van de Efteling omschrijven?

-Is er een groepsverband tussen Efteling fans? Hoe zou je de groepsverband omschrijven? Is er een connectie tussen Efteling werknemers en fans?

-Volg je andere social media pagina's of maak je deel uit van andere communities m.b.t. de Efteling? Om welke redenen? Vormen ze een bron van inspiratie? Indien ja, op wat voor manier? Heb je kennissen/vrienden ontmoet via deze pagina's? Bezoeken jullie het park samen?

-Ben je interactief op deze social media pagina's/groepen? Waar post je over of wat vind je leuk om te lezen?

-Hoe gebruik je social media platformen m.b.t. communicatie met andere Efteling fans? Welke platformen gebruik je het liefst en waarom? (Zijn sommige platformen fijner voor sociale interacties en andere om informatie te delen of voor productief gebruik). Hoe verhoudt dit zich tot offline? Heb je voorkeuren voor offline/online?

-Heb je ooit geparticipeerd in fan events/omgegaan met fans voor de tijd van social media? Hoe is dit voor jou veranderd?

-Zijn er specifieke groepen waarmee je de Efteling bezoekt? Indien ja, hoe is deze groep ooit bij elkaar gekomen en hoe zou je een dat in de Efteling met hen omschrijven? Hoe vaak bezoek je het park met (leden van) deze groep?

Interview guide ‘Fan group moderators’ – English version

Background information

- How did you get interested in theme parks/Efteling? When (at what age) did you start visiting?
- How would you describe your page/blog/podcast, who is involved in the creation of it and what motivated you to start it? How many followers/listeners do you have? Would you describe them to be active or passive?
- What is the aim of your blog/page/podcast? (e.g. informational, entertainment and/or social?)
- How often do you post/share/upload?
- How has your page/blog/podcast evolved over time?
- How do you experience the interaction with followers of your page/blog/podcast? Has this interaction and engagement changed over time?
- How would you describe the future goals of your page/blog/podcast? -What would you like to achieve? Do you see yourself continuing this page/blog/podcast for a long time?
- Do you have a day-time job and how do you combine this with your page/blog/podcast?
- How often do you visit Efteling/theme parks for your page/blog/podcast? – do you have any subscriptions on theme parks?
- Do you make a clear distinction between work visits to theme parks and visits in your own spare-time? Are many of your friends and/or family members interested in theme parks -do they have subscriptions?
- Can you imagine not having a subscription in the future?

Efteling

- How would you describe Efteling to someone who hasn't heard about it?
- How would you describe a day at Efteling?
- What does Efteling mean to you? Do you feel a personal connection to the park? If so, in what ways?
- Do you think Efteling differs from other theme parks, if so, why?
- Are there particular features of the park you are more interested in than others?
 - Why those features in particular?
- Do you think Efteling is a good place for get-togethers and if so, why?
- Have you ever collected any items (gifts/souvenirs) from Efteling or other theme parks? If so, what kind? (or bought any for others?)
- How do you feel about management and customer services at Efteling?
- How do you feel about the ways in which Efteling interacts with its fans?
- What is your hope for the future of the Efteling theme park? What would you like them to focus on/invest in? How do you see this in relation to visitors?
- Have you ever found points of critique regarding Efteling or its management?

Fandom and (online) groups

- How would you describe Efteling/theme park fans?
- Is there a sense of community amongst Efteling fans? How would you describe this sense of community? And is there a connection between Efteling employees and fans?
- Do you follow other social media pages or are you involved in other communities regarding Efteling? For what purposes? Do they inspire you? If so, in what ways? Have you met acquaintances/friends through these pages? Do you visit the park together?
- Are you interactive on these social media pages/groups? – what do you post about or like to read about?
- How do you use social media platforms regarding the communication with other Efteling fans? Which platforms do you prefer to use and why? (are some better for social interactions whereas others are better for the sharing of information or productive behaviour). How does this compare to offline? Do you have any preferences for offline/online?
- Did you participate in fan events/interact with fans of Efteling before the rise of social media? – How has this changed for you?
- Are there any specific groups you visit Efteling with? If so, how did this group start and could you describe what a day together with them at Efteling is like? How often do you visit with (members of) this group?

