

1-1-2005

## Economic Growth and Recession Time Periods: Their Effect Upon Pleasure Travelers Visiting Florida Theme Parks

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### Recommended Citation

Bonn, Mark A.; Furr, H. Leslie; and Dai, Mo (2005) "Economic Growth and Recession Time Periods: Their Effect Upon Pleasure Travelers Visiting Florida Theme Parks," *Hospitality Review*: Vol. 23: Iss. 2, Article 3.

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## **Abstract**

Two tourism-oriented travel samples were drawn from recent time periods that represented economic growth (expansion) and recession cycles in the U.S. economy. Analysis suggests that during the recession period, a greater percentage of theme park visitors chose to travel by air. Second, theme park travelers were more likely to visit friends or family during the recession period. Third, recession theme park travelers were 10 years older, on the average, than their rapid growth counterparts. The average age difference of theme park visitors was found to be significantly different during cyclical economic periods. Research findings support the need for additional studies that segment using generational markets

# **Economic Growth and Recession Time Periods: Their Effect Upon Pleasure Travelers Visiting Florida Theme Parks**

By Mark A. Bonn and H. Leslie Furr, and Mo Dai

*Two tourism-oriented travel samples were drawn from recent time periods that represented economic growth (expansion) and recession cycles in the U. S. economy. Analysis suggests that during the recession period, a greater percentage of theme park visitors chose to travel by air. Second, theme park travelers were more likely to visit friends or family during the recession period. Third, recession theme park travelers were 10 years older, on the average, than their rapid growth counterparts. The average age difference of theme park visitors was found to be significantly different during cyclical economic periods. Research findings support the need for additional studies that segment using generational markets.*

## **Introduction**

In the few short years since the millennium we have experienced the devastating effect certain situations have had upon travel. The outbreak of hoof and mouth disease halted travel to several regions of England. The SARS outbreak in Asia almost bankrupted an airline and interrupted travel to Hong Kong and other Asian destinations for over half a year. The specter of terrorism still hangs over the US airline industry after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. Yet it was the most recent downturn of the national economy that proved to be much more harmful to the travel industry than any of the disasters listed above. Certainly, the United States of America's continuous economic cyclical changes are more predictable and easily managed than environmental or terrorist-oriented disasters. The National Bureau's Business Cycle Dating Committee under National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) maintains a chronology of the U.S. business cycle. The chronology identifies the dates of peaks and troughs that frame economic recession or expansion. The period from a peak to a trough is a recession and the period from a trough to a peak is an expansion. According to the chronology, the most recent peak occurred in March 2001, ending a record-long expansion that began in 1991. The most recent trough occurred in November 2001, inaugurating an expansion (NBER, 2003).

Unlike natural disasters, the travel industry can easily monitor the economic health of the nation and could conceivably develop marketing strategies for future changes in visitors' behavior during similar economic periods in the past. This study spans both rapid growth (2000) and recession periods (2001) in the US economy. At the tail end of the most recent economic expansion (2000), the unemployment rate declined to an annual average rate of 4.0 percent in 2000. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) reached 172.2 in 2000, rising at an annual rate of 3.7%, the largest single year increase since 1991. In 2001, the U.S. economy stumbled across the threshold into recession as a result of stock market bubbles, large corporation scandals, and the terrorist attacks. The real GDP increased just 0.3% annually over 2000, the smallest annual increase since 1992 U.S. travel expenditures reached \$488.2 billion in 2000, rising at an annual rate of 8.1%, the highest growth rate since 1996. In 2001, U.S. travel expenditures experienced a negative increase of 4.9% to \$464.1 billion as a result of the economic recession.

## **Theoretical Background and Research Questions**

Defining specific social changes in mass travel consumption behavior over time based on family demographic attributes, such as family income and geographic area of origin, formed the conventional background for the research model used in this research paper. The basic

theoretical question was formulated on the theory that the geographic origin of visitors could affect, or be affected by changes in the economy.

According to Hagenars (1990), valid insights into the nature of historical changes in social behavior can be “gained only from theories that have been based on the systematic analyses of empirical data” (Hagenars 1990). Collecting empirical data in a continuous manner over an entire economic cycle does not solve all the problems facing tourism researchers interested in measuring complex changes in consumer behavior. Before the introduction of Log-Linear trend analysis in the 1970’s the use of surveys, repeated over time, that included more than one level of analysis in order to measure social change even lacked a proper method for measuring changes in behavior. Oftentimes important variations in various categories of analysis would be lost by collapsing variables or by only comparing data at individual levels. Large sample Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) “allows researchers to account for nested effects in studies that use unbalanced designs, and studies that use repeated measures” (Sibthorp, Witter, Wells, and Ellis 2004).

The number of tourism-oriented variable categories including age (Anderson and Langmeyer 1982; Dodd and Bigotte 1997); geographical implications (Etzel and Woodside 1982; Blazey 1988; Bonn, Furr, and Uysal 1992; Andereck and Caldwell 1994; Field 1999); length of stay (Pearce and Elliott 1983; Uysal, McDonald and O’Leary 1998); and level of experience (Ronkainen and Woodside 1980; Perdue 1985) that should be included in a study measuring social change over time is large. Segmentation studies that utilized benefits sought by travelers assisted interested parties in understanding issues related to travel motives also added another dimension to the social researcher’s arsenal (Shoemaker 1994; Bieger and Laesser 2002) and provided in-depth analyses for further refining our understanding of various travel markets (Spotts and Mahoney 1991; Taylor, Fletcher and Clabaugh 1993; Mudambi and Baum 1997; Agarwal and Yochum 1999; Frechtling and Horváth 1999).

In addition, segmentation travel studies often focus upon particular travel industry segments including airline transportation (Denstadli 2000), cruise lines (Marti 1995; Henthorne 2000), automotive (MacKay, Andereck and Vogt, 2002) and shopping (Reisinger and Turner 2002; Dimanche 2003). Facilities and services supporting travelers have also been the study of segmentation analysis, especially for lodging (Yucelt and Marcella 1996; Bell and Morey 1996; Manickas and Shea 1997). The wealth of “one-shot survey” segmentation research studies reviewed here provided a complex platform for developing a model for comparing and contrasting theme park visitors’ group behavior and characteristics within the context of two economically dissimilar time periods.

### **The Theme Park Industry**

Past research focusing on the U.S. theme park industry has primarily addressed future management perspectives (Milman 2001), growth issues (Samuels 1996), new market expectations (McClung 1991), competitive forces (Formica and Olsen 1998), assessments of attributes (Thah and Axinn 1994) and the overall industry (Loverseed 1994). Scholarly theme park journal articles rarely address consumer behavior issues as they relate to market segmentation of management topics such as the competitive forces issue. Milman’s examination of theme park managers recommended that future theme park studies be conducted to provide insight to decision makers regarding key issues that could impact their operations (Milman 2001).

Initially, a detailed assessment of theme park travelers’ behavior over an historical timeline was undertaken to establish periodic measures that gave a more comprehensive image of travelers. Typically, periodic measures such as the 2001 Travel Industry Association of America report citing a 1% decline in attendance to North American Theme parks provide little insight to theme-park managers about consumer behavior issues that may potentially affect theme park attendance. New findings were realized by researchers when

further differentiation of travel expenditure behavior over different economic time periods was conducted. Log-linear techniques clearly revealed certain nested behaviors of travelers from specific geographic regions during periods of recession and rapid growth.

Additionally, the study sought to establish and identify certain “baselines” for individual characteristics using a data set that represented two economic periods. The choice of this particular Florida-oriented database is significant because industry data identifies the fact that Florida theme parks visitors represent 18.6% of the 324 million national theme park attendees (Amusement Business 2003). An even more illustrative detail of this database is that during these two times Florida theme parks accounted for 72.7% (or 60.3 million) of the nearly 83 million visitors to the top eleven U.S. theme parks (Amusement Business 2002).

Lastly, the study attempted to determine individual characteristics that marked theme park visitors whose behaviors seemed most responsive to changes in the state of the economy. In particular, the study identifies characteristics of visitor segments who continued to spend on travel during an economic downturn. These group profiles should assist current and future theme park decision makers and destination marketing executives with associating key information pertaining to consumer behavior patterns and their relationship to visitor origins that could aid resort managers develop marketing plans form marketing plans for economic downturn periods.

### Method and Findings

From 1999 to 2001, visitors to Florida theme parks were personally interviewed on a random basis and asked to complete a 111-item survey related to their on-site travel experience. The selection was made during randomized days, at randomized sites and times at locations commonly frequented by visitors. These areas included theme parks, lodging properties, food service establishments, natural and man-made attractions, shopping areas and various other locations. A total of 4,189 usable responses were obtained. Completed responses were then separated into their two mutually exclusive groups representing two years; one for the time period of rapid growth (2000) and the other for the time period representing recession (2001). Table 1 provides demographic information related to the study sample.

**Table 1 Overall Theme Park Visitor Demographic Characteristics**

Variables (N=4,189)		Percentage
Marital Status	Married	69.9
	Single	19.1
	Widowed/Divorced	10.0
Education	Less than High School	2.6
	High School	17.5
	Technical School	6.6
	Some College/College	58.4
	Post Graduate	14.9
Household Income	Under \$20,000	6.0
	\$20,000-\$29,999	11.8
	\$30,000-\$39,999	14.7
	\$40,000-\$49,999	16.3
	\$50,000-\$74,999	24.5
	\$75,000 or More	26.7
Travel Mode to Florida	Air	62.1
	Auto	34.6
	RV/Motor-coach	2.2
	Other	1.1
Origin	In-State	34.8
	Out-of-State	49.0

### Overall Theme Park Visitor Experience Ratings

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being highest, theme park attendees rated their overall experience a 4.17. Responding on a satisfaction scale based upon 1=lowest to 10=highest, theme park attendees indicated concerns with many of the attributes associated with the on-site travel experience. For instance, "level of service" was rated as 6.87; "perception of safety and security" scored 6.85; "signs and directions" scored 6.28; and "ground transportation" scored 5.71 (see Table 2).