Interview guide ‘Efteling management employees’ – Dutch version

Efteling Management

- Zou je het algemene doel van de Efteling willen omschrijven? Wat biedt Efteling aan bezoekers?
- Hoe onderscheid Efteling zich van andere themaparken?
- Zijn er manieren waarin het Efteling management zich onderscheidt van het management van andere themaparken? Zijn er overeenkomsten?
- Zou je je rol binnen Efteling kunnen omschrijven? Hoe ben je hier gaan werken en hoe heb je de functie gekregen die je nu hebt?
- Hoe voel je je over het feit dat je bij Efteling werkt?
- Wat was je eerste ervaring met Efteling en hoe denk je nu over het park in vergelijking met toen?
- Zou je de verschillende taken van het marketing en het communicatie team in relatie tot fans en fan groepen willen uitleggen?

Efteling kanalen

- Op welke verschillende social media platformen is Efteling actief en welke van deze platformen is het meest effectief in het bereiken van en communiceren met bezoekers?
- Welke platformen gebruiken jullie om welke redenen en manieren om te ‘connecten’ met fans? Wat zijn de voordelen van de platformen die jullie gebruiken?
- Hoe kiezen jullie ervoor om wel actief te zijn op bepaalde platformen en op andere niet? Zijn jullie bijvoorbeeld weleens gestopt met het gebruiken van een bepaald platform en waarom? Hoe passen jullie je aan aan nieuwe platformen? Bijvoorbeeld ‘Tiktok’. Zijn jullie daar in geïnteresseerd – waarom wel/waarom niet?
- Hoe veel mensen zijn betrokken bij het managen van de social media accounts? En hoe omschrijven jullie de verschillende content die Efteling posts op jullie eigen social media account? Op welke manieren probeer Efteling nieuw publiek te trekken door verschillende soorten posts?
- Hoe is de manier waarop Efteling omgaat met bezoekers veranderd door de komst van social media?
- Hoe trekken jullie nu bezoekers door social media in vergelijking met offline manieren?
- Hoe houden jullie bezoekers op de hoogte van ontwikkelingen in het park – zoals bijvoorbeeld over de nieuwe ‘Max en Morritz’ achtbaan? Op wat voor soort manieren is dit van tevoren gepland?
- Wat zijn de richtlijnen waar alle communicatie door Efteling zich aan moet houden?
- Hoe verzekeren jullie je ervan dat alle social media posts op één lijn liggen met de visie van Efteling?
- Proberen jullie mensen met abonnementen op andere manieren aan te spreken dan ‘dagjes’ mensen? Indien ja, op wat voor soort manieren? Hoe zouden jullie de verschillen omschrijven tussen abonneementhouders en ‘dagjes’ mensen?
- Hoe proberen jullie een internationaal publiek aan te trekken en mee te communiceren via jullie social media channels? Verschilt deze aanpak van hoe jullie omgaan met Nederlandse of Belgische bezoekers?

Efteling fan groepen communicatie

- Kunnen jullie de verschillende fan groepen waar Efteling mee in aanraking komt omschrijven? Wat is hun doel? Hoeveel mensen zijn er betrokken bij die groepen?
- Wat betekenen de verschillende fan groepen voor de Efteling, wat is jullie relatie tot hen? Om wat voor redenen denken jullie dat Efteling fans fans zijn geworden? Wat heeft Efteling hun te bieden?
- Op welke manieren en hoe vaak gaan jullie met deze fan groepen of de leiders daarvan om?
- Hoe voegen fan groepen toe aan het 'gemeenschapsgevoel' onder bezoekers? Verschilt dit in vergelijking tot de tijd voor sociale media?
- Helpt de Efteling met het faciliteren van fan groep meetings of events? Indien ja, hoe?
- Ervaren jullie ooit kritiek vanuit de bezoekers en hoe gaat de Efteling hier mee om? Gebeurt dit vaak en waar gaat het dan over?
- Is er een stijgende of dalende lijn in het nemen van een abonnement onder bezoekers?
- Hoe denk je dat het uitbreiden van het park de fans beïnvloed? Hoe proberen jullie fans te betrekken bij dit proces?
- Hoe is de betrokkenheid van fans veranderd door de tijd heen?

Interview guide ‘Efteling management employees’ – English version

Efteling management

- Could you describe Efteling and what its general aim is? What does Efteling offer visitors?
- How is Efteling different from other theme parks?
- In what ways do you think Efteling management differs from the management of other theme parks? Are there similarities as well?
- Could you describe what your role is within the company? How did you come to work at Efteling and how did you get to the position you are in now?
- How do you feel about working at Efteling?
- What was your first experience with the park and how do you think of it now when compared to when your first came here?
- Could you describe the different tasks of marketing and the communication department in relation to fan and fan groups?

Efteling channels

- On which different social media platforms is Efteling active and which of these platforms is the most effective in targeting/reaching and communicating with visitors?
- Which platforms do you use for which purposes/which ways to connect with fans? What are the benefits of the different platforms used?
- How do you decide which platforms to be active on and when to drop a platform? Have you for example ever dropped being active on older social media platforms? How do you adapt to new ones? E.g. ‘Tiktok’? Are you interested in using it, why or why not?
- How many people are involved in managing the social media accounts? How would you describe the different types of content Efteling posts on its own social media accounts? In what ways does Efteling try to attract different audiences through different sorts of posts?
- How have the ways in which Efteling interacts with visitors changed due to the rise of social media?
- How do you attract visitors through social media compared to offline ways?
- How do you e.g. keep visitors posted on new evolvments in the park – such as for example the new Max and Morritz rollercoaster? In what ways is this planned in advance?
- What are guidelines to which all Efteling communication with visitors must adhere to?
- How do you ensure that all of the social media posts align with Efteling’s vision?
- Do you try to speak to people with subscriptions and day-visitors in different ways? If so, in what ways? How would you describe the differences between people with subscriptions and day-visitors?
- How do you try to attract and interact with international visitors through your social media channels? Does the approach differ from how you interact with Dutch/Belgian visitors?

Efteling fan groups communication

- Could you describe the different fan groups Efteling interacts with? What is their aim? How many people are involved in the group?
- What do the different fan groups mean to/how is their relationship with Efteling? And for what reasons do you think Efteling fans have become fans? What does Efteling offer them?
- In what ways and how often do you interact with fan groups (admins)?
- How do fan groups add to a community feeling amongst visitors? Does this differ from the times before social media?
- Does Efteling aid in facilitating fan group meetings or events? If so, how?
- Do you ever experience critique from visitors and how does Efteling deal with this? Does this occur frequently and what is it about?
- Has there been an increasing/decreasing trend of people buying subscriptions?
- How do you think that the expansion of the park influences the fans? How do you try to involve visitors and fans in the process?
- How has the involvement of fans changed over time?

Appendix C: Example Coding Frame

Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
Parents took interviewee to theme parks when he was young, each vacation.	First encounter with theme parks.	Love of theme parks.
Believes it is just as important to fix older attractions as creating new ones.	Opinion regarding the building and fixing of attractions.	Place attachment.
During fan events they know many people and network within the fan world.	Positive relationship between fan group moderators.	Social relationships through Efteling.
Lives far away from Efteling.	Travelling distance to Efteling.	Place attachment.
Forget the worries of daily life when visiting the park.	Description of Efteling visits.	Place attachment.
Mentions that before there were forums and mailing lists, which have become a lot smaller, and the majority has moved to social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook).	The activity of the Efteling platforms has moved to social media platforms.	Use and transformation of (social) media usage in relation to Efteling
Variety in ages of fans within the fan group.	Fan groups are accessible to young and old.	Fan group characteristics.