**Table 2 Overall Theme Park Visitor Behavioral Characteristics**

Variable	Means
Party Size	3.2
Number of Children	2.2
Length of Stay	1.85
<b>Daily Expenditures:</b>	
Shopping	\$104.71
Sightseeing	100.72
Lodging	99.79
Other	84.48
Event Fees	81.53
Evening Entertainment	76.79
Sports Fees	72.21
Restaurant	66.18
Ground Transportation	37.27
Grocery	33.38
Total Expenditure	\$272.13
Climate	7.71
Variety of Things to Do	7.60
Clean Environment	7.15
Level of Service	6.87
Friendliness of Residents	6.85
Perception of Safety/Security	6.85
Ease of Getting Around	6.80
Signs & Directions	6.28
Value for the Dollar	6.18
Ground Transportation	5.71
Overall Experience	4.17

### Geographical Segmentation Analyses

Three geographic market categories were developed to reflect this study objective and included the following: In-State (Florida Resident) theme park visitors; Domestic U.S. (non-Florida USA) theme park visitors; and International theme-park visitors. These three groups were contrasted with one other in several ways. First, chi square tests of independence were conducted in order to determine if a systemic association existed among the three geographic visitor origins with respect to selected demographic and behavioral variables. Results indicated that the calculated value of the test statistics were all greater than the critical value of the chi-square distribution (5.991) with two (2) degrees of freedom for the upper-tail area of 0.05 (see Table 3 – see next page).

**Table 3 Chi-Square Analysis of In-State, Out-of-State and International Florida Theme Park Visitors: Selected Demographic and Behavioral Characteristics**

Variables	In-State (%)	Out-of-State (%)	International (%)	$\chi^2$ Value
Marital Status				131.522***
Married	68.1	72.6	72.2	
Single	21.1	16.7	21.8	
Widowed/Divorced	10.8	10.8	6.0	
Education				178.164***
Less than High School	3.6	2.3	1.5	
High School	18.9	16.2	18.8	
Technical School	6.4	6.2	8.0	
Some College/College	57.9	59.6	55.6	
Post Graduate	13.2	15.8	16.1	
Household Income				286.868***
Under \$20,000	6.4	5.0	7.9	
\$20,000-\$29,999	15.5	9.4	11.1	
\$30,000-\$39,999	16.4	13.1	15.6	
\$40,000-\$49,999	17.8	15.5	15.1	
\$50,000-\$74,999	22.7	26.7	21.7	
\$75,000 or More	21.1	30.2	28.5	
Travel Mode to Florida				3437.997***
Air	10.1	68.2	86.5	
Auto/Ground	85.7	28.2	11.8	
Primary Reason for Visit				729.911***
Leisure Vacation	71.2	58.9	78.2	
Visit Friends/Family	12.0	24.9	12.7	
Business	4.0	7.3	3.3	
Attend Convention	5.1	4.6	3.5	
Other	7.8	4.3	2.3	

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

These tests suggested two salient points for marketing oriented managers. First, International theme park visitors exhibited significantly higher levels of post-graduate educational achievement. Second, domestic out of state visitors' primary reason for travel was for more like to visit friends and relatives than their in-state counterparts. Twenty-five studied variables were examined for these same three geographic market segments using one-way analysis of variance tests. Twenty of these variables were found to be significant at the  $p \leq 0.05$  level. Fifteen of these were found to be significant at the  $p \leq 0.001$ . Four study variables were significant at the  $p \leq 0.01$ , and one variable was significant at the  $p \leq 0.05$  level. (See table 4 – next page) Domestic theme park visitors were significantly older (41.05 years of age) than the in-state and international theme park visitors. In addition, international theme park visitor's travel with significantly larger groups (3.50 average party size) than their counterparts.

#### Other Measures

Spending behavior was analyzed according to the three geographic visitor origins and included six significant findings out of ten study variables. In-state theme park visitors spent significantly less on prepared foods (restaurants, snack bars, concessions) and more on groceries than did the domestic and international groups. International theme park visitors spent significantly more than the other two groups on sightseeing and shopping. International theme park visitors also spent more than the domestic theme park visitors on event fees.

**Table 4 ANOVA of In-State, Out-of-State and International Florida Theme Park Visitors: Selected Demographic and Behavioral Characteristics**