Appendix D: Online Survey Questionnaire

Online Survey Questionnaire – Dutch version

1. Stemt u toe om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek? Ja / Nee.
2. Bent u 18 jaar of ouder? Ja / Nee.
3. Heeft u momenteel een Efteling-abonnement? Ja / Nee.
4. Hoe lang heeft u een Efteling-abonnement? <1 jaar / 1-5 jaar / 6-10 jaar / 11-20 jaar / 21-30 jaar / Meer dan 30 jaar / Anders, kunt u dit toelichten:
5. Vanaf welke leeftijd bent u begonnen met het bezoeken van de Efteling? 0-5 jaar oud / 6-12 jaar oud / 13-17 jaar oud / 18-21 jaar oud / 22-29 jaar oud / 30-39 jaar oud / 40-49 jaar oud / 50-59 jaar oud / 60+ jaar oud
6. Hoe vaak bezoekt u het park gemiddeld per jaar? 1-10 dagen per jaar / 1 dag per maand / 2 of 3 dagen per maand / 1 dag per week / 2-3 dagen per week / 4-5 dagen per week / Bijna iedere dag
7. Welke van de volgende omschrijvingen van Eftelingbezoeker zou het beste bij u passen? Een Efteling fan / Een Eftelingliefhebber / Een dagjesbezoeker / Een pretpark fan / Anders (licht toe)
8. Op welke onderstaande pretparken heeft u ook een abonnement? Disneyland Parijs / Europa-Park / Phantasialand / Walibi / Toverland / Slagharen / Duinrell / Anders (licht toe)
9. Met wie brengt u gewoonlijk een dag door in de Efteling? (1 Nooit – 7 Heel vaak) Familie / Vriend(en) van school/werk/uit de buurt / Vriend(en) die ik heb ontmoet via de Efteling en social media platformen / Alleen
10. Is de Efteling uw favoriete plek (buitens huis) om te ‘socialize’ met vrienden en/of familie? Ja / Nee
11. Op een standaard dag in de Efteling, hoe waarschijnlijk is het dat u het volgende doet? (1 Nooit – 7 Heel vaak). Gewoon met plezier rondlopen en in het park zijn, en wellicht in een paar attracties gaan / Een terrasje pakken / Op mijn social media account(s) posten over mijn bezoek aan de Efteling. / In zoveel mogelijk attracties gaan.

12. Op welke social media platformen bent u actief wat betreft de Efteling? (U kunt meerdere vakjes aanvinken) LinkedIn / WhatsApp / Facebook / Instagram / Tumblr / Pinterest / Snapchat / YouTube / Twitter / TikTok / Anders (licht toe).

13. In hoeverre zijn de volgende factoren voor u van belang wanneer u deelneemt via deze social media platformen? (1 Niet belangrijk – 7 Heel belangrijk) Informatie verkrijgen en uitwisselen / Socializen en vrienden maken / Ontspanning en entertainment / Creatieve uitlaatklep / Mijn mening geven en discussies beïnvloeden

14. Wat was het EERSTE online platform waar u gebruik van maakte om toenadering te zoeken tot andere Efteling-enthousiasten? (U kunt meerdere vakjes aanvinken) Usenet nieuwsgroepen / Email (Listserv) / Web-gebaseerde discussieforums / Blogs / Podcasts / MySpace / Facebook / Twitter / YouTube / Instagram / Tumblr / TikTok / Hyves / Anders (licht toe)

15. Vink de volgende opties aan als u er OOIT gebruik van heeft gemaakt om toenadering te zoeken tot andere Efteling-enthousiasten online. (U kunt meerdere vakjes aanvinken). Usenet nieuwsgroepen / Email (Listserv) / Web-gebaseerde discussieforums / Blogs / Podcasts / MySpace / Facebook / Twitter / YouTube / Instagram / Tumblr / TikTok / Hyves / Anders (licht toe)

16. Wat is momenteel uw favoriete platform om in contact te komen met andere Efteling-enthousiasten? Web-gebaseerde discussieforums / Blogs / Podcasts / Facebook / Twitter / YouTube / Instagram / Tumblr / TikTok / Anders (licht toe)

17. Terugkijkend op uw vorige antwoord, waarom koos u voor dat specifieke platform als uw huidige favoriete platform in tegenstelling tot andere? (licht toe).

18. Heeft u ooit een van de volgende keuzemogelijkheden online gedeeld of gepost met betrekking tot de Efteling? Video of fotografie / Muziek of zang. / Handgemaakte schilderijen en/of illustraties / Computer graphics (bijvoorbeeld Illustrator, Photoshop, etc.) / Kunst, handarbeid of sieraden / Kleding ontwerpen en/of designs / Fanfictie-verhaal.

19. In hoeverre heeft het gebruik van de online Efteling fan discussieforums en social media een positief effect op uw beleving van het park offline? (1 Geen effect- 7 Heel positief effect).