Variables <sup>a</sup>	In-State (%)	Out-of-State (%)	International (%)	F
Age	39.11 <sup>B</sup>	41.05 <sup>A</sup>	38.69 <sup>B</sup>	21.836 <sup>***</sup>
Length of Stay	3.81 <sup>B</sup>	5.05 <sup>A</sup>	5.33 <sup>A</sup>	54.438 <sup>***</sup>
Party Size	3.28 <sup>B</sup>	3.12 <sup>C</sup>	3.48 <sup>A</sup>	55.436 <sup>***</sup>
Number of Children	2.25 <sup>A</sup>	2.11 <sup>B</sup>	2.14 <sup>AB</sup>	6.691 <sup>***</sup>
Daily Expenditure				
Shopping	87.33 <sup>C</sup>	101.34 <sup>B</sup>	139.16 <sup>A</sup>	76.380 <sup>***</sup>
Sightseeing	100.65 <sup>B</sup>	95.94 <sup>C</sup>	115.00 <sup>A</sup>	31.987 <sup>***</sup>
Lodging	98.74	99.98	100.69	.470
Other	75.64	91.80	81.40	2.577
Event Fees	83.33 <sup>AB</sup>	77.78 <sup>B</sup>	88.36 <sup>A</sup>	4.911 <sup>**</sup>
Evening Entertainment	82.24	73.27	79.54	2.662
Sports Fees	67.68	70.39	83.42	2.667
Restaurant	59.01 <sup>B</sup>	70.00 <sup>A</sup>	69.11 <sup>A</sup>	48.726 <sup>***</sup>
Ground Transportation	24.41 <sup>C</sup>	44.89 <sup>A</sup>	39.41 <sup>B</sup>	95.781 <sup>***</sup>
Grocery	36.40 <sup>A</sup>	32.45 <sup>B</sup>	31.47 <sup>B</sup>	4.639 <sup>**</sup>
Attributes <sup>b</sup>				
Climate	7.73 <sup>A</sup>	7.81 <sup>A</sup>	7.39 <sup>B</sup>	17.311 <sup>***</sup>
Variety of Things	7.77 <sup>A</sup>	7.66 <sup>A</sup>	7.12 <sup>B</sup>	40.237 <sup>***</sup>
Clean Environment	7.08 <sup>B</sup>	7.23 <sup>A</sup>	7.05 <sup>B</sup>	5.075 <sup>**</sup>
Level of Service	6.95 <sup>A</sup>	6.80 <sup>B</sup>	6.92 <sup>AB</sup>	4.020 <sup>*</sup>
Friendliness of Residents	6.74 <sup>B</sup>	6.92 <sup>A</sup>	6.88 <sup>AB</sup>	4.776 <sup>**</sup>
Perception of Safety	6.87 <sup>AB</sup>	6.76 <sup>B</sup>	7.06 <sup>A</sup>	8.362 <sup>***</sup>
Ease of Getting Around	6.87	6.75	6.80	2.777
Signs & Directions	6.54 <sup>A</sup>	6.31 <sup>C</sup>	5.73 <sup>B</sup>	46.250 <sup>***</sup>
Value for the Dollar	6.30 <sup>A</sup>	6.23 <sup>A</sup>	5.85 <sup>B</sup>	19.364 <sup>***</sup>
Ground Transportation	5.73 <sup>A</sup>	5.83 <sup>A</sup>	5.34 <sup>B</sup>	15.014 <sup>***</sup>
Overall Experience <sup>c</sup>	4.21 <sup>A</sup>	4.19 <sup>A</sup>	4.02 <sup>B</sup>	44.417 <sup>***</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Sheffé post hoc tests are tested on all the variables listed below. Means that are assigned capital letters (e.g., A, B, C) are significantly different at  $p \leq .05$ . Means that share letters are not significantly different.

<sup>b</sup> On a scale 1-10, with 1=Poor, 10=Excellent.

<sup>c</sup> On a Scale 1-5, with 1=Poor, 5=Excellent.

\* $p \leq .05$

\*\* $p \leq .01$

\*\*\* $p \leq .001$

The study examined theme park visitor perceptions of attributes associated with the on-site travel experience. A total of ten attributes were examined with nine demonstrating significant differences among the three geographic groups. International theme park visitors rated the attributes associated with signage, value for the dollar, variety of things to do, climate, and ground transportation significantly lower than all other groups. In-state and international theme park visitors rated the attribute of clean environment significantly lower than the domestic theme park visitors. Perception of safety was rated significantly higher by the international theme park visitors than by the domestic theme park visitors. Finally, international theme park visitors rated the total overall experience significantly lower than the domestic and in-state theme park visitors.



### Rapid Growth vs. Recession Time Period Analyses

Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) allowed the researchers to account for nested effects by testing a series of categorical variables (travel mode, education, marital status, education, income and primary reason for travel) within the context of exclusive time periods and the origin of the traveler (Florida, Domestic or International). This approach was especially useful because HLM allowed the researchers to account for effects at various levels of a model (Sibthorp, Witter, Wells, Ellis and Voelkl, 2004).

The likelihood of fit analysis of visitor behavioral characteristics of theme park visitors in recession time periods provided interesting results when compared to the characteristics represented by the rapid growth time period (see Table 5). Specifically, test results rejected the null hypothesis that there was no difference between visitor behavior during the rapid growth and recession time periods. The categorical behavioral variables travel mode (L.R. = 52.453,  $p=.0000$ ); income (L.R. = 81.969,  $p=.0000$ ); and primary reason for visiting (L.R. = 138.557,  $p=.0000$ ) were particularly significant. As expected, the origin of the traveler (partial chi-square = 3361.698,  $p=.0000$ ) seems to account for most of the interaction between the visitors' geographic origin, time period and travel mode. It is the change in geographic origin over time that was surprising (partial chi-square = 1225.654,  $p=.0000$ ). It was also interesting to note that the geographic origin of the visitors explained much of the variance of theme park visitors primary reason for traveling to central Florida (Partial chi-square = 739.453,  $p=.0000$ ).