20. Heeft u ooit een door een fan(groep)-georganiseerd evenement in de Efteling bijgewoond? (bijvoorbeeld een pub quiz, jubileum-event, meet-ups of meet-ups). Ja / Nee / Anders (licht toe)

21. Hoe kreeg u te horen over de evenementen die u heeft bijgewoond? (U kunt meerdere vakjes aanvinken). Usenet nieuwsgroepen / Email (Listserv) / Web-gebaseerde discussieforums / Blogs / Podcasts / MySpace / Facebook / Twitter / YouTube / Instagram / Tumblr / TikTok / Hyves / Televisie, radio, krant, of tijdschrift / Mond-tot-mondreclame van een vriend/familielid/collega / Anders (licht toe).

22. Welke van de volgende social media/websites/podcasts/forums met betrekking tot de Efteling heeft u gevolgd? (U kunt meerdere vakjes aanvinken) Bart Baan / Eftelingsestraat / Eftelist / Eftelwesley / Eftepedia / Kleine Boodschap / Loopings / Ochtend in Pretparkland / Themepark / Themetalk / De Vijf Zintuigen / Anders (licht toe).

23. Wat zijn uw twee favoriete redenen voor het volgen van de social media / websites / podcasts / forums uit de vorige vraag? (licht toe).

24. Welke locatie in de Efteling is uw favoriet voor sociale bezigheden met familie en/of vrienden (bijvoorbeeld een attractie, een bepaald restaurant, een bepaalde zit plek, etc.?) (licht toe).

25. Als het gaat om de sociale sfeer in de Efteling, hoe belangrijk acht u de volgende keuzemogelijkheden? (1 Onbelangrijk – 7 Heel belangrijk): De gethematiseerde sfeer / Efteling eten en drinken / Winkelen / Attracties / Shows / Meet en greets met Eftelingkarakters / Werknemers van de Efteling

26. Als u in de rij staat voor een attractie in de Efteling, hoe vaak doet u dan het volgende? (1 Nooit – 7 Heel vaak) Praten met de mensen waarmee ik die dag naar de Efteling ben gekomen / Praten met bezoekers (anders dan de mensen waarmee ik die dag naar de Efteling ben gekomen) / Social media gebruiken (Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube etc.) / Berichtjes sturen (SMS, WhatsApp, Messenger) op mijn telefoon / Naar muziek luisteren en/of een spel spelen op mijn telefoon / Nieuws, artikelen en/of boeken etc. lezen op mijn telefoon / Een gedrukt boek/krant/tijdschrift lezen. / De Efteling app bekijken i.v.m. wachttijden en ander park gerelateerde informatie.

27. Heeft u ooit een van de volgende dingen gedaan toen u in de Efteling was? Een andere bezoeker geholpen (anders dan de mensen waarmee ik die dag naar de Efteling ben gekomen) met routebeschrijvingen, informatie en/of een foto nemen. / Vuilnis opgeraapt (wat niet van mij was) en in een vuilnisbak gegooid / Verloren spullen gevonden en naar een medewerker gebracht / Een medewerker geholpen. / Een cadeau gegeven aan een medewerker (die geen vriend of familielid was).

28. Hebben de volgende keuzemogelijkheden een negatieve impact op de Efteling als een sociale plek voor u? (U kunt meerdere vakjes aanvinken) Verwijderingen van of aanpassingen gemaakt aan attracties en shows / Hoge bezoekersaantallen/drukte / Het gedrag van andere bezoekers / Hoe het Efteling management omgaat met de visie en nalatenschap van Anton Pieck / Nalatig en/of slecht management van online fan websites en social media groepen door beheerders en moderators / Fan websites, social media fangroepen, en evenementen in het park, georganiseerd door fans, zijn te gecommmercialiseerd geworden.

29. Bent u het eens of oneens met de volgende stellingen? (1 Sterk mee oneens – 7 Sterk mee eens): Het zou erg moeilijk voor me zijn om verder van de Efteling vandaan te verhuizen en niet in staat te zijn om even vaak naar de Efteling te gaan. / Zelfs ook al bezoek ik de Efteling geregeld, raak ik nooit op het park uitgekeken. / Efteling is als een tweede thuis. / Ik voel vertrouwen en kameraadschap tussen mijzelf en andere bezoekers en werknemers van de Efteling. / Efteling is voor Nederlanders een plek om trots op te zijn.

30. Wat is uw nationaliteit? Nederlands / Belgisch / Anders (licht toe).

31. Waar woont u? Nederland / België / Anders (licht toe)

-> Nederland (32). In welke provincie van Nederland woont u? Noord-Brabant / Limburg / Zeeland / Zuid-Holland / Noord-Holland / Utrecht / Gelderland / Flevoland / Overijssel / Drenthe / Friesland / Groningen.

-> België (33). In welke provincie van België woont u? Antwerpen / Limburg / Oost-Vlaanderen / Vlaams-Brabant / West-Vlaanderen / Waals-Brabant / Henegouwen / Luik / Luxemburg / Namen.

34. Wat is uw geslacht? Vrouw / Man / Non-binair / Zeg ik liever niet.

35. Wat is uw leeftijd? 18-25 / 26-35 / 36-45 / 46-55 / 56-65 / 66+

36. Bent u ooit een werknemer van de Efteling geweest? Ja, ik ben momenteel een werknemer van de Efteling. / Ja, ik was vroeger een werknemer van de Efteling. / Nee, ik ben nooit een werknemer van de Efteling geweest.

Online Survey Questionnaire – English version

1. Do you agree to participate in this research? Yes / No.
2. Are you over 18 years old or older? Yes / No.
3. Do you currently have an Efteling subscription? Yes / No.
4. For how long have you had a subscription on Efteling? <1 year / 1-5 years / 6-10 years / 11-20 years / 21-30 years / More than 30 years / Other (specify)
5. From what age did you first start visiting Efteling? 0-5 years old / 6-12 years old / 13-17 years old / 18-21 years old / 22-29 years old / 30-39 years old / 40-49 years old / 50-59 years old / 60+ years old
6. On average how many times do you visit the park in a year? 1-10 days per year / 1 day per month / 2 or 3 days per month / 1 day per week / 2-3 days per week / 4-5 days per week / Almost every day
7. Which of the following descriptions of Efteling visitors would be most applicable to you? An Efteling fan / Someone fond of Efteling / An occasional day visitor / A theme park fan/ Other (specify)
8. Are you also a passholder of other theme parks? Disneyland Paris / Europa-Park / Phantasialand / Walibi / Toverland / Slagharen / Duinrell / Other (specify).
9. Do you typically spend a day at Efteling with (1 Never – 7 Very often). Family / Friend(s) from school/work/neighbourhood / Friend (s) met through Efteling and social media platforms / By myself
10. Is Efteling your favourite place to socialize with friends and/or family outside of home? Yes / No.
11. On a typical day, how likely are you to do the following? (1 Never – 7 Very Often). Just enjoy walking around the park and being in the park, and going on few rides if any. / Having a drink on the terrace. / Post to my social media account(s) about my Efteling visit./ Go on as many rides as possible.
12. On which social media platforms are you active in relation to Efteling? (You can check more than one) LinkedIn / Instagram / WhatsApp / Facebook / Tumblr / Pinterest / Snapchat / YouTube / Twitter / TikTok / Other (specify).

13. When participating in online forums and social media with other Efteling enthusiasts, how important are the following factors to you? (1 Not important – 7 Very important) Information knowledge and exchange / Being social and making friends / Relaxation and entertainment / Creative outlet / Giving my opinion and influencing debates.

14. What was the FIRST online platform you used to connect with other Efteling enthusiasts? (You can check more than one). Usenet newsgroups / Email (Listserv) / Web-based discussion forums / Blogs / Podcasts / MySpace / Facebook / Twitter / YouTube / Instagram / Tumblr / TikTok / Hyves / Other (specify).

15. Check any of the following you have EVER used to connect with Efteling enthusiasts online? (You can check more than one). Usenet newsgroups / Email (Listserv) / Web-based discussion forums / Blogs / Podcasts / MySpace / Facebook / Twitter / YouTube / Instagram / Tumblr / TikTok / Hyves / Other (specify).

16. Which is currently your favourite platform for connecting with other Efteling enthusiasts? Web-based discussion forums / Blogs / Podcasts / Facebook / Twitter / YouTube / Instagram / Tumblr / TikTok / Other (specify).

17. Based on your previous answer, why did you choose that platform as your current favourite compared to others? (Specify)

18. Have you ever posted and shared online the following related to Efteling? Video or photography / Music or song / Handmade painting and/or illustration / Computer graphic (e.g. Illustrator, Photoshop, etc.) / Arts, crafts or jewellery, Clothing design and creation / Fan fiction story.