**Table 5: Hierarchical Log-linear Likelihood of Fit Analysis of Theme Park Visitor Behavioral Characteristics and Geographic Origin: Rapid Growth (2000) vs. Recession Periods (2001)**

	Interactions	df	L.R. Chi-Square	p	Pearson's Chi-square	p
Travel Mode	Geog*Time*Travel Mode	2	52.453	.0000	55.376	.0000
	Geog*Travel Mode	2			3361.698	.0000
	Time*Travel Mode	1			12.413	.0004
	Geog*Time	2			1225.654	.0000
Marital Status	Geog*Time*Marital	4	1.27395	.8658	1.27694	.8653
	Geog*Marital	4			131.458	.0000
	Time*Marital	2			42.526	.0000
	Geog*Time	2			21.194	.0000
Education	Geog*Time*Education	8	15.812	.0452	15.174	.0559
	Geog*Education	8			75.880	.0000
	Time*Education	4			35.126	.0000
	Geog*Time	2			6.963	.0308
Income	Geog*Time*Income	10	81.969	.0000	82.607	.0000
	Geog*Income	10			288.287	.0000
	Time*Income	5			120.182	.0000
	Geog*Time	2			10.998	.0041
Primary Reason	Geog*Time*Reason	8	138.557	.0000	137.744	.0000
	Geog*Reason	8			739.453	.0000
	Time*Reason	4			94.167	.0000
	Geog*Time	2			46.943	.0000

International theme park visitors with household incomes of less than \$20,000 seem to have been affected more by the worldwide recession than other income categories. Only 2.8 percent of travelers proved to be international visitors during the recession; the least amount of visitors from this category ever recorded (Table 6). Conversely, international visitors during the rapid growth period reporting household incomes under \$20,000 represented the largest percentage (9.5%). During recession time period, out-of-state theme park visitors from households earning \$75,000 or more represented the largest percentage (36.5%) of all visitor segments according to income. Domestic theme park visitors traveled by air travel more often during the recession (50.8%) time period than during the rapid growth (35.9%) time period. Regardless of economic time periods, international theme park visitors indicated that leisure vacation was their primary reason for visiting Florida significantly more than the other groups.

**Table 6: Chi – Square Analysis of Theme Park Visitor Demographic and Behavioral Characteristics: Rapid Growth Period (2000) vs. Recessionary Period (2001)**

Variables	2000 Rapid Growth			2001 Recession			$\chi^2$ Value
	IS(%) N=607	OS(%) N=789	Intl.(%) N=532	IS(%) N=688	OS(%) N=896	Intl.(%) N=674	
Gender							100.102***
Male	47.2	48.0	55.2	43.8	45.5	58.5	
Female	52.8	52.0	44.8	56.2	54.5	41.5	
Ethnicity							1252.390***
Caucasian	89.3	91.8	71.0	89.7	93.2	78.7	
Hispanic	5.4	2.8	12.1	4.2	2.1	7.4	
African-American	3.3	3.2	2.5	3.9	3.2	2.1	
Asian	.5	1.1	3.6	.9	.2	3.0	
Other	1.4	1.1	10.8	1.2	1.3	8.9	
Marital Status							194.529***
Married	67.0	71.2	71.2	71.3	76.4	75.5	
Single	22.1	17.6	22.6	18.3	14.1	18.7	
Widowed/Divorced	10.9	11.1	6.2	10.5	9.5	5.7	
Education							294.954***
Less than High School	2.9	2.1	1.6	5.8	2.9	1.1	
High School	18.7	16.0	17.9	19.4	16.6	21.8	
Technical School	6.5	6.5	7.8	5.9	5.3	9.0	
Some College/College	60.1	60.1	55.5	51.8	57.9	56.1	
Post Graduate	11.8	15.3	17.2	17.1	17.2	12.2	
Household Income							486.128***
Under \$20,000	7.4	5.1	9.5	3.7	4.8	2.8	
\$20,000-\$29,999	14.8	10.1	10.6	17.6	7.4	13.0	
\$30,000-\$39,999	17.8	14.5	14.7	12.6	9.0	18.7	
\$40,000-\$49,999	18.3	16.2	15.7	16.5	13.6	13.2	
\$50,000-\$74,999	22.3	26.0	20.4	24.1	28.8	26.2	
\$75,000 or More	19.5	28.0	29.2	25.5	36.5	26.2	
Travel Mode to Florida							1657.107***
Air	4.9	35.9	27.3	9.6	50.8	47.0	
Auto	93.1	60.2	65.3	89.8	46.9	47.9	
RV/Motor-coach	2.0	3.0	6.8	.2	2.0	4.9	
Other	.1	.8	.6	.4	.2	.1	
Primary Reason for Visit							923.515***
Leisure Vacation	76.4	59.1	78.5	60.2	58.6	77.2	
Visit Friends/Family	8.7	24.3	11.5	18.9	26.0	16.5	
Business	2.8	7.1	3.4	6.3	7.7	3.0	

Attend Convention	4.0	4.7	4.0	7.3	4.3	1.9
Other	8.0	4.8	2.6	7.3	3.3	1.3

\*\*\* p ≤ .001

### Travel Characteristics

A series of multivariate tests were conducted to determine what differences, if any, existed between visitors during the expansion and recession time periods with respect to age, economic spending, party size, length of stay and other selected attributes related to travel behavior (see Table 7 – next page). During the period of rapid growth, out-of-state theme park visitors traveled with significantly fewer individuals than in-state or international visitors. During both time periods, international visitors formed the largest party sizes when compared to the other two geographic travel segments. Comparing rapid growth and recession time periods, both in-state and out-of-state visitor segments traveled with a greater numbers of children in their travel parties during the rapid growth time period than during the recession time period. Predictably, the average amount spent for daily shopping dropped from approximately \$41 to \$36 with the smaller-sized travel groups in the recession period.

### Expenditure Comparisons

Table 7 also identifies expenditure characteristics for the three study groups. Results show that out-of-state theme park visitors during the recession period spent more on lodging than did the in-state and out-of-state visitors during the rapid growth time period. In-state theme park visitors spent more during recession time periods than did out-of-state visitors on event fees. International visitors during rapid growth spent more on sports fees than did in-state visitors during the recession period. In-state visitors during recession period spent more on evening entertainment than all the other groups in the rapid growth period. During both time periods, in-state theme park visitors spent significantly less on restaurants than all the other geographic-origin groups. Out-of-state theme park visitors during recession time period spent significantly more on restaurants than during the rapid growth period. Ground transportation results indicated that out-of-state during both time periods spent significantly more than in-state visitors. This appears to confirm the fact that many more out-of-state visitors traveled by air during the recession period and required local rentals for ground transportation. During recession period, in-state spent significantly more on groceries than the rest of the group in both periods.

### Comparison of Area Attributes Within the Context of Economic Time Periods

Theme Park visitors responded to ten (10) items related to area attributes during both time periods. Results suggest the following:

- **In-State Theme Park Visitors**  
During the period of rapid growth, in-state visitors rated “clean environment” lower than the out-of-state visitors. In-state visitors rated the variable “perception of safety” significantly higher during recession period compared with international visitors during that same period. Also, in-state visitors rated “perception of safety” significantly higher during the recession period than all the other groups during the rapid growth period. “Ease of getting around” and “value of the dollar” were rated significantly higher by in-state theme park visitors during the recession period compared with all other theme park visitor groups during the rapid growth period.
- **Out-of-State Theme Park Visitors**  
Out-of-state visitors rated level of service significantly lower during the rapid growth period than by in-state visitors during the recession period. During the time period of rapid growth, out-of-state theme park visitors rated the variable “friendliness of residents” significantly higher than all other groups during the recession period. Out-of-state visitors place a significantly higher level of satisfaction on climate when compared with international visitors during rapid growth and recession periods.

**Table 7 ANOVA Analyses of Theme Park Visitor Demographic and Behavioral Characteristics: Rapid Growth Period (2000) vs. Recessionary Period (2001)**

Variables	2000 Rapid Growth			2001 Recessionary Period			F
	IS <sup>d</sup> N=607	OS N=789	Intl. N=532	IS N=688	OS N=896	Intl. N=674	
Age	35.58 <sup>D</sup>	38.18 <sup>C</sup>	36.74 <sup>CD</sup>	47.33 <sup>AB</sup>	48.37 <sup>A</sup>	45.37 <sup>B</sup>	197.569 <sup>***</sup>
Length of Stay	3.00 <sup>C</sup>	3.99 <sup>B</sup>	4.22 <sup>B</sup>	8.92 <sup>A</sup>	9.06 <sup>A</sup>	9.24 <sup>A</sup>	340.371 <sup>***</sup>
Party Size	3.36 <sup>A</sup>	3.16 <sup>B</sup>	3.52 <sup>C</sup>	3.07 <sup>BD</sup>	3.02 <sup>D</sup>	3.37 <sup>ABC</sup>	32.392 <sup>***</sup>
Number of Children	2.32 <sup>A</sup>	2.17 <sup>B</sup>	2.14 <sup>ABC</sup>	2.01 <sup>BC</sup>	1.94 <sup>C</sup>	2.13 <sup>ABC</sup>	10.349 <sup>***</sup>
Daily Expenditure							
Shopping	89.82 <sup>C</sup>	103.03 <sup>B</sup>	142.85 <sup>A</sup>	80.02 <sup>C</sup>	96.06 <sup>BC</sup>	124.22 <sup>AB</sup>	32.498 <sup>***</sup>
Sightseeing	100.16 <sup>B</sup>	94.57 <sup>B</sup>	113.88 <sup>A</sup>	101.76 <sup>B</sup>	99.25 <sup>B</sup>	117.89 <sup>A</sup>	13.637 <sup>***</sup>
Lodging	97.41 <sup>B</sup>	98.05 <sup>B</sup>	99.44 <sup>AB</sup>	103.20 <sup>AB</sup>	105.72 <sup>A</sup>	104.73 <sup>AB</sup>	3.951 <sup>***</sup>
Other	64.41 <sup>B</sup>	83.93 <sup>AB</sup>	84.50 <sup>AB</sup>	104.24 <sup>AB</sup>	110.05 <sup>A</sup>	68.77 <sup>AB</sup>	4.598 <sup>***</sup>
Admissions/Event Fees	83.86 <sup>AB</sup>	80.47 <sup>BC</sup>	93.39 <sup>AB</sup>	81.11 <sup>AC</sup>	66.53 <sup>C</sup>	69.30 <sup>AC</sup>	5.895 <sup>***</sup>
Evening Entertainment	74.88 <sup>B</sup>	70.64 <sup>B</sup>	78.28 <sup>B</sup>	106.15 <sup>A</sup>	81.95 <sup>AB</sup>	84.02 <sup>AB</sup>	5.069 <sup>***</sup>
Sports Fees	74.53 <sup>AB</sup>	72.46 <sup>AB</sup>	91.59 <sup>A</sup>	51.22 <sup>B</sup>	62.71 <sup>AB</sup>	61.77 <sup>AB</sup>	3.558 <sup>**</sup>
Restaurant	56.99 <sup>B</sup>	68.24 <sup>A</sup>	69.51 <sup>AC</sup>	65.02 <sup>A</sup>	75.41 <sup>C</sup>	67.72 <sup>AC</sup>	26.239 <sup>***</sup>
Ground Transportation	22.41 <sup>B</sup>	43.80 <sup>A</sup>	40.33 <sup>AC</sup>	31.65 <sup>BC</sup>	48.47 <sup>A</sup>	35.82 <sup>AC</sup>	41.669 <sup>***</sup>
Grocery	31.36 <sup>B</sup>	32.48 <sup>B</sup>	30.83 <sup>B</sup>	46.69 <sup>A</sup>	32.35 <sup>B</sup>	33.88 <sup>BC</sup>	9.298 <sup>***</sup>
Attributes							
Climate	7.65 <sup>AB</sup>	7.82 <sup>A</sup>	7.44 <sup>B</sup>	7.97 <sup>A</sup>	7.80 <sup>A</sup>	7.14 <sup>B</sup>	9.293 <sup>***</sup>
Variety of Things	7.73 <sup>A</sup>	7.68 <sup>A</sup>	7.16 <sup>B</sup>	7.86 <sup>A</sup>	7.61 <sup>A</sup>	7.00 <sup>B</sup>	16.903 <sup>***</sup>
Clean Environment	6.97 <sup>B</sup>	7.26 <sup>A</sup>	7.13 <sup>AB</sup>	7.42 <sup>A</sup>	7.16 <sup>AB</sup>	6.67 <sup>B</sup>	7.702 <sup>***</sup>
Level of Service	6.88 <sup>AB</sup>	6.77 <sup>B</sup>	6.93 <sup>AB</sup>	7.11 <sup>A</sup>	6.87 <sup>AB</sup>	6.82 <sup>AB</sup>	3.069 <sup>**</sup>
Friendliness of Residents	6.82 <sup>ABC</sup>	7.02 <sup>A</sup>	6.97 <sup>AB</sup>	6.58 <sup>C</sup>	6.65 <sup>BC</sup>	6.50 <sup>C</sup>	8.960 <sup>***</sup>
Perception of Safety	6.56 <sup>B</sup>	6.56 <sup>B</sup>	7.05 <sup>A</sup>	7.83 <sup>C</sup>	7.51 <sup>CD</sup>	7.14 <sup>AD</sup>	50.882 <sup>***</sup>
Ease of Getting Around	6.74 <sup>BC</sup>	6.79 <sup>B</sup>	6.92 <sup>AB</sup>	7.21 <sup>A</sup>	6.63 <sup>BC</sup>	6.28 <sup>C</sup>	11.074 <sup>***</sup>
Signs & Directions	6.00 <sup>B</sup>	5.82 <sup>B</sup>	5.34 <sup>A</sup>	7.56 <sup>C</sup>	7.36 <sup>CD</sup>	6.95 <sup>D</sup>	11.074 <sup>***</sup>
Value of the Dollar	5.91 <sup>B</sup>	5.90 <sup>B</sup>	5.30 <sup>C</sup>	7.10 <sup>A</sup>	7.00 <sup>A</sup>	6.70 <sup>A</sup>	93.880 <sup>***</sup>
Ground Transportation	4.97 <sup>BC</sup>	5.24 <sup>B</sup>	4.90 <sup>C</sup>	7.31 <sup>A</sup>	7.32 <sup>A</sup>	6.92 <sup>A</sup>	199.493 <sup>***</sup>
Overall Experience	4.19 <sup>AC</sup>	4.19 <sup>AC</sup>	3.98 <sup>B</sup>	4.24 <sup>A</sup>	4.19 <sup>AC</sup>	4.10 <sup>BC</sup>	20.331 <sup>***</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Sheffé post hoc tests are tested on all the variables listed below. Means that are assigned capital letters (e.g., A, B, C) are significantly different at  $p \leq .05$ . Means that share letters are not significantly different.

<sup>b</sup> On a scale 1-10, with 1=Poor, 10=Excellent.

<sup>c</sup> On a Scale 1-5, with 1=Poor, 5=Excellent.

<sup>d</sup>IS= In State

OS=Out-of-State

Intl.=International

\*\* $p \leq .01$

\*\*\* $p \leq .001$

- International Theme Park Visitors

International theme park visitors rated "signs and directions" significantly lower than all other groups for both time periods. International theme park visitors rated "ground transportation" significantly lower than out-of-state theme park visitors during rapid growth and significantly lower than all groups during the recession period. The international visitors during both time periods rated the "variety of things" significantly lower than the other groups. Finally, international visitors rated their overall experience significantly lower than all other groups during the period of rapid growth and their overall experience was also significantly lower during the recession period than those in-state and out-of-state visitors.

## Summary

One of the key responsibilities of tourism research is to provide the tourism and hospitality industry with information that can help their business managers compete in abnormal situations. Without access to baseline measurements, strategic decision-making becomes more like guesswork than problem solving. The approach used in this paper assumed that there would be significant differences between visitors to Florida theme parks during periods of rapid growth and recession. Florida theme park directors are provided several pieces of evidence within this study that could be used to aid institutional strategic marketing planning when entering a recession. One counter intuitive item concerns the fact that during the recession period a greater percentage of theme park visitors traveled by air. This may be attributed to the deep discounting by the U.S. airline industry during this period but it could also be the result of older, higher income travelers taking advantage of economic opportunities created by recessions (i.e. availability and affordability of hotel rooms). A second finding was that visitors to Florida theme parks during the recession of 2001 were more likely to be traveling to visit friends or family than similar visitors during the rapid growth period. This second finding particularly documents the importance of attempting to better understand differences between segments of theme park travelers visiting friends compared with those visiting relatives (Lehto, Morrison, and O'Leary, 2001).

Florida visitors to theme parks during the 2001 recession were found to be ten years older, on the average, than those visitors to Florida theme parks during the rapid growth period of 2000. These visitors stayed longer but spent less on shopping. However, recession theme park visitors spent more on evening entertainment, lodging, groceries and restaurants, in most cases, than did their respective counter parts during the rapid growth period. The most interesting behavioral changes for recession theme park visitors seemed to revolve around the fact that these theme park visitors who were older than the average age of rapid growth theme park visitors) rated "safety", "signs and directions", and the "value received for their travel dollar" destination attributes significantly more important.

The highly significant variables of travel mode and primary reason for visit are all responses for each geographic origin area that most managers would expect. It stands to reason that many purely demographic variables will not be particularly helpful to future segmentation researchers. However, behavioral variables such as expenditures on shopping, sports fees, evening entertainment, lodging, groceries and restaurants fees do provide the strategic marketer with additional, useful information. Age is the one demographic variable that does seem to consistently explain behavioral changes for theme park participants in the two time periods.

Future marketing studies that seek to explain social change must depend on demographic time variables such as age. Make no mistake about it, "In the world of generational marketing, it's age that counts" (Janoff, 1999). One possible solution to marketing travel services to a mass audience is to focus on a combination of age, economic context, and cohort levels of analysis. The likelihood for complete success is increased when industry analysts try to understand differences between two economically-diverse time periods by taking into account the buying power, preferences, attitudes and lifestyles of various generations.

The results from this study present actionable results for marketing management application. This study confirms that theme park visitors from the rapid growth time period are different from theme park visitors surveyed during the recession time period. The study also confirmed that geographic origins of theme park visitors help to explain differences between the two time period groups. Destination managers have immediate, tangible evidence to begin addressing strategies for maximizing visitor on-site satisfaction. Particularly, actionable results may be achieved immediately by developing strategies to address improving directional signage for an ageing domestic market and international travel market segments based on this trend analysis study. However, a cohort analysis would enable researchers to use such closely related variables as generation and time period to find a

clearer means for understanding the process of social change. The problem of multicollinearity must be addressed. For example one variable in the age-generation-period is always nested in another (Toivonen 1999).

HLM might be the correct tool to unlock the age-generation-period problem. After all, age is the one easily-obtainable piece of information that seems to hold the key to many of the questions surrounding changes in travel behavior during recession times. Profiling visitors by an easily reported factor such as age is an important means for guiding travel-oriented marketing strategies (Court and Lupton 1997). The value of using age to group individuals into meaningful segments, such as generations, should guide operations managers to a more efficient use of information delivery systems, which in turn allows for elevated returns on promotional activities (McQueen and Miller 1985). Following these generations over a life course could determine how all generations respond to each new national economic stage, such as wartime or recovery periods. Lucas' rational expectations theory can be tested adequately only if the effects of generation and age can be separated from the effects of the economic age in which each consumer makes decisions.

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