19. To what extent has your use of online Efteling fan discussion boards and social media had a positive effect on your in-park experience? (1 No effect – 7 Very positive effect).

20. Have you ever attended a fan(group)-organized event in Efteling (e.g. a pubquiz, fan group anniversaries, meet-ups)? Yes / No / Other (specify).

21. Please check how you learned of the events you attended (you can check more than one): Usenet newsgroups/Email (Listserv)/Web-based discussion forums / Blogs / Podcasts / MySpace / Facebook / Twitter / YouTube / Instagram / Tumblr / TikTok / Hyves / Television, radio, newspaper, or magazine / Word-of-mouth from a friends/family member/co-worker / Other (specify).

22. Which of the following social media/websites/podcasts/forums have you followed in relation to Efteling? (You can check more than one). Bart Baan / Eftelingsestraat / Eftelist / Eftelwesley /

Eftedia / Kleine boodschap / Loopings / Ochtend in Pretparkland / Themepark / Themetalk / De Vijf Zintuigen / Other (specify).

23. What are your two favourite reasons for following any of these social media/websites/podcasts/forums mentioned in the previous question? (specify).

24. What location at Efteling is your favourite for being social with family and/or friends (e.g. a ride, a specific restaurant, a seating area, etc.)? (specify).

25. For the social atmosphere at Efteling, how important are each of the following? (1 Unimportant – 7 Very important). Themed environment / Efteling food and beverages / Shopping / Rides / Shows / Character meet and greets / Park employees.

26. While you are in line for an attraction at Efteling, how likely are you to do the following? (1 Never – 7 Very often). Chat with the people I went to Efteling with / Chat with other visitors (besides from the people I ordinarily go to Efteling with) / Use social media (Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc.) / Text messaging (SMS, WhatsApp, Messenger) on my mobile / Listen to music and/or play a game on my mobile / Read news, articles, books etc. on my mobile / Read print (book, newspaper, magazine) / Check out the Efteling app for queuing times or other park-related information.

27. Have you ever done the following while at Efteling? Helped another visitor (besides from the people I ordinarily go to Efteling with) with park directions, information and/or taking a photo / Picked up trash (not mine) and put it in a trash bin. / Found lost property and returned it to an employee. / Assisted an employee in the park. / Bought a gift for an employee (that was not a friend or relative)

28. Have the following had a negative impact on Efteling as a social place for you? (You can check more than one) Removal or changes to attractions and shows / High crowd levels / Behaviour of other visitors / The handling of Anton Pieck's vision and legacy by Efteling management / Neglectful and/ or poor management of online fan websites and social media groups by owners/moderators / Fan websites, social media fan groups, and in-park events by fans have become too commercial

29. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (1 Strongly disagree – 7 Strongly agree) It would be very hard for me to move far away from Efteling and not be able to visit as often / Even if I visit Efteling frequently, I do not get tired of the park. / Efteling is like a second home to me. / I feel trust and camaraderie with other visitors and park employees at Efteling. / Efteling is a place to be proud of for the Dutch.

30. What is your nationality? Dutch / Belgian / Other (specify)

31. Where do you live? The Netherlands / Belgium / Other (specify)

-> The Netherlands (32). In which province of the Netherlands do you live? Noord-Brabant / Limburg / Zeeland / Zuid-Holland / Noord-Holland / Utrecht / Gelderland / Flevoland / Overijssel / Drenthe / Friesland / Groningen.

-> Belgium (33). In which province of Belgium do you live? Antwerpen / Limburg / Oost-Vlaanderen / Vlaams-Brabant / West-Vlaanderen / Waals-Brabant / Henegouwen / Luik / Luxemburg / Namen.

34. What is your gender? Female / Male / Non-binary / Prefer not to say.

35. What is your age? 18-25 / 26-35 / 36-45 / 46-55 / 56-65 / 66+.

36. Have you ever been an employee of Efteling? Yes, I currently am an employee. / Yes, I was an employee in the past . / No, I have never been an employee of Efteling.

Appendix E: Field Notes Template

Date:

Site:

Activity:

Participants:

Length of observation:

Summary: