

Contested Kingdom: The role of online media in the relationship
between Disney and fans over Disneyland

by

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Abstract:

Over the past 30 years, the Disney corporation and fans in Southern California have vied online and in the park over the meaning and purpose of Disneyland. The arrival of online social platforms in the 1990s combined with the park annual pass program to enable Southern California passholders, who number approximately one million today, to show a strong sense of place attachment to Disneyland with visits on a monthly, weekly, and even daily basis.

This thesis reveals how the nature of each online social platform, as well as social and cultural factors, have shaped the relationship between local Disneyland fans and the Disney corporation. In the 1990s, the characteristics of Usenet newsgroups afforded fans the cultural and social capital to build a discourse online to resist the directions of the corporation. In the 2000s, the characteristics of fan owned website discussion boards enabled the corporation to gain control of discourse online by bestowing cultural capital on fan owners with high transaction costs in exchange for positive coverage. In the 2010s, the characteristics of social network media, particularly Facebook, and the mass diffusion of smartphones, cemented corporate control of the discourse due to the co-option of influencers and fragmentation of online fandom. However, the low transaction costs of the new platforms led to a proliferation of online fan groups that established a multitude of new social formations in the park. Disney also co-opted fan media, practices, and events to produce its own social and economic capital. The 30-year arc examined in this study illustrates the gradual subsiding of the early democratic promise of many-to-many communication online in favor predominantly of the corporate controlled model endemic to legacy media technologies. The early democratic promise of many-to-many communication online subsided in favor predominantly of the corporate controlled model endemic to legacy media technologies. The mixed methods of qualitative (interviews, participant observation, and data documents) and quantitative (online survey) tools, and grounded theory were used to establish a framework to analyze the

interplay of corporation, fans, and online social platforms around a fandom object as a physical place using medium theory (Meyrowitz, 1994), Van Dijck's (2013) platform analysis model, Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital, Foucault's (1980) power-knowledge, and place attachment theory (Manzo & Perkins, 2006).

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Declaration of Originality

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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William McCarthy, July 2019

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Glossary

AP: Annual pass to Disneyland resort parks

Cast member: front-line park employee

DCA: Disney California Adventure theme park (opened in 2001, less than a one-minute walk from Disneyland)

DIG: Disney Information Guide website owned and operated by Al Lutz in the 1990s

Disneybounding: fan practice of wearing outfits inspired by the appearance of major and minor characters from Disney texts but not an exact duplication as to be considered cosplay in violation of Disney park policy on visitor attire (e.g. using Snow White's associated colors and hairstyle reimagined as a 1920s flapper style)

Disney Legend: hall of fame program honoring individuals for extraordinary contributions to the Walt Disney Company; awarded biennially at the D23 Expo

Disneyland Resort: Anaheim, California, Disney resort comprised of Disneyland theme park (opened in 1955), Disney California Adventure theme park, the Downtown Disney shopping district, and three Disney-owned hotels (Disneyland Hotel, Grand Californian, and Paradise Pier).

Imagineer: an individual who works in Imagineering

Imagineering: the design and engineering arm of the Walt Disney company

Walt Disney World Resort: Orlando, Florida, Disney resort, opened in 1971, currently comprising four theme parks, two water parks, and over 25 Disney-owned hotels.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the problem

I had always perceived Disneyland (and theme parks in general) as commercial, fake, and trite. However, while living with family in 2008 in Southern California, the house of Mickey Mouse was hard to ignore for a visit. The region has many attractions for young families including children's museums, railway exhibits, air and space museums, aquariums, zoos, parks, beaches, and more. Yet, Disneyland's omnipresence in billboards, local periodicals, television commercials, radio ads, Disney stores at the mall, Disney branded food in the supermarket, and even local conversation topic made a trip seem inevitable. Nevertheless, I was uneasy about visiting. As a young child on the quintessential American family pilgrimage to Walt Disney World in Florida, my lasting impression consisted of being so scared by just the name of the attraction called Haunted Mansion that I closed my eyes for almost the entire duration of a ride that is essentially more humorous than frightening. Later, as a graduate student, I lived within a one-hour high-speed rail ride to Tokyo Disneyland, but never gave a thought to a visit during my two-year residence in Japan. This time curiosity convinced me to take a trip to the original Disneyland to witness firsthand as an adult the notoriety of a Disney theme park.

Since I was neither a fan, nor knowledgeable of Disneyland, I did what any detailed oriented person would do before a visit, I perused the Internet to find as much information as possible to plan ahead. Initially, I checked the official Disneyland website and Trip Advisor, but soon found my way onto fan sites with insider type advice. This is when I discovered there were people who actually visited Disneyland on a monthly, weekly, or even daily basis. In June 2017, one man was recognized by Disneyland for visiting on 2,000 consecutive days (Eades, 2017). Eco (1986) observed that visitors to Disneyland were akin to robots with little agency

as they shuffled from ride to ride through the park. However, on most Sundays at noon for two decades, in the park's central hub, a group from the MiceChat fan website meet and enjoy the park together. They have lunch, socialize, and go on a couple rides at most, and sometimes none at all. Although many scholars such as Cresswell (2015b, pp. 76-77) have called Disneyland "the epitome of placelessness constructed, as it is, purely for outsiders", there are many local fan-organized meets, events, and clubs in the park every weekend. Jenkins (2006a; 2013) saw fan participation within online social platforms as a positive force in user empowerment, and as technological extensions of fan communities that existed before the Internet such as conventions, zines, and newsletters. Local Disneyland fans on online social platforms went a step further by creating and organizing regular offline social activities in the park through their events, meets, and clubs. After checking ticket prices, I wondered how so many local fans could afford to visit the park so frequently.

I had always thought of Disney theme parks as tourist destinations that locals might visit annually, but not for weekly trips. Even leisure studies scholars such as Roberts (2004, p.159) noted that "few people can be more than once-a-year visitors" to theme parks. I presumed frequent visits would be prohibitively expensive until discovering Disneyland's annual pass (AP) program. The 1984 introduction of APs for US\$65 enabled holders to visit as many days as they wished over a one-year period. Disneyland did not need to be a special occasion trip for locals anymore, instead becoming, with an AP, almost as accessible as the neighborhood park. Prices have increased over the years with an equivalent signature plus AP in 2019 selling for US\$1,399, but a lower tier pass with more blackout days (weekends, summer, and major holidays) is offered exclusively to Southern California residents for only US\$399. There are estimated to be over one million annual Disneyland passholders (Martin, 2016; MacDonald, 2015). With such a large number of people able to visit the park regularly

and on a whim, there were meets and events at Disneyland organized by fans online. The affordability of the AP combined with the affordance of online social platforms to connect people with shared interests turned Disneyland into a common social meeting spot for Southern Californians. That was when I began to have an idea for a research project on Disneyland as a special place that connected Southern Californians online and in the park.

I visited Disneyland a number of times in 2008 using some of the helpful tips from local fan experts on web discussion boards, and eventually left the Southern California region after a few months. However, I continued to follow the various forums not only for research purposes but also due to a newly kindled interest in news, discussions, debates, and history about Disneyland. In the late 2000s, web discussion boards were still the nucleus for fan interaction and information about Disneyland, but a precipitous decrease in user activity and posting became noticeable by the early 2010s as online social networks increasingly drew fans away. Smartphones also changed the Disneyland experience by enabling fans to connect with each other easily anywhere, anytime, while visiting the park. The concurrent rapid adoption of smartphones and social network media gave rise to networked individualism (Rainie & Wellman, 2012) that focused on an individual's personal network of connections and existing ties (strong, weak and latent) maintained through the Internet. Social network platforms not only drew traffic away from the shared interest fandoms found on web discussion boards, but also transformed governance, content, and usage practices, just as the transition from Usenet newsgroups to web discussion boards had done in an earlier Internet era. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube changed the ownership model from fan-owned discussion boards to corporate-owned platforms. The succession of platform architectures, from Usenet to web discussion boards to social network media, precipitated steady shifts away from the sustained building of a shared interest fan social group to

generating a large volume of turnover traffic for advertising and marketing purposes as corporate values trumped public social ones (Van Dijck, 2013). By ushering in the formation and exchange of user generated content through networks, social media platforms embedded an ideology of neoliberal values of individual empowerment at the expense of public good (Marwick 2013).

By the mid-2010s, stalwart members of web discussion boards commented and wondered where everyone had gone and why. The common answer was to Facebook because everyone was seemingly on the platform. There was no longer a need to visit the many shared interest fan websites and discussion boards that had been present online since the late 1990s and early 2000s. On Facebook, new shared interest groups proliferated rapidly since they were free and easy to create. Fandoms fragmented and spread across multiple social network platforms into smaller and more exclusive groups. In an earlier era, shared interest web discussion boards had attracted a diverse array of participants from all corners of the Internet to focus on a particular fandom object (e.g. Disneyland), but social network platforms focused on an individual user as a hub connecting outward to a sundry array of “likes” (friends, family, hobbies, jobs, interests, commerce, etc.). For Disneyland fans, the mid-2010s saw a rapid increase in the number of in-park fan events being organized on social network platforms, in addition to the formation of scores of local Disneyland fan social clubs with Facebook groups. While in-person relationships often turn into online ones through Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, online connections much less often turn into offline friendships (Baym, 2015). However, Disneyland fans in Southern California took an inverted approach by rarely using online social platforms to arrange person-to-person meets in the park, but rather to discover events, meets, or clubs to attend in order to mix within a mass gathering of fans to potentially connect and make friends in-person at the park. My research idea then

expanded to consider the impact of the different online social platforms of the last 30 years on fan organization and interaction. In addition, I began to consider the periodically contentious relationship of local fans with the Disney corporation as the owner of the physical place of Disneyland that sought to control fans online and in the park. Walt Disney dubbed Disneyland the Magic Kingdom, but the park has been a contested kingdom for the last three decades as local fans and the Disney corporation vie over the meaning and purpose of Disneyland through a succession of online social platforms.

The study therefore looks at two associated questions. First is the examination of the fervent sense of place attachment of Southern California fans to Disneyland by looking at the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Second, in addition to cultural and social factors, the characteristics of the prevailing online social platforms of the last 30 years (Usenet, web discussion boards, and social network media) are examined to delineate the evolution of the interaction, influence, and organization of local fans regarding Disneyland, and Disney as corporate owner and place caretaker. The impact of online social platforms on the fluctuation of power between fans and Disney over discourse, commerce, and social formations is examined over the last three decades.

1.2 Primary research questions

Research Question 1. What are the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of place attachment that the approximately one million annual passholders in Southern California hold for Disneyland's social and physical features?

Research Question 2. How have the characteristics of the prevailing online social platforms of the past three decades shaped:

- 1) the interaction and use of Disneyland by fans in Southern California, and fan resistance to Disney, and
- 2) the fluctuation of power between Disney and fans over Disneyland discourse, commerce, and social formations.

1.3 Statement of the problem

The problem is how the prevailing online social platforms of the past 30 years each distinctly affected Disneyland as a contested place between adult fans in Southern California and the Disney corporation. Although often thought of as a place for children, adults at Disneyland are also bewitched by “an invitation to adventure, a respite from the drudgery of work, and an opportunity to escape from the alienation and boredom of everyday life” (Giroux & Pollock, 2010, p. 8). The pairing of the AP program from 1984 and the rise of online social platforms in the early 1990s afforded a way for disparate adult Disneyland fans in Southern California to connect and meet regularly in the park. Disneyland had been popular with locals since the 1955 opening of the park, but the coupling of the AP and online social platforms supercharged the affective, cognitive, and behavioral bonds of attachment between locals and park. By using the early online social platform of a Usenet newsgroup and a fan-run information clearinghouse website, locals resisted the Disney corporation directly by calling for park changes and assisting in the ousting of top executives, including CEO Michael Eisner in 2005. The decline of Usenet and the rise of web discussion boards and social network platforms, particularly Facebook, afforded Disney the opportunity to reset the discourse on favorable terms to the company. In the park, however, over the past three decades, locals have used online social platforms to create, promote, and organize an ever-increasing number of social formations outside Disney’s oversight. What began as a trickle of in-park fan activities in the 1990s became a deluge enabled by social network platforms in

the 2010s. At the same time, Disney moved to co-opt fan created media and practices in order to directly communicate with fans and take control of any commerce regarding the park.

The gap in the knowledge is twofold. First is to resolve how Disneyland has become a beloved place of attachment for many Southern Californians even though the park has often been termed placeless. Second is to explicate how the characteristics of the prevailing online social platforms of the past 30 years have specifically shaped the online and in-park intersection of local fans and the Disney corporation over Disneyland discourse, social formations, and commerce. The study traces the arc of fan unity and resistance to fragmentation and resignation along with the fluctuation of power between Disney and fans online and in the park during three distinct Internet eras.

1.4 Contribution to scholarship

Although Disney is the largest (by revenue) and oldest (founded in 1923) multinational mass media and entertainment conglomerate in the world, and Disneyland is an internationally famous icon, this is the first longitudinal study of Disneyland fandom. Disneyland fandom displays practices different from other media fandoms because the affective object is a physical place imbued and intertwined with almost 100 years of popular texts, and not centered on a particular person, band, game, film, or TV series. Unlike the media fan cultures observed by Jenkins (2013), Hills (2002) and Booth (2017), Disneyland fandom is not characterized by fan fiction or filk music, or cosplay in the park, which is banned at Disneyland for anyone 14 years of age or older. Instead, fans “Disneybound” in the park by wearing outfits inspired by the appearance of major and minor characters from Disney texts so as not to be considered cosplay (e.g. using Snow White’s associated colors and hairstyle reimagined as a 1920s flapper style). Fannish activities that are organized online and occur

regularly at the park, such as the many events and clubs, are a new area to explore how a fandom negotiates and/or resists a corporate intellectual property owner within a fandom object manifested as a physical place owned by said corporation. This study remedies that Disneyland has long been overlooked in the literature as a local playful place by using place attachment theory (Manzo & Perkins, 2006) to analyze the park's special relationship with Southern Californians. This study should lead to comparative research on other global Disney parks, theme parks such as Universal Studios, Busch Gardens, Dollywood, LEGOLAND, and more around the world, in addition to overlooked neighborhood playful places on a much smaller scale such as card game shops, board game cafes, and other themed entertainment venues.

A longitudinal examination of Disneyland fans in Southern California over the last 30 years enables a parallel look at the evolution and interplay of fans and corporations on online social platforms from Usenet to web discussion boards to social networks. Bury (2016) interviewed 33 fans involved in participatory culture from a broad spectrum of media fandom for a sense of community on online social platforms from Usenet to Tumblr. The study at hand of Disneyland fandom builds on Bury's fan research with a wider range of data including an online survey with 637 participants, over two months of on-site fieldwork, and interviews with 18 participants. In addition, this study not only surveys everyday fans but also explicates the consequences of platform transition from the varied perspectives of web discussion board owners, fan event and club organizers, Disneyland cast members (front-line park employees), and social media influencers. Utilizing medium theory (Meyrowitz, 1994) and Van Dijck's (2013) platform analysis model, the shifts in technology, ownership, governance, business models, users/usage, and content are examined for their impact online and in the park on local fans and Disney through a 30-year succession of online social platforms. Foucault's

(1980) power-knowledge is used to explicate the 30-year fluctuation of power between Disney and fans over Disneyland. Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital provides a persistent framework throughout the study to highlight the interplay and exchange online and in the park of social, cultural, and economic capital between fans and the Disney corporation. The fans were early adopters in the use of online social platforms that afforded the establishment of a new discourse online, distinct practices, and in-park social formations. The nature of subsequent social platforms enabled the corporation to reset online discourse, and co-opt and commercialize fan practices. The evolving intersection over the last 30 years between Disney and local fans over Disneyland can provide a model framework, as discussed in Chapter 10, for other longitudinal studies of corporations and fans on online social platforms.

1.5 Methodology

The study was discovery oriented taking a naturalistic and subjective interpretivist approach through data collection, data analysis, and theory building per grounded theory. The interpretivist approach aligned with the study's primarily qualitative nature exploring and observing the online and in-person experiential milieu of people, practices, behaviors, locations, events, and relationships. Mixed methods were used with an emphasis on qualitative tools such as interviews and participant observation from over two months of on-site fieldwork at Disneyland. An online survey of Southern California residents provided quantitative data to nest within the primarily qualitative framework for statistical support and demographic analysis. Internet data provided quantitative (discussion board, newsgroup, and social media group popularity metrics) as well as qualitative (observation of social documents and creative expression) data. Grounded theory was used to tie together the four methods to drive substantive theory.

1.6 Theoretical framework

The study developed a framework using medium theory (Meyrowitz, 1994), forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), Van Dijck's (2013) platform analysis model, Foucault's (1980) power-knowledge, and place attachment theory (Manzo & Perkins, 2006), supplemented with insights from seminal works in fan studies by Baym (2000), Hills (2002), and Jenkins (2006a; 2013), to analyze the 30-year intersection on online social platforms of fans and corporate owner contesting the discourse, commerce, and social formations encompassing the fandom object as a local place.

1.7 Assumptions, limitations, and scope

The study assumes that interviewees and survey respondents answered honestly and accurately based on their own personal experience, and that the presence of the investigator on-site did not unduly influence the behavior of participants who were aware of the researcher's presence during events, meets, and activities in the park. A limitation was the inability, despite email requests, to obtain an interview with a current representative in Disney corporate or Disneyland guest relations. Instead, to gain an understanding of Disney's perspective, the study consulted relevant articles from periodicals, Disney publications and web documents, and interviews with former and current cast members, long-time Disney observers, and a retired Disney Imagineer (an employee in the design and engineering arm of Disney). The scope was limited to Southern Californians in order to focus the study on Disneyland as a local place and to keep the project manageable for completion during the research time frame. The online survey of 637 respondents was delimited to those who have visited Disneyland at least once, are at least 18 years of age, and reside in one of the ten counties of Southern California. Survey respondents were solicited through posts to nine venues for online Disneyland fans. However, seven were Facebook groups, thus the survey

data primarily derives from respondents recruited on Facebook. Group administrators on Facebook permitted the researcher to post a link to the survey and often encouraged member participation. Securing agreement from major social media influencers to post a link to the researcher's survey to their very large fan audience on visually oriented social network platforms such as Instagram and YouTube was neither practicable nor forthcoming. Besides the reluctance of being perceived as spamming followers and subscribers, influencers also did not want to publicize the survey link on their social media accounts due to the hope of securing a full-time social media position with Disney in the future. Any negative comment on Disney in this study could potentially harm their employability with the company. In addition, since influencers draw followers and subscribers from Disney fandom around the world, many potential respondents would have been denied participation due to the delimitation of the survey to Southern California residents. Human research ethics precluded contacting fans directly on platforms with private messages. Therefore, the survey had little choice but to lean predominantly, but not exclusively, on Facebook groups for respondents with the survey data reflecting this bias. Sit-down interviews were conducted with 18 participants. On-site fieldwork, including participant observation of in-park events, meets, and activities, was conducted for over two months.

1.8 Organization of the remainder of the study

The next chapter covers the methodology of this mixed methods study along with a small-scale literature review of related research from fan studies. This is followed by chapters three and four with literature reviews on forms of capital, medium theory, online social platforms, and Disneyland as a remediation of playful places to lead congruently to the subsequent analytical chapters. Chapter 5 considers Disneyland as a local place of attachment for many Southern Californians. Chapters 6 and 7 investigate the evolution of the interaction,

influence, and organization of Disneyland online fandom through the three different Internet eras. Chapter 8 analyzes the evolution and growth of fan organized events, meets, and clubs at the park from only a few in the 1990s to hundreds today. Chapter 9 assesses the fluctuation of power between fans and Disney online and in the park over the last three decades in relation to discourse, commerce, and social formations. The discussion in Chapter 10 presents a model framework to explicate the interplay and exchange of forms of capital around the fandom object amid the fans, corporation, and prevailing online social platforms of each Internet era. The challenges to Disneyland as a continuing place of attachment for Southern Californians are also discussed. The study submits a conclusion in Chapter 11.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This mixed methods study examines how online social platforms from Usenet to web discussion boards to social network platforms, in addition to smartphones, have impacted the relationship between Disneyland fans in Southern California and the Disney corporation online and in the park over the past three decades. The core issue of this study can be extrapolated to examine the longitudinal relationship of other fandoms and corporate owners as online social platforms continue to evolve in the future.

2.1 Paradigm

The project was discovery oriented taking a naturalistic and subjective interpretivist approach through data collection, data analysis, and theory building. The convergent design of the project, per grounded theory, enabled data sets to be collected and analyzed recursively to drive the construction of substantive theory. The interpretivist approach aligned with the study's primarily qualitative nature exploring and observing the online and offline experiential milieu of people, practices, behaviors, locations, events, and relationships.

2.2 Research design

The project straddled the multiple valences of fandom studies (including sociology, media, leisure, and cultural studies), and therefore looked to previous research on shared interest online groups for guidance. From the earliest studies of virtual communities such as Rheingold's (1993) account of the WELL, and Turkle's (1995) ethnographies of early Internet users, qualitative methods of interviews, observations, and data documents have been employed. Baym's (2000) seminal study of a soap opera newsgroup used open-ended surveys of members, participant observation of their interaction, and the data document collection of posts. Bury (2016) used online surveys and telephone/Skype interviews in a study of 33 fans

to ascertain a longitudinal sense of online camaraderie on platforms from Usenet to Tumblr. Bury's use of mixed methods with a strong qualitative element and a supporting quantitative component (quant-QUAL) was adopted by this study as the appropriate longitudinal approach to look at a shared interest fandom. Though there have been studies on the use of social media by fans (Highfield, Harrington & Bruns, 2013; Hills, 2013; Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013; Marwick, Gray & Ananny, 2014; Wood & Baughman, 2011), Bury's was the first to analyze the effects of different social media platforms over time on shared-interest online groups. While Bury focused solely on fan participants, the present study went a step further by also focusing on the owners, administrators, organizers, and influencers on online social platforms. The shifts in technology, ownership, governance, business models, users/usage, and content were analyzed for their impact on the shared interest online fandom devoted to Disneyland, and the Disney corporation as the owner, from Usenet to web discussion boards to social network platforms. Disneyland fans in Southern California are observed in the study performing Jenkins's (2013) five levels of fannish activity by engaging in a particular mode of reception, using a particular set of critical and interpretive practices, constituting a base of consumer activism, availing particular forms of cultural production, aesthetic traditions, and practices, and functioning as an alternative social community. Since Southern California Disneyland fans regularly meet and attend events at the park, recurring participant observation of the fan place was essential as also used in the season-long treatment by Bondy (2005) of baseball fans in a specific bleacher section at Yankee Stadium, and Sandvoss's (2005) periodic work on football fans in Europe.

The study used mixed methods with an emphasis on qualitative tools such as interviews and participant observation. Survey-derived quantitative data was nested within the primarily qualitative framework for statistical support and demographic evaluation. The survey

quantitatively examined fan attitudes, interests, concerns, event attendance, and group involvement, while also providing for open-ended qualitative input through a number of short answer queries. Data documents provided quantitative (web discussion board and social network platform popularity metrics) as well as qualitative (observation of social documents and creative expression) data. The varied methods provided perspectives from the many different stakeholders within the scope of the study. The interviews provided an array of fan viewpoints including website proprietors, event organizers, a social club leader, social media influencers, cast members, everyday local fans, and a retired Imagineer. The survey tallied the viewpoint of the members and followers of various online and in-park fan groups. Data documents and in-park participant observation together provided the opportunity to observe and learn from the interactions between everyday fans, event organizers and participants, social club members, and Disney park operations management. The quantitative (close-ended) and qualitative (open-ended) data were integrated together to draw interpretations based on both data sets in relation to the research questions (Creswell, 2015).

The researcher was on-site at Disneyland in Southern California to examine the in-park aspect for an over two-month period from October 5 to December 5, 2017, and February 2 to 5, 2018. On-site observation enabled a grounded theory approach of recursive and comparative data collection, and the analysis of similarities and differences until patterns emerged, a core dimension was established, and saturation was reached. The process entailed a continuous progression of theoretical sampling to collect, code, and analyze data, and then more data was collected to code and analyze based on prior work until a substantive theory emerged from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). By using mixed methods with extensive fieldwork, the study reached saturation in data collection when the same instances were repeatedly observed, and categories were well developed with little need for further data

gathering (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The use of grounded theory in fandom studies can be found in Pope's (2017) look at the feminization of sports fandom, Fleming's (2007) study of DragonCon fantasy convention attendees, Lee's (2011) recurring online interviews with fanfic writers, and Harrington and Bielby's (2007) research into the status and possibilities of global fandom. The theoretical sampling of grounded theory is especially useful "when studying new or uncharted areas because it allows for discovery" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 145). This research was informed by prior literature in the multiple valences of fandom studies to use a grounded theory approach for data collection and analysis.

2.3 Methods

The study used four methods for a varied toolbox to observe, collect data, and analyze online fan groups, fan in-park activities, fan website owners, event organizers, social clubs, social media influencers, Disney's presence on online social platforms, Disney's park operations, cast members, and everyday fans in Southern California. Although grounded theory could be considered a method, it was used in this study to tie together the following four methods and is therefore addressed in the data management and analysis section below.

2.3.1 Online survey

A link to a standardized online questionnaire using Google forms was made available to a sampling frame of website and social media group users after receiving administrator approval (see Appendix 1 for full list of survey questions). The questionnaire took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete and was delimited to participants at least 18 years of age who had visited Disneyland at least once and resided most of the year in Southern California due to the study's focus on local fans. The total number of respondents was 694. However, with 57 delimited, the total number of respondents completing the survey in full

was 637. The survey examined the longitudinal use of online platforms, in-park sociability and practices, participation in park events, meets, and clubs, and the dimensions of place attachment to Disneyland. The survey targeted findings representative of local Disneyland fans in Southern California including attitudes and opinions. Variables were correlated using demographics, attitudes, social interaction, and usage. The self-reported representations illustrated fan social activities revolving around Disneyland. The questionnaire was a combination of closed and open-ended questions to ascertain the type and level of contact with various Disneyland online groups and in-park activities. Likert scale and matrix surveys were used to determine representative interactions, changing patterns in interactions and usage, correlations between various factors, accounts of social experiences, and the attitudes, intentions, and opinions of respondents. The questionnaire was divided into sections. The first section inquired about frequency of visits, trip companions, AP ownership, and other favorite local social spots, including non-Disney-owned Southern California theme parks, to determine the comparative level of commitment. A series of brief sections queried the degree and motivation for participation in specific online and in-person groups over time, including Usenet, web discussion boards, and social media groups, and clubs, meets, and events. The penultimate section explored what made Disneyland social and meaningful for the respondent, such as favorite hang-out spot, social activity, park milieu, and interaction with fellow visitors, fan groups, and cast members. The final section asked respondents a brief number of demographic questions.

2.3.2 Interviews

In-depth interviews ranging from 20 to 90 minutes with 18 participants were conducted with founders and organizers of Disneyland social clubs, social media groups, in-park events, and

web discussion boards, as well as local fans, cast members, social media influencers, and a retired Imagineer. Of the 18 interviewees, nine were male and nine were female:

- Anonymous #1, local Disneyland fan who visits almost every day, October 17, 2017
- Anonymous #2, founder and organizer of Steam Day and administrator of the event's Facebook group (uses Steampunk handle on all social media), November 14, 2017
- Anonymous #3, local Disneyland fan, October 29, 2017
- Anonymous #4, the administrator of the Facebook group for swing dancing at Disneyland, November 16, 2017
- Anonymous #5, former cast member as well as prominent social media influencer, October 17, 2017
- Anonymous #6, co-administrator of the Facebook group for Disneyland social clubs as well as leader of a social club, November 6, 2017
- Anonymous #7, local Disneyland fan, October 27, 2017
- Anonymous #8, local Disneyland fan, October 29, 2017
- Anonymous #9, current (at time of interview) cast member as well as prominent social media influencer, November 16, 2017
- Bob Gurr, retired Imagineer and Disney Legend, October 8, 2017
- Jim Hill, long-time media commentator on Disney, October 27, 2017
- Noah Korda, founder and organizer of Bats Day and administrator of the event's website, social media, and Facebook group, November 22, 2017
- Mike Marquez, organizer of approximately 20 events and administrator of Facebook group One Big Disney Family Entertainment, October 16, 2017
- Amy McCain, founder and organizer of Galliday and administrator of the event's website, social media, and Facebook group, October 31, 2017

- Doobie Moseley, co-founder of the Disney fan website and discussion board Laughing Place, and administrator of the Laughing Place social media accounts, November 30, 2017
- Ken Pellman, former Disneyland cast member from 1990s and 2000s, and co-host of the fan podcast “The Sweep Spot” devoted to the park, October 21, 2017
- Todd Regan (Internet handle: Dusty Sage), CEO of MiceChat, organizer of the in-park event Gumball Rally and Sunday hub meets, administrator of the MiceChat social media accounts, and Executive Director of the Dick Van Dyke Foundation, November 28, 2017
- Hayley Ruszecki, co-founder and co-organizer of Lolita Day, and co-administrator of the event’s website and social media accounts, October 11, 2017

Although a template list of questions was prepared as a guide (see Appendix 2 for list of questions), the interviews were conducted in an open-ended, semi-structured, and flexible manner with context specific queries for each interviewee so new lines of interest could be followed from topics raised in the course of the session (Pole & Lampard, 2002). The interviewer took a neo-positivist stance of rapport with interviewees as neutral on the content. The interviews were audio recorded with any additional reflections written immediately after each interview. Memos were written during transcription with identifying information at the top including when and with whom the interview was conducted. For practicality, any phatic and filler conversation was not transcribed. The general purpose of the interviews was to delve more deeply into the roles, practices, and history of local Disneyland fans and groups. The prepared questions investigated the interviewee’s relationship with Disneyland and the Disney corporation (including the negotiation and challenge of using a corporate owned space as a public place for gathering), history with associated online and in-park groups, clubs, and events, successes and challenges with groups, clubs, and events, and the effects

and consequences of the transition from Usenet to web discussion boards to social network platforms. The latter question was emphasized for linkage to medium theory (Meyrowitz, 1994), forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), and Van Dijck's (2013) platform analysis model. The interviews primarily aimed to gain an historical perspective from fan organizers and participants of groups and events, ascertain administrator challenges from a governance, ownership, technology, and content perspective, and, finally, to get a sense of the past, present, and future of local fan social activities and formations at Disneyland.

2.3.3 Participant observation

Fieldwork in Southern California was conducted through participant observation of the groups, clubs, meets, events, and visitors within Disneyland by looking at their experiential space of practices, relationships, events, objects, and culture. Particular attention was paid to potential signs of commodification of leisure and sociability, and also to the notion of place attachment as an affective bond beyond the commodity metaphor of a multi-attribute consumer choice (Williams, 2014). Systematic observation was conducted according to the research questions and study framework to triangulate findings with the surveys and interviews. In-park participant observation of events, clubs, and meets occurred post-interview with the organizer in order to verify interview-provided information, and uncover practices and customs using thick description (Geertz, 1973) since people are often unaware of the practices and nuances that define their experience (Bourdieu, 1977). Ad hoc, informal interviews with club, meet, and event participants, as well as everyday visitors, were interwoven with the observation so these informal anchored interviews could inquire as to the nature of what was just observed. The aim of the fieldwork was to gain an etic and emic understanding of individual and group structuring of habitual and recurrent practices within associations and lives (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The observational data represented firsthand

accounts to supplement secondhand accounts from interviews. Descriptive field notes were jotted on a mobile phone or piece of paper as soon as possible post-observation (see Appendix 3 for field note template). A wide angle perspective was taken at observation entry that eventually gave way to a focus on specific individuals, interactions, and activities with attention given to key words (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). For each observation case, a summary was completed with a description of the physical environment and context, the number, organization, and characteristics of participants, the structure of activity and interaction, and the sequencing, norms, and length of time. The content of significant conversations was noted including who spoke with whom, who listened, silences and non-verbal behavior, dress and physicality, and subtle factors including any informal activities, connotative and symbolic meanings, and what did *not* happen. Quotation marks were used for direct quotes. And, finally, my behavior as participant observer was annotated, including whether the researcher affected the scene.

2.3.4 Documents

Social data documents included the content of online discussion groups, activity and event websites, social media groups, and vlogs (Pink, 2013). Creative expression by fans were notable documents for analyzing fan relations with Disney and other fans. Paulus, Lester, and Dempster (2014, p. 191) emphasized the importance of observing digital qualitative tools such as “mobile devices, GIS, online communities, and the ‘YouTube Nation’... making it easier to capture social life as it happens, adding a layer of authenticity to our work”.

Quantitative content analysis of digital document data was conducted to count (where applicable) number of threads, posts, views, comments, members, followers, subscribers, etc. The extensive social media presence used by interest based web discussion board owners was analyzed for their potential success (measured by followers/subscribers and level of

discussion activity over time) in maintaining a meaningful connection with fans. Groups that originated and exist only on social media sites were analyzed for their type (knowledge, in-person meets, influencer, hybrid) and success (measured by followers/subscribers and amount of discussion activity). Statistical data from the online survey was cross-referenced with these aforementioned types of quantitative data to ascertain the groups and sites popular with survey participants versus overall site popularity within greater online fandom. This cross-referencing helped determine whether the survey participants were indicative and representative of the general fan community. Qualitative content analysis was undertaken of the key organizational features per Altheide's (1987) inductive approach of exploring membership criteria, discussion forum protocol, and member services and activities. In addition, Brint's (2001) structured subtypes of variables including context, frequency, and motivation for interaction were applied to online and in-park participation. These data documents were also valuable as existing outside the influence of the researcher as an instrument of inquiry, and hence nonreactive. At the same time, the inherent nature of digital data on Facebook, Twitter, websites, etc. as potentially ephemeral and often dynamic over time through deletion, addition, or even movement to new locations was taken into consideration during collection and analysis. The data documents of the varied Disneyland online groups were used to understand their diverse forms and practices (Miller & Slater, 2000).

2.4 Participant recruitment and data collection

The Disneyland online fan groups from Usenet, web discussion boards, and social network platforms within this study were chosen based on active membership (number of threads generated and unique user postings), substantial size (overall number of registered members/followers/subscribers), longevity (number of years active), and relevance (focus on

Disneyland, rather than Walt Disney World in Florida, or theme parks in general). Web discussion boards were also analyzed by activity (threads and posts generated) in successive years to trace their decline in active membership and include as a discussion point in interviews with site owners.

The online survey participants were drawn by posting a notice to Facebook groups, a popular fan website column, and a meetup.com group all focused on Disneyland in Southern California including general interest, event, and social club pages:

- Club Hub Facebook group post
- Disneyland Southern California Annual Passholders Unite Facebook group post
- Disneylanders Facebook group post
- Lolita Day Facebook group post
- MiceChat Facebook group post
- Social Clubs of Disneyland Facebook group post
- Steam Day Facebook group post
- MiceChat.com Fab News column – included as a news item within the column
- Meetup.com Disneyland fan club group post

The survey was delimited to residents of Southern California who were at least 18 years old. Participants were sourced from online sites and groups through a general invitation message. Pre-approval of the site or group administrator was obtained in advance before posting an invitation message in order to respect group posting rules and increase the chance of buy-in from members. Potential participants were encouraged to contact the researcher by email with any questions or concerns (see Appendix 4 for survey participant information sheet). The survey was targeted to multiple sites and groups for maximum variation so many potential instances of the fandom could be uncovered per grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss,

1967). This broader targeting also held greater potential to uncover negative or disconfirming instances of emerging theory. Overall sample size was initially targeted to be between 50 and 100 completions with saturation and redundancy of responses reached, but the final tally of complete survey respondents was 637. A breakdown of respondent age groups is specified in Table 1.

Age Group	Percentage
18-25	15%
26-35	27%
36-45	27%
46-55	18%
56+	13%

Table 1: Age groups of online survey respondents (n=637).

The gender of respondents was 75% female, 24% male, and 1% provided an indeterminate response. The demographic of media fans has long been noted for a strong female inclination (Bacon-Smith, 1991; Jenkins, 2006a; Sandvoss, 2005; Stanfill, 2019), particularly so for Disney fandom (Gabillet, A, 2015; Scott, S, 2019; T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017), but the disproportionate result among survey respondents was greater than anticipated. The racial/ethnic demographic of survey respondents was 59% white/Caucasian, 22% Hispanic/Latinx, 7% Asian, 5% mixed race, 1% black/African-American, and 5% did not provide a quantifiable response. Compared to California state demographics, white and mixed race were a higher proportion of respondents than Hispanic/Latinx and Asian, which may be attributed to the survey being only in English and the link posted only to English language websites and Facebook groups. The low percentage of black/African-American respondents was perhaps due to socioeconomic factors that limit their access to Disneyland. By contrast, Latinx-Americans have a US national median income 16% higher than African-Americans. In addition, California has a relatively lower percentage of African-Americans at

less than 6% compared to the US as a whole at nearly 13%. Unlike age and generational issues, the study did not focus on gender or race/ethnicity because the data did not foreground a divergence along those lines for local Disneyland fans on online social platforms or in fan organized park activities. Current Disneyland cast members comprised 4% of respondents and 9% had previously been cast members. Data analysis was ongoing as surveys were completed per grounded theory.

Interview participants were contacted via a publicly available email address, message on a social media page, website contact form, or in-person at the park. The date, time, and location for each interview was mutually agreed upon. The consent form was signed with an option to be publicly identified or remain anonymous (see Appendix 5 for interview consent forms and participant information sheets). The interviews were either conducted in person near Disneyland in a publicly accessible area (e.g. Starbucks or benches in the Downtown Disney shopping district), or by distance using phone or Skype. Interviewees were chosen for their status as website and discussion board owners, event organizers, and social network group administrators, in addition to Disneyland cast members, a retired Disney Imagineer, and local fans who visit the park regularly, belong to social clubs, and/or attend events and meets. The interview sampling was conducted by purposive nonprobability in order to reach information-rich cases. The criterion-based selection was extended by snowball sampling to find further interview participants. The overall sample size for formal interviews was targeted to be between 15 and 20 participants, and the final number was 18. Sampling was done until saturation and redundancy was reached. When the same responses were repeatedly heard to interview questions, that was taken as an indication that few new insights were forthcoming. Data analysis was conducted after each data collection to build on new concepts in subsequent interviews and assess the level of overall data saturation.

In-park event organizers were contacted in advance via a publically available email address, message on a social media group page, or website contact form for researcher approval to be a participant observer. A purposive nonprobability sampling of events was conducted by examining longevity, level of fan participation, and online and in-park presence to derive a diverse array of information-rich cases. Ad hoc conversations were often held with event and club participants, as well as with everyday visitors during the over two months the researcher spent at Disneyland. Obtaining the approval of every event organizer greatly facilitated the researcher's role as a participant observer and ability to interact with fan participants. Overall sample size was targeted to be between four and eight events with the final number being eight. Sampling was done until saturation and redundancy were reached. If similar behaviors and practices were repeatedly observed at events, that was taken as an indication that few new insights were forthcoming. Data analysis was conducted after each data collection to build on new concepts in subsequent observations and assess the threshold level of overall data saturation. In-park event and group observations were designed to verify information from interviews, observe behaviors and practices, and ascertain in-park sociability and potential commodification of fan events.

2.5 Trustworthiness of data

Credibility (internal validity) was established through the triangulation of multiple methods, so the varied sources of data could be cross-checked. For example, interview data was checked against observation notes, survey results, and document data. Some follow-up questions for interviewees were sent to check respondent validation and solicit feedback on preliminary or emergent findings. As opposed to relying on a single source, multiple methods provided an improved form of data validation. Ongoing engagement was sustained during the

data collection process of interviews, survey, and participant observation until emergent findings felt saturated with the data beginning to read the same way consistently. At the same time, any variant data that supported alternative explanations was pursued. The best fit emerged through the preponderance of evidence. A reflexive position as to how the researcher could have affected the research process with any biases, assumptions, and dispositions was noted.

Multiple methods were employed to gather data to ensure consistency and reliability in results, and ensure congruency with the reality of the participants. An audit trail was used to describe how data was collected, categories formed, and decisions made throughout the duration of the study project. A researcher's journal was maintained of reflections, questions, and decisions made when facing problems, issues, or ideas during the data collection stage. Written memos from field observations were transcribed into the research journal.

A thick description (Geertz, 1973) of findings with evidence from interview quotes, field notes, survey results, and documents was used to enable transferability (external validity). Maximum variation was undertaken in interview subjects, data documents, and event attendance for a greater range of potential applicability to readers and researchers who can assess and extrapolate from the totality of evidence for applicability to new studies.

2.6 Data management and analysis

Data was scrutinized during collection to enable an emergent and flexible analysis that strategically evolved and developed over time. Each unit of data built on the last, so the first interview was transcribed shortly after exiting, and then could be compared with the second interview shortly afterward. This process was continuously repeated using Bogdan and

Biklen's (2011) suggestions for data analysis by narrowing the study in subsequent interviews, reviewing field notes, writing memos not only about what was observed but what was being learned, exploring new literature in the field, and playing with metaphors, analogies, and concepts. This constant comparative method of data analysis for the interviews, field notes, documents, and surveys led to substantive theory as a hallmark of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The inductive analysis did not necessarily find knowledge but rather constructed meaning through an emic and etic understanding of participants within their milieu. The three phases of grounded theory coding were followed. The first, open coding, tagged any unit of data that could be relevant to the study as a memo containing a descriptive notation of people, practices, events, behaviors, etc. Memo writing (including reflection) and grouping began with the first interview transcript or set of field notes, and continued to the next unit of data to find similarities and differences. This repeated use of open coding through memo writing assisted in the formation of categories through interpretation and reflection. The second phase, axial coding, established categories from the open codes, and related categories and properties (category descriptions) to refine the entire scheme of categories by identifying recurring regularities and data units (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). With more data, some categories became subcategories. Category names derived from the researcher, words used by participants, and the topic literature. Each data unit in a category had identifying codes and transcript line markers put into category files. Category construction was initially inductive, but once data saturation was reached, deduction was used to narrow down to the most useful recursive categories. These categories reflected the research questions, and were conceptually congruent and mutually exclusive. The category lists from separate data points were merged into a master list to become an initial classification system of regularities and patterns that cut across the data. The third phase,

selective coding, defined one element of the phenomenon as the core dimension that interconnected and interrelated with all other categories.

The type of grounded theory used in the study is classic (or Glaserian) rather than constructivist (or Charmazian). The classic type is a more distanced, objective viewpoint, while still accounting for role reflection through memo taking. The constructivist type takes a relativist approach of multiple social realities, while classic seeks to identify a core category or concern to explicate the subject through incidents in the data. Classic takes the perspective of participants into account within the core concept as an explication of ongoing patterns of behavior. The constructivist approach has the researcher and multiple participants work together to build data and analysis, and is often interrelated with other theories such as critical, post-colonial, feminist, and action viewpoints. Classic is a general method untied to any one theoretical perspective, unmoored from any lens of ontology and epistemology, and therefore highly adaptable (Glaser, 2005). Citing Silverstone's (2007) ethical terminology of "proper distance", Hills (2012) cautions scholar-fans against taking sides in fan debates and factional disputes. Taking into consideration the numerous rival groups and clubs within the Disneyland fan environment, an attempt at a constructivist approach could have drawn the researcher into a potentially acrimonious and tumultuous data collection and analysis phase. Therefore, classic grounded theory was chosen as a flexible process of "proper distance" focused on the final outcome.

In addition to grounded theory, other tools of analysis were used to derive useful study data. To ascertain the patterns of relationships between and among the study's social actors (i.e. site owners, event organizers, influencers, etc.), social network analysis (Kozinets, 2015; Wellman, 1988) was conducted of data from interviews and online data documents. Each

actor was a node and the relationships between actors were relational ties that could be graphed for connections, information, and resource flow, and effects on people and groups. Social network analysis was used to quantify and statistically analyze the patterns of participation of fans across the many sites, forums, groups, events, and social network platforms. Online survey results were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively using a cross-case variable-oriented analysis. Potential correlations, for example, between fan use of online social platforms, in-park event participation, and fan demographic profile were examined. Univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses were conducted for comparison.

2.7 Ethical assurances

The project received approval from the University of Adelaide's Human Research Ethics Review Group: H-2017-008. The consent form for the survey questionnaire was embedded into the online structure of the gateway page. The interview consent forms included options to remain anonymous or use real name attribution. Some interview participants were public or semi-public figures so attribution was offered as a choice. Per the consent form, interviewees could remove themselves from the research project at any time before thesis submission, though none did so. The project scrupulously respected those interviewees and participants requesting confidentiality and anonymity. As indicated on the consent form, the research endeavored to provide beneficence, non-maleficence, and informed consent. Risk of harm to participants was rigorously minimized, no deceptive practices were employed, and participation was voluntary. All voices were heard with the reciprocity befitting the researcher-participant relationship.

Chapter 3: Forms of Capital, Medium Theory, and Online Social Platforms

This chapter comprises three sections to provide a framework, theoretical underpinning, and historical overview to explicate the shift from shared interest groups on Usenet and website discussion boards to personal social networks in order to inform the analysis and discussion of Disneyland fans and the Disney corporation online and offline in later chapters. First is a discussion of Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital as a framework to analyze the online and offline interplay and exchange between fans and Disney. Second is an overview of medium theory to discuss the technological aspects of online platforms for social impact on a macro/structural and micro/individual level. The third section begins with a look at the early concept of online community before proceeding to a review divided into the periods before and after personal social networks. Usenet, which was ungoverned, unowned, and unmoderated, was the primary early social platform for people to share knowledge and information on shared interests and hobbies. As Usenet declined, fans shifted to website discussion boards which were still centered on shared interests and hobbies but, unlike Usenet, were owned, governed, and moderated by a small number of highly motivated enthusiasts. The rise of social media shifted fans away from shared interest based sites to personal social networks owned, governed, and moderated by corporations. The emergence of influencers from social network platforms is also discussed. And to better understand the converging evolution of the social and political economic aspects of the platforms, Van Dijk's (2013) model is discussed herein and then used in Chapter 10 as part of the study's analytical framework.

3.1 Forms of capital

Hills (2002, p. 46) views Bourdieu's (1986) work as a framework to analyze how fan status is built up "as a social hierarchy where fans share a common interest while also competing over

fan knowledge, access to the object of fandom, and status”. Bourdieu (1986) identifies three forms of capital – economic, social, cultural – that Malaby (2006) sees as being transformed, or parlayed, from one form to another across online and offline domains. Economic capital consists of resources such as money and assets that can be used to obtain the other two forms of capital. Social capital is the network of personal connections that can be converted into economic capital. Cultural capital is the knowledge of texts and works important to fans that can also be converted into economic and social capital. This kind of knowledge rewards the holder with subcultural authenticity and cannot be learned at schools (Thornton, 1995).

However, cultural capital can be institutionalized when an authority bestows its imprimatur to an individual or group as credentialed to carry out certain kinds of activities (Malaby, 2006).

Auslander (1999, p. 58) states that cultural capital translates into symbolic capital within fan cultures because “the more you know about a particular rock group, for example, the more prestige you will have among fans of that group”. Hills (2002, p. 57) states:

Following Fiske’s coinage of ‘fan cultural capital’ (the knowledge that a fan has about their object of fandom), I would suggest that ‘fan social capital’ (the network of fan friends and acquaintances that a fan possesses, *as well as* their access to media producers and professional personnel linked with the object of fandom) must also be closely investigated in future analyses.

Fiske, writing in 1992, believed popular culture capital was not typically convertible into economic capital besides a few exceptions such as fan artists at conventions. Since the time of Fiske’s article, online social platforms have afforded fans many novel ways to establish hierarchies of cultural and social capital to parlay into economic capital. Social capital online is “not only a resource for social action but also one that can be leveraged to cultivate market capital” (Malaby, p. 146). Bourdieu’s (1986) framework is used in this study to understand

the generation, use, and transformation of the forms of capital across the intersecting domains of fans, online social platforms, and the Disney corporation at Disneyland.

3.2 Medium theory

Medium theory concentrates on the specific characteristics of each medium or particular type of media. For Meyrowitz (1994, p. 50), medium theorists ask questions such as:

What are the relatively fixed features of each means of communicating and how do these features make the medium physically, psychologically, and socially different from other media and from face-to-face interaction?

The variables associated with each medium influence its usage, and social, political, and psychological impact (Meyrowitz, 1994). Medium theory looks at the micro/individual situation level of how the choice of one medium over another affects a situation or interaction, and at the macro/structural level of how the addition of a new medium to an existing matrix of media can change social interactions and structures (Meyrowitz, 1994). A medium does not simply pass information between environments, but can shape the social environments themselves (Meyrowitz, 1994).

Two of the most prominent early medium theorists were Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan. For Innis, some types of media were easier for elites to dominate, such as a medium in short supply or one requiring special encoding or decoding skills, because elites had more time or resources available to fully utilize them (Meyrowitz, 1994). McLuhan analyzed mediums in different historical periods as extensions of human senses that affected the structure of culture and reshaped social life (Meyrowitz, 1994). While the mass diffusion of electronic media in the 20th century allowed for greater global awareness and involvement among people, a more heterogeneous world for the individual who had traditionally united

and divided into groups based on social class, ethnicity, race, education type and level, religion, occupation, and neighborhood could then further subdivide into groups based on fashion, sports, hobbies, and music (Meyrowitz, 1994).

For Bolter and Grusin (1999, p.65), a medium “appropriates the techniques, forms and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real”. Therefore, a medium is never used in isolation but in relation with other media. A new medium is seen as filling a deficit or fixing a problem in a predecessor, and thus through remediation improves on an older medium that users did not even realize was deficient. Photography was seen as “more immediate than painting, film than photography, television than film, and now virtual reality fulfills the promise of immediacy and supposedly ends the progression” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 60). In the digital age, the debate became whether the networked computer itself was the ultimate technology to simulate all mediums through digitization, and therefore be the medium to end all mediums.

The Internet as a new medium afforded the many-to-many social engagement found on platforms such as Usenet, web discussion boards, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Gillespie (2010, p. 350) defines a platform as an “online content-hosting intermediary” that affords a chance to communicate, interact, and sell. Jenkins (2006b, pp.14-15) held that technological convergence would not lead to a black box through which all media flowed, but rather there would be many black boxes of “specialized media appliances”. Rather than the digital computer as an all encompassing medium within which all mediums converge, Manovich (2013) sees mediums undergoing evolutionary multiplying over time with increasing diversity and complexity as each new medium adopts and builds upon the affordances of existing ones as a kind of reciprocal remediation. Digital technology is

exceptional by affording programming, which allows medium objects to be algorithmically modified from within to produce new digital technologies (Manovich, 2013). Within the medium of the Internet has emerged a succession of online social platforms each with specific characteristics that have produced social changes.

Digital media is often distinguished from previous media for being the most “interactive” (Burnett & Marshall, 2003), although Jenkins (2006b) prefers the term “participatory”, to separate the actions of human actors from the technological systems that enable interaction. The interactive characteristics of various communication systems have different impacts on social participation (Spurgeon, 2008). Bordewijk and van Kamm (1986) term the one-way one-to-many information flow of electronic broadcast media as allocution due to the interactivity deficit among and between transmitters and receivers. Allocution was the dominant form of communication media in the 20th century and naturalized the unequal interaction between senders and receivers (Carey, 1992) and legitimized restrictions on participation (Spurgeon, 2008). However, digital networked communication through the Internet and mobiles has allowed for a dynamic, multi-patterned interactivity with “explicitly conversational capabilities that enable peer-to-peer exchange, direct participation, and representation” (Spurgeon, 2008, p. 6). Digital media has extended the conversational interaction and participation by consumers beyond what was possible with modern mass media (Spurgeon, 2008). Mass media producers, distributors, and marketers “want to maintain their traditional dominance over media content” (Jenkins, 2003, p. 286) as they enjoyed under the previous media environment, so there is a struggle between the corporations and consumers over the social implications of participation from the rise of the Internet and mobiles (Spurgeon, 2008).

Over the past 30 years, the three online social platforms of Usenet, web discussion boards, and social networks emerged for fans to interact with each other and the media corporation that owned the fandom object. Each platform has impacted discourse, social formations, and commerce at the micro and macro level for its specific time period. The tension between structure and agency is observed as macro-level patterns at the medium level shaping, along with social and cultural factors, the micro-level actions of the corporation and fans at the place of Disneyland. The next section discusses the historical backgrounds for the emergence, growth, and ebb of the three prevailing online platforms under examination in this study.

3.3 Online community

Even the earliest founding documents of the Internet in the 1960s referred to the idea of communities within online environments (Parks, 2011). Anderson (1983) decoupled community from physical proximity by identifying imagined communities of people who had never met face-to-face but could affectively imagine themselves as a community, such as in his study of the development of nationalism and nationhood. Meyrowitz (1985) held electronic technology such as television could dissociate a physical location from a sense of place thus creating a new “situational geography” of social life. But the Internet went further by combining the latter two concepts to become the technology that created social relationships and spaces without a physical location. New technologies became a multiplier “creating a plurality of overlapping or mutually exclusive social realities” on different stages (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 150). Levy (1997) called the self-organized groups with common intellectual or emotional investments, such as web communities, the new knowledge space to differentiate from organic (family, clans, tribes) and organized social groups (nations, institutions, religions, and corporations). Poster (1995) heralded the coming of a second

media age of multiple producers, distributors, and consumers through the integration of technology including televisions, satellites, computers, and telephones to replace the first media age of broadcast technology with few producers and many consumers. This second media age would give rise to participatory media culture (Jenkins, 2006a; Jenkins, 2013). Hagel and Armstrong in 1997 presciently emphasized the importance of user-generated content not only to the communities but to a community's business owners.

Hiltz and Turoff (1978) in their book *Network Nation* were among the first to write of using computer networks for 'computer conferencing' as a way to socialize, meet, and organize. In 1987, Howard Rheingold (2012, p. 162) popularized the term virtual community as:

A group of people who may or may not meet one another face to face, and who exchange words and ideas through the mediation of computer bulletin boards and networks. Like any other community, it is also a collection of people who adhere to a certain (loose) social contract, and who share certain (eclectic) interests.

Communities on the network encompassed social aggregations for public discussion (Rheingold, 1993) with shared practices among individuals in social interaction (Lizie, 2009). Rheingold's usage of virtual, or online, communities pushed out competing metaphors such as "information superhighway" to influence the way people thought of the Internet (Parks, 2011). Blanchard's (2004, p. 55) definition also emphasized online community's social aspect as "groups of people who interact primarily through computer-mediated communication and who identify with and have developed feelings of belonging and attachment to each other". The low cost, high speed, and widespread adoption of the Internet allowed for social affordances to increase social capital (Wellman et al., 2003). Computer-mediated communication shifted sociability from being centered on a physically proximate group to an extended digital network (Wellman, 1999; Rheingold, 2012). Online

communities were not global or local sites, but translocal contexts by being both transnational and local (Rokka, 2010).

All communities, online and offline, have specific histories of interaction and practices (Bury, 2016), with sociological studies of communities generally looking at three variables: place, number of ties, and quality of interaction (Song, 2009). Jones (1997) iterated four conditions for online spaces to be considered a place of community: an array of participants to generate a variety of opinions, a degree of interaction, a shared public space for interaction, and a level of persistent membership. However, the debate over online community at the beginning was often emotional and contentious by hinging on questions of who people were in their public and private lives when using novel communication technologies. Early research on online community focused on the ontological, and especially the lack of place except in a metaphorical and culturally imagined sense.

3.4 Early online social platforms (pre-social networks)

Cyberpunk fiction, and its description of cyberspace, highly influenced early thinking and expectations of the Internet as a separate space and identity from everyday life (Hine, 2015). At the same time, William Gibson's 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, wherein the term "cyberspace" was coined, presented the Internet as causing social decay (Rainie & Wellman, 2012), and as a social space apart from the real world (Shirky, 2008). At a time when few people had Internet access, the people you met online were different from the people you met offline since the two worlds rarely overlapped. However, Rheingold's (1993) experience with one of the oldest online communities, the WELL, showed how the social glue binding members together created social capital, knowledge capital, and communion (Hafner, 2001). This sense of community was strengthened by requiring every post by WELL members to be

attributed and linked to a persistent userid (Rheingold, 1993). Deindividuation was first thought to encourage antinormative behavior when an individual's identity was submerged within the group (Kiesler, Kraut, Resnick & Kittur, 2011) as the relative anonymity of online discussion compared to face-to-face and phone communication was seen as partly responsible for less normative pressure online (Bordia, 1997). On the other hand, relative anonymity could also give participants control over the manner and occasion for self-disclosure (Baym, 2000; Walther 1995) and afford opportunity to form relationships without regard to differences in social status or physical appearance (Baym, 2000; Hiltz & Turoff, 1993). In addition, deindividuation was found to lead to greater group solidarity and identity compared to open displays of individuating markers (e.g. name and photo), thus emphasizing the "us" of the group over the relationships between "you and me" (Postmes, Spears & Lea, 1998).

The WELL was only one community out of an enormous number of niche groups and communities that offered a way for people to join discussions outside of and unavailable within one's regular offline sociability (Kollock & Smith, 1999; Mele, 1999). From the late 1970s until the mid 1990s advent of the web, BBSes (bulletin board systems) were a popular way to connect with like-minded hobbyists and fans by logging into a computer server to upload or download software and data, and exchange news and information. Kollock and Smith (1999, p. 16) described these communities as "groups of people who meet to share information, discuss mutual interest, play games, and carry out business". Many communities formed through fan attachment to media properties, becoming active cultural agents in the reading and appropriation of favorite texts (Coppa, 2014; Jenkins, 2006a; Jenkins, 2006b). The range of groups became so vast and varied that people could "shop" for their community based on narrow affinities (Song, 2009). Participants in online communities often established relationships due to their shared homogenous interests despite potential heterogeneity in

social background such as age, ethnicity, and class (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). And offline communities of shared hobbies and interests could be augmented by online interaction and engagement (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). Iriberry and Leroy (2009) enumerated several benefits for members in online communities including the exchange and access to information and knowledge, an opportunity to form and maintain social ties with people previously known offline and to meet new people online, giving and receiving emotional support, being entertained, the ability to come and go as one wished due to spatial and temporal independence, and establishing a persistent social presence and storage facility for messages and interactions with other members. The earliest form of online community emerged on listserves as topical discussion lists sent through email to subscribers. The first, in 1973, was called SF-LOVERS for science fiction fans to discuss, debate, and connect (Johnston, 2014). However, for scalability to accommodate the growing number of fans coming online and readability by enabling threaded posting, early online communities of interest flourished on Usenet newsgroups, and then website discussion boards.

3.4.1 *Usenet*

Usenet was an early non-centralized digital network for topical discussion and file sharing via newsgroups. Established in 1980, Usenet existed well before the appearance of the World Wide Web (Lueg & Fisher, 2003). What began as early discussions of Unix programming and troubleshooting quickly diverged into an array of topics and conversations on a global scale (Rheingold, 1993). Individual users posted to discussion boards known as newsgroups for primarily “social interaction on topics of personal rather than professional interest” (Baym, 1994, p. 147). During the “Great Renaming” in 1987, groups were divided into seven large hierarchies (Pfaffenberger, 2003), including society (soc.) and recreation (rec.), which became the two most popular (Baym, 2000). Within the hierarchies, there were categories

such as culture and arts, and then further subcategories including Japanese culture and soap operas. For more niche and alternative topics, an eighth hierarchy called “.alt” was implemented in 1986 and became the most popular by number of posters, posts, average line count, replies, repliers, and newgroups (Smith, 2003). The popularity of .alt was in spite of being blocked by many server administrators because of the hierarchy’s sometimes controversial subject matter (Whittaker, Terveen, Hill & Cherny, 2003). By 1996, there were 17,000 groups and approximately three million users globally (Whittaker, Terveen, Hill & Cherny, 2003), though the total number of users was probably higher due to an undercount of lurkers, who browsed but rarely, if ever, posted. Lurkers comprised the majority of members in online groups and often felt a sense of community even without posting (Nonnecke & Preece, 2003).

The characteristics of Usenet as an online social platform impacted how users interacted, perceived, and utilized newsgroups. Most newsgroups were unmoderated and conversations were known for devolving into rants and flame wars fanned by the cloak of anonymity through junk and spoofed email addresses (McLaughlin, Osborne & Smith, 1995; Slouka, 1995). As a decentralized system, Usenet had no corporate or super-organizational oversight. Newsgroups did not contain information about the number of subscribers, members, or other demographic information thus contributing to a lack of social context (Smith, 2003). Usenet was “an anarchic, unkillable, censorship-resistant, aggressively noncommercial, voraciously growing conversation among millions of people in dozens of countries” (Rheingold, 1993, p. 118). Usenet differed from web forums and bulletin boards by featuring neither administrators nor a central server for storage. The asynchronous structure of the conversation distinguished Usenet from other popular interactive forums of the time, including IRC (Internet Relay Chat) and MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons) (Baym, 2000). Some

newsgroup denizens accrued cultural capital as regulars who would often compile and publish a FAQ (frequently asked questions) to guide new posters in group norms. Usenet was a place for conversation and publication, “like a giant coffeehouse with a thousand rooms” (Rheingold, 1993, p. 130). Besides designated marketplace newsgroups, commercial posts were not tolerated in the belief of the time that “if Usenet were to become exploited as a marketing arena the character of the net would be so dramatically altered that it might lose its appeal entirely” (McLaughlin, Osborne & Smith, 1995, p. 107).

However, by the late 1990s Usenet newsgroups ran into intense competition from discussion boards on niche-interest (such as sport, hobbies, games, etc.) websites. Usenet’s popularity also declined during the initial rise of social networks including Friendster in 2002, MySpace in 2003, and Facebook in 2006. Usenet’s ASCII character set could not visually compete with the web’s display of color graphics. Web-based discussion boards and social network sites had owners and moderators for the governance of trolls and disputes, and gatekeeping to restrict commercial “spam” messages that had been a perpetual problem for Usenet’s predominantly unfiltered newsgroups. The antagonistic dominance on Usenet of white males with a conservative and libertarian political bent (Herring, 1999), as well as the incessant conflict within the large unmoderated public forums, also pushed women, and many men, to moderated web-based forums and Listservs (Baker, 2001; Bury, 2001; Clerc, 1996; Pfaffenberger, 2003). Clerc (1996) observed the migration of X-Files fans from the conflict-ridden Usenet group, alt.tv.x-files, as a fragmentation across numerous mailing lists and Listservs. With new alternatives for sociability and community, Internet service providers (ISPs), which were often a division of a media conglomerate, started discontinuing support and access for a Usenet they had always dreaded for its pirated intellectual property (music, movies, and software) and pornography (Segan, 2008). An investigation launched in 2005 by

New York State into child pornography made ISPs even more leery about carrying Usenet (Segan, 2008). America Online (AOL), one of the biggest ISPs in the US at the time, cut off Usenet access for its 20 million subscribers in 2005 (Segan, 2008), and other large ISPs followed suit in subsequent years. Usenet's nature as an ungoverned, mostly unmoderated, simple text-based platform led to its eventual demise as a popular platform for shared interest fans who migrated to new platforms including web discussion boards. Usenet still exists today, though with comparatively scant posting activity.

3.4.2 *Web discussion boards*

Forums and bulletin boards based on hobbies, interests, culture, support, politics, and localities were popular within the space of online service providers such as America-Online, Prodigy, and CompuServe from the late 1980s through the 1990s. The boards were exclusively gated to the subscribers of each service with no opportunity for cross-participation between services. Each topic board was text-based, multi-threaded, and attributed to the subscriber's member name. Posts were often ephemeral, being purged from the system 30 days after the initial posting. After the first popular web browser, Mosaic, was released in 1993 (Marwick 2013), users of different ISPs were able to share and view content with each other in an accessible and convenient manner. The earliest web forum dates from 1994 by the W3C (Forum Software Reviews, 2011). Using the web to create local face-to-face community augmented by online interaction began with pioneering sites such as San Francisco-based Cyberorganic, which, by 1995, had enabled discussions within email lists, a website forum, and a chat function (Marwick 2013). Website forums were differentiated from chat as a form of asynchronous discussion with longer posts saved within an accessible archive. The forums were generated by a web application with a variety of functions available as a package by a hosting service or an outside provider. The app was coded using

one of a variety of server-side programming languages including PHP, Java, and Perl, but could be installed and run by a website administrator unfamiliar with web languages by using a WYSIWYG design editor. The code behind the boards enabled photo posting, avatars, colors, font styles, and a community mailbox. Forums had a tree-like structure organized with many categories and sub-categories for topic discussion. The web-based discussion boards engaged in a threaded sociability that was a public, recorded, polylogical (relying on multiple conversation partners) discourse displayed in a sequential order (Postill, 2011). Thread sociability stood in contrast to the organic, fluid, private, and usually unrecorded nature of typical offline conversations. Ease of use and functionality made the forums popular with many interest-based websites that wanted to create a community while holding ownership and governance rights. Though sometimes the priorities of forum users and administrators would conflict (Postill, 2011), discussion boards could exhibit community as “a group of people who share social interaction, social ties, and a common interactional format, location or ‘space’” (Kozinets, 2010, p. 10). However, when users ran afoul of the rules set by site owners or forum moderators, they could be banished with limited alternatives, if any, of other sites and forums with the same shared interest. Web discussion board owners, and moderators to a lesser extent, accrued cultural and social capital through governance of one of a limited number of venues for fans of a particular shared interest.

Usenet’s decline led to fans migrating to websites with discussion boards in search of conversation, participation, and community (Bury, 2016). In addition, fan-created listserves such as the Wire, devoted to the Irish rock band U2, moved to web discussion boards by the early 2000s (Lizie, 2009). Some fans migrated from the unruliness of Usenet and the rule-bound web discussion boards to blogging software. Launched in 1999 but not widely adopted until 2003, LiveJournal was particularly popular with fans who wanted to connect on niche

interests. These smaller groups on web discussion boards and LiveJournal fragmented the previously broad sense of community fandom that Usenet had fostered (Coppa, 2014). While this created more online meeting spaces for fans to voluntarily self-select into communities, the quantity of spaces did not necessarily correlate to the quality of discourse or activities. Unlike the discussion boards on websites, LiveJournal was free and easy to use thus minimizing the transaction costs for group creation. Hellekson and Busse (2006) found that LiveJournal fans agreed the signal-to-noise ratio for quality content was better than on Usenet, but discussions were more difficult to sustain due to the blog style page layout that pushed all existing posts, even popular ones, down the page after each new post was uploaded. By default, Usenet and web discussion boards brought topic threads, even old ones, back up to the top of the news reader or forum section after a new post to the thread. In addition, LiveJournal allowed individual posts or entire blogs to disappear without the possibility of archival retrieval (Hellekson & Busse, 2006). The fragmenting of fan communities and difficulty in sustaining discussions on LiveJournal presaged similar issues that would become even more apparent later with Facebook. Shared interest web-based discussion boards precipitously declined in popularity after the arrival of online social network platforms that afforded the straightforward creation of new groups with low transaction costs and access to a large bounded audience.

3.4.3 Criticism of pre-social network platforms

The fear that electronic media technology would displace shared social space can be traced as far back as the nineteenth century with the telephone (Fischer, 1992) and the telegraph and railroad (Marx, 1964), so trepidation over the Internet's technological deterministic threat to sociability, without taking into account historical and social context, was not surprising. Online community researchers (Baym, 2000; Kollock & Smith, 1999; Rheingold, 1993;

Song, 2009) noted that many early critics saw virtual communities as poor, ersatz, technological substitutions of genuine human communion. For example, Lockard (1997) proclaimed “virtual community” an oxymoron. Nie and Erbring (2002) claimed the Internet could have an even more deleterious effect on community than the automobile and television. Stoll (1995, p. 24) worried about the false promise of online communication as “an instantaneous and illusory contact that creates a sense of intimacy without the emotional investment that leads to real friendship”. Putnam (2000) saw computer mediated communication as increasing our knowledge capital and ability to collaborate on projects across space and time, but not as beneficial to our social capital. The anonymity and fluidity of online communities led to “drive-by” relationships (Putnam 2000) where trust, reciprocity, and trustworthiness did not develop (Galston 1999).

Numerous studies (Boulianne, 2009; Dutta-Bergman, 2005; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Quan-Hasse, Wellman, Witte & Hampton, 2002; Rainie & Kalsnes, 2001; Rainie & Wellman, 2012; Robinson, Kestnbaum, Neustadt & Alvarez, 2000; Wang & Wellman, 2010) countered the early criticism by noting that use of the Internet for social and group purposes enhanced and augmented sociability. Chapters 6 recounts Disneyland fans of this era availing Usenet and web discussion boards to build social capital not only by sharing knowledge and information on the platforms, but by resisting the Disney corporation. Time spent in online and offline spheres were not measurable as zero-sum (Jurgenson, 2012), as both spheres became intermixed in the way people lived (Baym, 2015; Cerulo & Ruane, 2008; Chayko, 2008; Wilson & Atkinson, 2005). The Internet and email allowed for new community based on Wellman’s “networked individualism” that emphasized the individual’s reaching out to disparate people and resources depending on the situation (Rainie, Horrigan, Wellman & Boase, 2006). As an example of collective social capital, Lin (2001) found that access to

online networks in China allowed millions of followers of the Falun Gong spiritual movement to organize, and be perceived as a challenge by the Chinese Communist Party. This “networked operating system” was touted as a new social order more diverse than previous groups with more freedom and capacity for individuals to act (Rainie & Wellman, 2012).

Hampton and Wellman (2003) found that the Internet had two comparative advantages over previous communication technologies. Internet communication could be asynchronous so people did not need to be online simultaneously, and people could engage in one-to-one conversations or one-to-many broadcasts. Hampton and Wellman (2003) in their “Netville” study also cited the implementation of an online discussion list scoped locally for wired residents as a key factor in facilitating neighborhood involvement and community participation. The Internet not only connected people across the globe, but could also help foster local sociability (Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2004). This early debate over the value of online sociability as worthy or inferior compared to traditional offline settings was made archaic by the rise of online social networks and smartphones that made the online immanent to the offline as co-located omnipresence.

3.5 Social network platforms

Information architect consultant Darcy DiNucci coined the term “Web 2.0” in a 1999 article entitled “Fragmented Future” (DiNucci, 1999). However, the phrase was not popularized until 2004 at the first Web 2.0 conference by Tim O’Reilly of O’Reilly Media to differentiate the new, at the time, social media tools and companies from the dot-com bust of 2000. Web 2.0 had three defining features: ease of use, social facilitation, and free publishing and production platforms for any user to upload content including text, photos, and videos

(Lovink, 2011). Jenkins (2013) criticized web 2.0 as a business model for companies to capitalize and commodify the participatory culture of free fan labor and gifts. The term social media became the umbrella expression to encompass Web 2.0 tools. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 10) defined social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content”. Social media was a “mode of communication and mode of production” (Herman, 2014, p. 39) that included folksonomic social tagging sites such as Digg and del.icio.us, video and photo sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr, wikis for fandom objects, and social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The new social media sites made it easier for users to upload content to spread information and ideas, self-present, initiate and maintain social content, debate issues, and help others (Schweiger & Quiring, 2005).

Social network sites as a subset of social media “allowed individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social network sites facilitated and maintained existing connections previously made offline to a greater degree than building new friendships online (boyd & Ellison, 2007). boyd and Ellison highlighted the site’s networks, not networking, to emphasize the scope of contacts since networking suggested the establishment of relationships with strangers, which was possible on network sites, but not a chief practice at the start. Hence, boyd, in 2006, called MySpace “an imagined egocentric community”. However, over time, social network sites added groups for networking and community. Social network sites like Facebook not only maintained personal relationships but enabled bridging social capital to new ties based on ‘friends of friends’ (Ellison, Vitak,

Gray & Lampe, 2014). Folksonomy sites declined in the shadow of Facebook and Twitter's more robust features, and video and photo sharing sites such as YouTube and Instagram became social network, and networking, sites themselves. Network and networking became intrinsic to the definition as social media became "networked information services designed to support in-depth social interaction, community formation, collaborative opportunities, and collaborative work" (Hunsinger & Senft, 2014, p. 1).

Social network platforms such as YouTube (founded 2005), Facebook (2006), Twitter (2006), and Instagram (2010), offered networked sociability on an individual, community, societal, and global level. Though originally web-based on a personal computer, social network apps on smartphones (mobile computers) such as the iPhone (originally released in 2007) allowed users to be mobile, thus comingling and obscuring the distinction between online and offline milieu (Shirky, 2010). Mobile technology allowed people to take their private online communities into the public arena of action to augment in-person interaction. The wireless and mobile Internet revolutionized the media environment as "no longer devoted to keeping viewers fixed on one transmission but rather fixed in transmission through multiple screens that guide subjects through all of time and space" (Oswald & Packer, 2012, p. 277). With the rise of social media in the late 2000s, going online became normalized for most Americans (Song, 2009). In 2019, of American adults, 73% use YouTube, 69% use Facebook, 37% use Instagram, and 22% use Twitter (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). Instagram was particularly popular with young people from 18 to 29 years of age with 67% using the photo-sharing service (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). Online social networks became embedded in daily life with people no longer thinking of "going online" as an out-of-body experience (Hine, 2015). Instead, a great deal of continuity and complementarity emanated between between one's online and offline life (Hine, 2015). Internet technologies

achieved closure as an everyday tool with a stable identity of functions for users (Hine, 2015).

The coming together of the “triple revolution” of social networks, Internet, and mobile devices enabled people to be even more connected as individuals than embedded in groups (Kozinets, 2015; Rainie & Wellman, 2012). The new platforms emphasized existing social ties of family, friends, and colleagues, rather than the development of new ties centered on interests and hobbies. However, online communities with shared interests did not necessarily dissolve, as the interests themselves did not suddenly evaporate. For survival, shared interest online communities had to evolve and adapt by creating social network accounts and groups on the new platforms in order to persist beyond their earlier Usenet and web iterations.

Successful transitions were difficult as maintaining a critical mass of members necessitated a high level of compliance with the characteristics of Back’s (1951) group development theory: *common bond*, where members felt socially or emotionally attached, *common identity*, where members felt connection through a shared purpose or attachment, and *prestige* of being in the group. Still, posting activity on many web discussion boards rapidly dissipated as members departed for social network platforms.

The first social networking service, SixDegrees.com, launched in 1997 but failed to become popular as people were still reluctant at that time to display their social lives online (Shirky, 2010). However, by the late 2000s, people came around to the notion as the transaction costs of creating or joining groups on Facebook or other social media was minimal (Shirky, 2008). Previously the costs to start a website for a group were not only financial by paying for a domain, hosting service, and web coding, but also costly in terms of time, knowledge, effort, and attention. By contrast, creating a Facebook group was free, easy (few technology skills

required), and fast (a matter of minutes) with a large built-in potential audience. Many groups failed to attract an audience, while others were wildly successful, but without a transaction cost there was no penalty for anyone to try to form as many groups as desired. Practically hassle and cost-free group creation on social network sites led to the fragmentation of pre-existing large fan communities into numerous smaller factions.

3.5.1 Criticism of social network platforms

Social network platforms have been accused of fostering societal problems by nurturing narcissism, shallowness, and vanity, creating attention disorders, being addictive, and empowering a kind of hyper-individualism at the expense of public good (Marwick, 2013). Picard (2015) did not perceive social media as making people enlightened, tolerant, and civilized, or creating an egalitarian society, but rather as co-opted by business and elite interests in a similar fashion to other twentieth century media inventions such as television and radio. Social network sites encouraged people to share information, photos, links, and recommendations to establish detailed user profiles for sale by corporate owners to targeted advertising (Baym, 2015). Social surveillance and lack of privacy became more problematic with the publicly accessible aggregation of personal data through social media livestreaming (Trottier, 2012). Marwick (2013) concluded that social media created more social inequality by emphasizing neo-liberal values of entrepreneurialism, commodification, and libertarianism. Hunsinger (2014) dubbed social media an electronic leviathan as an agglomeration of corporations and post-statist organizations that not only complement the Hobbesian state sovereign but also exist and operate externally as formidable trans-statist entities. These criticisms of social network media for macro/structural issues of power and commerce were far different from the concerns over social displacement and faux friendships previously directed at early online social platforms.

For Rheingold (2012, p. 163), the difference between the new online social networks and previous online communities was “the quality, continuity, and degree of commitment in the relationships between members”. Rheingold (2012) believed Wellman’s interpersonal network ties (Wellman, et al, 2003) did not create a strong sense of online community because communication about shared interests on a social network platform often did not lead to the establishment of personal relationships. Rheingold (2012) thought social networks provided social and knowledge capital, but not the same level of communion as the online communities on older online social platforms. In a 2016 podcast interview (*Howard Rheingold Episode*, 2016), Rheingold criticized Facebook groups for being so disorganized that the platform degraded even the concept of what a forum should be. He speculated that a business reason was responsible for the muddled group threading since those types of problematic issues had been solved with online forums long ago. Deller (2014) traced the fandom of the rock band Belle & Sebastian’s transition from fan-owned discussion boards to social networks finding that Facebook contributed to the community’s decline (though concomitant with the band’s decline in output). Interaction on Facebook consisted primarily of likes and comments on band updates rather than on discussions between fans. Facebook groups for the band had few members with most eventually dissolving, while the band’s Twitter presence had little sense of community (Deller, 2014). Johnston (2014) related feeling a sense of online community in the early days of AOL chat rooms, a Usenet newsgroup, and listserves, but lacking any current online home despite being interconnected on Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, YouTube, and an online dating site. Rather than connecting to strangers through common interests, social network platforms focused on the management, enhancement, and expansion of pre-existing relationships (Johnston, 2014). The nature of

social networks was not conducive to the sense of group camaraderie that was present on previous online social platforms.

People communicate on social networks primarily with others they already know, thus reducing the chance of expanding one's social circle (Baym, 2015). And on newer social network sites, the formation of reciprocal relationships is not always a goal. Dissimilar to pioneers such as Friendster, LiveJournal, MySpace, and Facebook, reciprocity is not necessarily a norm on Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, or Tumblr where one can "friend" without being mutually "friended" in return (Johnston, 2014). Fame on social networks is achieved through scaling a large audience by not reciprocating (Shirky, 2008). Writing in a pre-social network online environment, Malaby (2006) emphasized the importance of reciprocity in generating social capital, but reciprocity is a detriment for scaling social capital on today's social media platforms. Van Dijck (2013) observed the networking focus of Facebook and Twitter as serving individualized needs, so users were not interested in building communities on those platforms. boyd, in a conversation with Jenkins and Ito (2016), criticized Wellman's networked individualism as detrimental to traditional social structures in families and neighborhoods, dismissive of earlier technologies that organized people into groups, and supportive of a personalized world of narcissism and egocentric networks. boyd saw social networks as designed for people to emphasize individualism, while groups and collaboration were put into subordinate status (Jenkins, Ito & boyd, 2016). The rhetoric of the companies and creators behind the tools promoted individual empowerment such as YouTube's slogan to "broadcast yourself" (Jenkins, Ito & boyd, 2016). The emphasis of the new social platforms on the individual and existing friend networks saw large online social communities that focused on shared interests, as previously found on Usenet and web discussion boards, dwindle in members.

Bury's (2016) research on the longitudinal experience of media fan migration from Usenet to web discussion boards to social networking sites illustrated the importance to community formation of platform architecture and a prescribed practice of social relations. Pre-social media fan spaces succeeded in fostering community by focusing on a shared interest, and not necessarily using personal identity markers such as real names, family, jobs, etc. (Bury, 2016). While Facebook claims the use of authentic identity constructs a safe space, the fans Bury (2016) interviewed felt the policy made for an unsafe space to express themselves due to a fear of repercussions from context collapse. Bury (2016) concluded that Twitter and Tumblr's platform architecture did little to enable community formation, and Facebook's prescribed sociability actively hindered community realization. Due to their intrinsic nature, sites geared to networked individualism impeded the development of interest-based communities. While social network sites maintained and strengthened the bonding capital of preexisting relationships (Rainie & Wellman, 2012), they sacrificed some of the bridging capital found on Usenet and web discussion boards (Bury, 2016). However, for a select few – dubbed influencers – social network platforms enabled the accumulation of large numbers of followers and subscribers whose value as social capital could be parlayed into economic value via partnerships and sponsorships with corporations.

3.5.2 Social media influencers

Amateur media production has a long history (Hunter, Lobato, Richardson & Thomas, 2012), but Google enabled the monetization of non-professional content on a much larger scale by blending the formal and informal media economy (Lobato & Thomas, 2015). The AdSense advertising platform made available a path to revenue for any website owner with non-professional content and an audience (Lobato & Thomas, 2015). The purchase of YouTube in

2006 gave Google a way to share advertising revenue through partner programs with non-professional video content producers. In discussing vloggers (video bloggers), Burgess and Green (2009, p. 103) noted “the amateur and entrepreneurial uses of YouTube are not separate, but coexistent and coevolving”. This interdependency of the producers and social media sites has been called a value co-creation (Zwick, Bonsu & Darmody, 2008) but the work infringes on space away from the workplace, the distinction between media text and consumer has converged, and all communication becomes susceptible to monetization for capital accretion (Herman, 2014). Every status update, tweet, hashtag, video and photo uploaded, or interest pinned is for the marketplace. The audience may have become both producer and consumer, or prosumers (Fuchs, 2013), but their activity is still packaged as commodities by the social media companies (Herman, 2014). In addition, brands have enlisted non-celebrity users with large audiences and credible authenticity within a specific industry, such as fashion or travel, to become social media influencers to persuade their followers to use, buy, or consume what the corporations want to promote. The social media analytics tracking site, Social Blade, reports on nonprofessional YouTube (and other social network platforms) influencers with hundreds of thousands, and even millions, of subscribers around the world. Making extra money, or even a living, using online social network platforms has become conventional.

3.5.3 Political economy of social network platforms

Van Dijck (2013) distinguishes between the *connectedness* that drives users to a platform to associate with friends and share content, and the *connectivity* of user profiles and information served to marketers as monetization by the platform’s corporate owner within a legal structure of what constitutes legitimate use. Networked communication and the culture of participation have been transformed into platform sociability within a culture of technological

connectivity. Langlois and Elmer (2013) assess the design of social media interfaces as driven primarily by the economic interests of the platform. Early social network and user generated content platforms, such as Wikipedia (founded 2001), Flickr (2004), and YouTube (2005), had a semblance of being alternative spaces without corporate and governmental interference, and instead reliant on strong user communities for self-regulation (Van Dijck, 2013). But between 2005 and 2008, the platforms saw their user bases expand rapidly, many were bought out by large media corporations to become part of a platform chain of microsystems, and new corporate owners were wary of putting profit at risk by exposure to the thorny issues of community building (Van Dijck, 2013). By using coding technology, corporations such as Facebook and Google that own popular platforms commoditized relationships by turning *connectedness* into *connectivity* (Van Dijck, 2013). While users chased social capital, the platforms amassed economic capital as corporate created spaces put commercial values over public ones (Van Dijck, 2013). The code of platforms imposed regulations, or laws, to govern social acts and create a specific technological-social world (Lessig, 2006).

The new platforms were more akin to traditional media companies in their pursuit of profit than their high-minded rhetoric would admit (Gillespie, 2010). YouTube needed to appeal not only to end users, but more importantly to advertisers and professional content producers for revenue (Gillespie, 2010). In a study of MySpace, Parks (2011) found little evidence of community presumably because the owners and investors designed the network principally in terms of monetization. Just and Latzer (2017) found governance by algorithms within Internet-based services such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube increased individualization, commercialization, inequalities, and deterritorialization. This

interrelationship between platforms within ecosystems of sociability made online space and communication commercial, not public (Van Dijck, 2013). For Van Dijck (2013, p. 130):

The neoliberal ideology of technology pushing economic needs is not always conducive to the ideal of creating a sustainable environment that nourishes community-based platforms. Commercial owners favor – over the need for sustainable communities – quick turnovers, short-lived trends, celebrities attracting mass audiences, attention-grabbing experiences, influential power-users, and a large pool of aspiring professionals. And yet it is remarkable how often the participatory ideal of connectedness is invoked to warrant the need for commercial exploitation of connectivity.

By tracing the history and political economy of connective (Van Dijck's preferred term to social in order to emphasize the technological aspect) media using actor-network theory, Van Dijck (2013) proposes a platform analysis model of two parts, each with three elements. First are the techno-cultural constructs of technology, users, and content. Technology is not only how sociability is facilitated, but how the code shapes the performance of sociability through design. Usage/users looks not only at engagement with the platform and technology, but also the intended and actual practices. Content refers to the media objects produced and disseminated through the technological capacities of the platform, and then subjected to rigid and uniform formats and layouts for presentation. Second are the socioeconomic structures of ownership, governance, and business models, which take the perspective of political economy. The major platforms form an ecosystem of connective media that has corporatized sociability by normalizing the co-opting of social terms such as "sharing" and "friending". To "like", "share", and "retweet" not only constitute a form of user expression, but also facilitate rankings, recommendations, and data analytics for the platform (Langlois & Elmer, 2013).

The metaphors permeating social networks can mask their corporate ownership (Singer, 2014) with Baym (2009) stressing that more attention needs to be directed to questions surrounding ownership. When corporations own social spaces, then a site, and all user profiles and work, can suddenly disappear due to unprofitability such as the shut down of Yahoo!'s Y!360 (Herrmann, 2016). Or, in the case of social media site imeem (operational from 2003 until being acquired by MySpace in 2009), all amateur user videos, photos, and music can be deleted without advance warning as part of a total site revamp intended to attract only professional work and increased profits (Coppa, 2014).

Using this framework, Van Dijck argues that the rise of connective (social) media eroded the idealization of online sociability as a public sphere because the underlying business interests prioritized and stressed profit and control (i.e. governance), while users accepted or acquiesced to commercial objectives and a “locked in” ecosystem, or even adopted corporate values as social media influencers. Corporate interests are also served by exploiting the free labor content provided by users as “prosumers”, as explicated in Fuchs’s (2013, p.255) critical study of the commodification of “networks, contacts, user profiles, and user generated content”. Social media standardized and commercialized fans into being simply “users” and fan activities as “user-generated content” (Coppa, 2014). Fans no longer needed to figure out how to code, maintain, and protect their own websites or discussion boards since the companies provided the code, maintenance, and security for free while the fans provided the content. Social network platforms regularized and commodified fan interaction while sharing between users was consigned as a resource to be tapped (Coppa, 2014). As O’Reilly said in the opening remarks at the first Web 2.0 conference in 2004, “customers are building your business for you” (Coppa, 2014, p. 86). In Chapter 9, Disney’s co-option of fan created media, practices, and events amply illustrates this point. As this chapter explicated the

gradual commodification of online social platforms by corporate owners, the next chapter traces the gradual commodification of leisure venues.

Chapter 4: Playful Places from Saturnalia to Disneyland

This chapter traces the genealogy of theme parks through the history of playful places.

Surveying the lineage through Saturnalia, festivals, carnivals, pleasure gardens, world's fairs, and mechanical amusement parks makes evident not only the longstanding human practice of seeking pleasure and leisure among crowds, but also the affection and attachment held for playful places. People have long enjoyed entertainment and spectacles, while partaking in food and beverages. While Walt Disney popularized the modern multi-land theme park as a new form of mediated experiential entertainment, many elements of Disneyland derived in whole or part from past playful places, particularly the Coney Island parks. Amusement and theme parks developed as a remediation of "sights and sounds from various media" that "recall and refashion the experience of vaudeville, live theater, film, television, and recorded music" (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 169). Although the physical apparatus and settings adapted due to prevailing social and cultural relations, and extant technology, playful places have consistently been proximate locales where people have enjoyed play away from home and work. However, the gradual commodification and control of leisure and playful places by business and/or political interests increased with each iteration.

In play, people release anxieties, prepare and practice future actions, and discover myriad ways to interact with others (Moore, 1980). Definitions stress the nature of play as distinct from routine behavior and absent the pursuit of profit. Huizinga (1950, p. 13) emphasizes the distinctiveness of play and the special bond of a social group at play in his definition:

A free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules

and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.

For Huizinga (1950), play derives from culture as an expression of liberty, innovation, fantasy, and regulation. Caillois (1961) surmises that play does not create wealth or products, and is therefore different from work or art. Play is a “free and voluntary activity, a source of joy and amusement”, and an “escape from responsibility and routine” (Caillois, 1961, p. 6). Play is indulged as one wishes within the limits of time and place, and necessarily separate from the rest of one’s life that could contaminate and corrupt the nature of play (Caillois, 1961). Play embraces uncertainty allowing for player initiative, and creates a second freer and fictive reality differentiated from real life (Caillois, 1961). Festivals and amusement parks would mainly fall on the *paidia* end of the play classification continuum as defined by Caillois (1961). *Paidia* is unregulated, carefree, and uncontrolled fun and liveliness. On the opposing end of the continuum is *ludus*, denoting rules-bound, determined, and skill-rewarded play. The games of playful places primarily consist of mimicry (simulation such as theater, shows, and dark rides) and *ilinx* (vertigo such as flat rides, playgrounds, and rollercoasters) in Caillois’s (1961) classification of games, as opposed to *agôn* (competition such as sports) and *alea* (chance such as casinos and lotteries).

Social, cultural, and intellectual elites throughout history have criticized playful places for having a negative influence on individuals and crowds by fostering debauchery, depravity, low culture, violence, false consciousness, ethnocentrism, phoniness, frivolity, and wastefulness of time and money (Burke, 2009; Conlin, 2013; Cross & Walton, 2005; Immerso, 2002; Kassin, 1978; Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015; Peiss, 1986; Walford, 1967). Detractors have often pointed to the undemocratic production of playful places

expertly crafted in the ideological seduction of visitors who derive false pleasure while unaware of the motivation behind the symbolic messages promoting consumption.

Alternatively, some have looked to what extent visitors create their own meaning within playful places even if unaware of the motivation behind the dominant production. The debate between the productionist domination of meaning versus post-modern relativism and agency informs the historical background of the production of playful places and their reception by elites, intellectuals, and the masses. Consideration is also given to a middle ground as noted by Mosco (1997, p. 26), “the audience is not passive, but neither are producers dumb”.

4.1 Pre-industrial Saturnalia, festivals, and carnivals

For millennia, outdoor spectacles were dedicated to the pursuit of pleasure and happiness. Crowds intermingled across prevailing social hierarchies. All became part of the show in a far different way from a spectator viewing entertainment on a stage or in a stadium. From ancient Greco-Roman Saturnalia festivals to St. Bartholomew’s Fair to pre-Lenten carnivals, brief intervals of merrymaking have been a mainstay of social history reflective of the attendant society and culture (Cross & Walton, 2005). In pre-industrial agrarian-based cultures, fairs were principally for trade and business, but festivals and carnivals allowed customs to be flouted and social hierarchies upended without penalty (Kasson, 1978). The ancient Greco-Roman festival of Saturnalia celebrated in mid-December saw Europeans engage in food, alcohol, sex, and aggression without restraint (Cross & Walton, 2005). Christians would later appropriate and alter the pagan Saturnalia for Christmas as a palimpsest (Burke, 2009). During other festivals, people engaged in games and songs that challenged the rich and powerful, and served to release tensions in their societies (Cross & Walton, 2005). Besides poking fun at elites, festival goers enjoyed fortune telling, puppet shows, sporting competitions of skill and strength, races, animal shows and contests, and dice

and card games. In pre-print Western Europe, adults were “childlike by modern standards, enjoying games and stories that literate societies associate with children” (Meyrowitz, 1994, p. 64). As a time and place to play, festivals afforded people the opportunity to blow off steam from a hardscrabble existence, and for the elite class to assuage any budding discontent that could challenge authority. People remembered fondly the last festival attended, and eagerly looked forward to the next one (Burke, 2009).

Elites carefully scrutinized the festivals for seditious signs and restricted the number of annual holidays, which in Roman times could be 100 or more (Burke, 2009; Walford, 1967). During more conservative regimes, festivals could be banned as a curb on the perceived excesses of violence, debauchery, and rioting (Burke, 2009; Walford, 1967). During pre-Lenten carnivals, participants donned masks and costumes to join in joyful subversion of the prevailing social order while taking the opportunity to meet people from nearby communities. Bakhtin (1984) described carnivalesque, or folk-humor, as being a time when any excess or grotesqueness was permitted short of grievous violence. For Bakhtin (1984), the carnival created a free, sacrilegious, eccentric, and equal social space of communal performance with no distinction between actors and audience so diverse voices could be expressed. For the Feast of Fools, the world was turned upside down as a reflection of the New Testament promise that “the last shall be first”. Catholic subdeacons often took on the role of bishop or pope for the day and performed a parody of religious rites and rituals bordering on blasphemous. By the 1400s, the Catholic Church and leading theologians issued proclamations backed by the threat of punishment against carnivals and feasts. After 1500, Protestants, particularly Calvinists and Puritans, took a dimmer view than Catholics of festivals honoring saints, opposed the perceived debauched and disorderly nature of festivities, and saw frivolous merrymaking as a distraction from God, thus imposing their

own crackdown on celebrations thought contrary to the new Christian creed (Burke, 2009). The suppression of playful festivals and carnivals gave way to the growth of fairs as primarily trading and business affairs with some associated amusements. However, merrymaking found a new setting.

4.2 Pleasure gardens

Unlike Saturnalia and festivals, pleasure gardens situated their merriment in a specific location, not a date on the calendar (though most operated only between the late spring and summer months, and closed on some weekdays). Since admission fees were charged to enter pleasure gardens, leisure became a commodity. City denizens could enjoy pleasure gardens, often located on the periphery of an urban area in Britain and close to the city center in the US, as a respite of green space where people could amuse themselves, or enjoy time with family and friends. They ate, drank, listened to music, enjoyed art such as paintings and sculptures, and viewed spectacles including fireworks. Though some paintings were political in an attempt to influence opinion and shape national identity (Hughes, 2013), most were decorative. Outdoor music was used to convey mood, trigger emotional responses to visual attractions, order and differentiate physical spaces, enhance spectacles, shepherd the crowd, and signify the passing of time (Cowgill, 2013). But, most of all, they enjoyed interacting and being with the co-present crowd in the garden (Conlin, 2013). The emphasis was on play (Borsay, 2013).

The first recorded pleasure garden was London's Spring Gardens in the 1630s, though it did not offer much in the way of spectacle. However, by the eighteenth century, London's Vauxhall was constructed with elements of masquerade, Asian inspired design, and exotica to take visitors on journeys of the imagination (Conlin, 2013). Landscaping was not arranged as

a representation of nature, but produced as a picturesque and idealized spectacle (Hyams, 1971). Composers and performers used Vauxhall as a springboard to gain a following, and freely intermixed with the audience. The concept of Vauxhall soon spread to other places in Britain, and then throughout Europe to France, Sweden, Germany, Russia, and Denmark (Conlin, 2013). In the nineteenth century, pleasure gardens spread across the United States with New Orleans claiming the most at fourteen (Douglas, 2013). The pleasure gardens were accessible to multiple social classes (though those in work clothes and servants were sometimes prohibited entry), exhibited high and low culture, and readily utilized new media and genres such as painting, music, fiction, and reenactments of famous battles such as Waterloo (Conlin, 2013). People of different social ranks could enjoy the gardens for their salubrious benefit without causing disorder or challenging authority (Borsay, 2013). In the US, entry was often based on race with some pleasure gardens reserved for whites, a few reserved for African-Americans, and, in the South, special rules for people of mixed race. Pleasure gardens were owned privately, operated during the summer and usually visited in the late afternoon or evening as an “enclosed ornamental ground or piece of land, open to the public as a resort or amusement area, and operated as a business” (Conlin, 2013, p. 5). Pleasure gardens were often the main attraction of a city, and the chance to encounter elites, listen to new music, and view the latest fashion (Conlin, 2013). Workers in the gardens engaged in the performative labor of hospitality. Though the flickering of oil lamps and fireworks provided some illumination at night, the semidarkness of the garden provided an aura of mystery and mischief. While pleasure gardens did not have the mechanical rides of later amusement parks, they operated on the same principle of serendipitous encounters with the unexpected (Conlin, 2013).

Pleasure gardens marked the beginning of the end of the town square as a public space for recreation. The balance between the commercial and recreational in the urban square became lopsided in favor of commercialism, which was backed up by legal ordinance and zoning (Conlin, 2013). Recreation moved to the private space of the pleasure gardens, and playing in the town square was deemed disorderly. The new industrial economy neatly divided the day of a worker into a time for work and for play, a time for production and for consumption. To be near factory work in the cities, tenements became extremely crowded. The pleasure gardens became an imagined and ersatz escape to the countryside. But by the middle of the nineteenth century, urban real estate became too expensive for the land under pleasure gardens to remain undeveloped into commercial or residential buildings. In addition, American cultural elites and reformers saw pleasure gardens as too plebeian, frivolous, and commercial.

Nineteenth century environmental designer Frederic Olmstead believed the rapid growth of cities as impelled by commercial interests would lead the population to social failure. Modern American cities were designed for work and profit, not leisure or community. The social restraints within small towns were giving way to anonymity and rootlessness within cities. Olmstead saw the teeming masses within Manhattan as having “contact without fellowship, congregation without community” (Kasson, 1978, p. 12). As a remedy, Olmstead designed Manhattan’s grand landscape garden, Central Park, which opened in phases starting in 1858, and ending principally in 1863, to become the first public park in the US. The original site was not conducive to being a green park, comprised of bogs and salt marshes with poor soil and outcroppings of granite, but 4,000 workers over a multi-year period excavated, drained and leveled the area with the help of 166 tons of gunpowder, topsoil shipped in from New Jersey, and new pipe and reservoir technology (Jones & Wills, 2005). Olmstead hoped the

production of the new grand park would serve as a public place for relaxation and greenery, the prevention of anomie, alienation, and inertia (Jones & Willis, 2005; Kasson, 1978), and draw people away from pleasure gardens (Conlin, 2013). Elites supported outdoor recreation in nature for the lower classes who were perceived as rowdy, smelly, and germ laden (Nasaw, 1993; Roberts, 2004), and as a respite from machinery and industrial work to support family life for men to share with their wives and children (Jones & Wills, 2005). The green park has signified a moral landscape of “goodness, order and peaceful living” since Greco-Roman times (Jones & Wills, 2005, p. 45). Social reformers wanted the urban population to spend free time and money in a pragmatic manner, and not on alcohol, gambling, and prostitution (Roberts, 2004). The public municipal parks banned alcohol and obscene language, and had few recreational amenities, thus depriving the working-class of two of their favorite activities: drinking beer and dancing (Peiss, 1986). Elites encouraged genteel activities such as bird watching, classical music, walking (but not on the grass), and reading for good moral character and intellectual pursuits (Jones & Wills, 2005). However, the park rarely served as a democratic function due to the ordering of race, gender, and class-based constraints (Jones & Wills, 2005). By the end of the nineteenth century, pleasure gardens had all but disappeared in Manhattan and elsewhere due to rising land values and elite disapproval that pushed pleasure to the periphery of cities in places such as Coney Island (Burrows & Wallace, 1999). In Britain, pleasure gardens, which were often located on the city edge, were being replaced by an American import, mechanical amusements (Kane, 2013). The green of the garden was relenting to the machinery of the midway.

4.3 The world’s fair and the beginning of mechanical amusement parks

The 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago was one of the grandest world’s fairs ever staged (Walt Disney’s father, Elias, worked on its construction as a carpenter). The expo

had two sections. The White City of European-inspired grand architecture was presented as a model “city upon a hill” (in the messianic language of early seventeenth century Governor John Winthrop of the Massachusetts Bay Colony) demonstrating that urban areas could be systematically organized, leading to the City Beautiful movement of modern urban planning (Adams, 1991). The Expo projected an optimistic view of the future and America’s ascent to a leading role in the world (Lukas, 2008). Auguring Disneyland over 60 years later, the expo grounds were cleaned every night, advertising was regulated and limited, hygiene for food handling was encouraged, garbage disposal was organized, and sewage was treated (Adams, 1991). Hospitality staff at the fair could arrange for medical services and hotel bookings (Kasson, 1978). Multiple accounts testified to the Expo’s large, orderly and peaceful crowd, which Ewen (1988) attributes to the history of beautiful places having a palliative effect on mass assemblies. Building exhibits featured agriculture, mining, electricity, machinery, transportation and anthropology, and were provided free of charge. Appropriating the 1889 Paris Exposition’s centrally located carnival amusements area, Chicago featured a Midway Plaisance full of mechanical amusements, recreation, cultural exhibits (generally portraying non-white cultures as barbaric and childlike), and unusual sideshow performances for a fee. The amusements of the Midway, such as the first Ferris Wheel, were more popular with the crowds than the edifying fare of the White City, and provided organizers with a profit where most expos usually ended with debt (Weinstein, 1992). The cold discipline of the White City’s neoclassical structures was no match for the gaiety of the Midway’s fun. The ideal of urban architecture found at the White City along with the rides of the Midway combined to produce what could be considered the first American theme park (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). Carnival could be manufactured for profit. Entrepreneurs around the country took notice and formed carnival road shows and built amusement parks meant to entertain rather than edify (Kasson, 1978). After Chicago, midways at future world’s fairs at Atlanta in 1895, Nashville

in 1897, Omaha in 1898, Buffalo in 1901, and St. Louis in 1904 only became greater in size and profitability (Nasaw, 1993). Mass culture was able to displace the elite's genteel penchants and values.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, fairs only opened in a location for a few months before packing up and moving on. But the large, complicated, and expensive mechanical amusements required a stable physical anchoring. Pleasure gardens started to transform into amusement parks. Tivoli Gardens opened in 1841, in Copenhagen, Denmark, as a pleasure garden with refreshment stands, fountains, music, dancing, balloons, and sports activities (Weinstein, 1992), that soon added an early version of a roller coaster in 1843 (Kane, 2013). Tivoli's owner persuaded the King of Denmark to allow the park within the city because an amused populace forgets politics (Jones & Wills, 2005). In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Prater in Vienna started offering mechanical amusements within its pleasure garden (Weinstein, 1992). Britain's first amusement park, Blackpool Pleasure Beach in Lancashire, England, opened in 1896, and still operates today. Kane (2013, p. 229) defines an amusement park as "mechanized amusements in a permanent enclosed zone, controlled by a single business interest, and targeting a heterogeneous adult audience". The owners of amusement parks on the sites of former pleasure gardens often incorporated and maintained the greenery to draw more visitors by marketing the natural elements (Kane, 2013). But over time thrill seeking ilinx became the defining feature of amusement parks with mechanical machines.

4.4 Coney Island

Russian author and revolutionary Maxim Gorky dubbed Coney Island in 1907 the "city of fire" for the countless number of lights beguiling observers from afar to the nighttime

playground (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015). Gorky also considered Coney an opiate of the masses, and a tool of exploitation by the capitalist class (Frank, 2015). Yet like millions of others, Gorky was enchanted by Coney Island as “fabulous and beyond conceiving, ineffably beautiful, is this fiery scintillation” (Frank, 2015, p. 37). From its early 1800s start as an escape valve from Manhattan, architectural historian Rem Koolhaas called Coney “the nearest zone of virgin nature that can counteract the enervations of urban civilization” (Koolhaas, 1994, p. 30). After the Civil War, hotels, restaurants, and facilities opened as Coney attracted 25,000 to 35,000 visitors on weekends by 1873 (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015). By the 1880s, workers were granted half-holidays on Saturdays providing them with additional leisure time (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015), and a nickel trolley to Coney opened in 1895 making transportation affordable and convenient (Kasson, 1978). Standalone concessions featured mechanized rides including the first gravity-propelled switchback railway rollercoaster that opened in 1884 proving the public would pay to ride down a wooden track. A trip to Coney Island was an escape from the routines and constraints of everyday urban life and a world apart (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). Working class women traveled in groups to Coney Island as one of the few places where they could socialize, and feel freedom and excitement (Peiss, 1986). Lonely individuals and new immigrants came to Coney Island as a place to meet and find community (Scibelli, 2011). By 1900, Coney Island attracted between 300,000 and 500,000 visitors on Saturday afternoons, Sundays, and holidays (Peiss, 1986). It was an excursion resort with most visitors from Manhattan for day trips (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015).

Even before the first mechanical amusement park opened in 1896, Coney Island was known as the “Sodom by the Sea” of degenerate entertainment, sexual deviance, and anarchic freedom. Social reformers feared the large crowds would breed moral contagion and

corruption (Nasaw, 1993). Though efforts were made to separate the new Eastern and Southern European immigrants from American nativists, “at Coney’s rides and beaches, diverse peoples swam, ate, played, and rode together, encouraging development of an interethnic – albeit white – ‘New York’ sensibility” (Burrows & Wallace, 1999, p. 1136). With accessible public transportation and inexpensive upfront costs, Coney Island was dubbed the “Poor Man’s Riviera” (Immerso, 2002, p. 147). Some restrictions and prejudices were maintained including segregated bathrooms for African-American and Jewish visitors, who were also discouraged from using certain sections of the beach (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015).

While Coney Island already featured mechanical amusement rides scattered throughout the area as single standalone concessions, the first enclosed amusement park, Sea Lion, opened in 1895 with an admission fee and multiple rides to sell leisure space as a commodity (Weinstein, 1992). By fencing in independently operated rides, the park kept out prostitution, roughhousing, and gambling (Weinstein, 1992). Sea Lion Park’s marquee attraction was a Shoot-the-Chutes ride, the precursor of the popular log flume attractions found around the world today. Sea Lion did not last long, closing in 1902 due to competition from another new park, Steeplechase, opened by George C. Tilyou in 1897 as a rejoinder to social reformers who wanted to clean up what they perceived as Coney Island’s immoral, criminal, and dangerous elements. There were calls for establishing a genteel Central Park at Coney Island to replace its rambunctious and raucous nature (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015), with warnings that riding a rollercoaster did not constitute appropriate entertainment for easily corrupted young people (Kasson, 1978). Olmstead wrote, “modern civilized men find more refreshment and more lasting pleasure in... natural landscape” (Immerso, 2002, p. 45). One writer called the amusement parks “an artificial distraction for an artificial life”, while

another lamented the sale of hallucinatory pleasure for profit (Kasson, 1978, p. 101). James Huneker, a famous music critic of the time, said Coney Island appealed to the lowest common denominator in culture with people gathered in large crowds reduced to “half child, half savage” (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015, p. 175).

In response to the critics, Tilyou attempted to elevate Steeplechase Park’s reputation by enclosing the park, banning alcohol, and employing security guards. At a time when most amusement parlors, such as theaters presenting film, music, and vaudeville, were segregated even in northern states (Nasaw, 1993), Tilyou encouraged African-Americans to come to Steeplechase, though the swimming pool remained off limits (Immerso, 2002). To promote playful sociability, he pioneered “anti-alienation” rides that would throw park-goers, particularly men and women, together, such as the spinning barrel of fun at the park entrance, the human roulette wheel, and the whirlpool, thus breaking down the Victorian mores of the time mandating separation of the sexes. Couples could flirt and hold onto each other by riding together on attractions such as the namesake Steeplechase mechanical horses (Peiss, 1986). Up to 200,000 postcards were mailed from Coney Island on a busy weekend, and many depicted young men and women flirting with each other (Frank, 2015).

Tilyou also understood that visitors enjoyed seeing the audience become part of the show. At a popular ride exit, he installed a notorious blowhole in the ground sending a woman’s skirt upward or knocking a hat off a man’s head. Also at the exit, men would literally be shocked by a clown wielding an electric-infused club. Those who had just experienced this treatment would often wait around as part of the audience in the “Laughing Gallery” for the next victims to exit and then laugh at the misfortune they had only just experienced themselves. Park goers became entertainment for an audience of their fellow park goers (Adams, 1991).

American poet E.E. Cummings commented that amusement parks allowed everyone to become a performer, and hence a source of art (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015). The blurred line between performer and spectator became a Steeplechase hallmark. “The spirited, liberated, physical play at its core”, was as Immerso (2002, p. 78) noted so “everything in the park revolved about the human body and no holds were barred”.

Tilyou said adults could act like children and “cut-up” by shaking off their social repression (Denson, 2002). In an article titled, “Human Nature with the Brakes Off – Or: Why the Schoolma’am Walked into the Sea,” Tilyou related the story of a prim teacher who lost her social inhibitions at Coney and marched into the ocean fully clothed due to the prevailing spirit of people taking the brakes off (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015). Tilyou believed people remembered childhood as the happiest period of their lives, and even if not true, this was the mindset they adopted anyway (Kason, 1978). Tilyou concluded his article by commenting, “As an amusement man, I thank heaven that we Americans never really grow up” (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015, p. 185). A writer in 1901 described the mechanical amusements as “tumultuous recreation”, where the rides would “toss, tumble, flop, jerk, jounce, jolt, and jostle you” (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015, p. 83). First-time riders were enveloped in a total sensorial experience as the kineticism and speed of the ride blurred the distinction of body and machine (Sally, 2006). One writer surmised in 1905 that “perhaps Coney Island is the most human thing that God ever made, or permitted the devil to make” (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015, p. 88).

On the same location of the former Sea Lion Park, the original Luna Park (with dozens of imitators popping up around the world thereafter) opened in 1903 with some 250,000 electric lights giving the park a sense of safety and illusion (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015).

The park's Asian and Arabian design motif of minarets, domes, and towers created a visual playfulness of mystery and magic. Park co-founder Frederic Thompson, who had trained as an architect in Paris, believed a playful place should jumble up different art styles and traditions, and avoid straight lines in show building design. Thompson also echoed Tilyou in commenting that adults enjoyed amusement parks because they were just children grown tall and still desirous of elaborate child's play (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015). He insisted on the safety of park visitors and the performative labor of park employees in treating visitors with respect and courtesy. Thompson during the summer months lived in an apartment over the Japanese garden so he could take care of his park at all hours firsthand (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015). He loathed seeing visitors sitting on the park's benches for they had removed themselves from the action within his spectacle by becoming a detached audience (Kasson, 1978). Thompson believed a stimulated and playful crowd was a peaceful one that knew where to draw the line before yielding to unruly mob behavior (Cross & Walton 2005). The park featured replicas of foreign cultures, and even imported indigenous peoples, such as the Inuit, from around the world for exhibits and sideshows (Kasson, 1978). Though this cultural zoo presented a prejudicial and reductionist view of other cultures, it was well-liked by visitors who were curious about the world but did not have the means to travel abroad. Luna Park was very popular seeing an average of 100,000 visitors daily during the 1904 season (Weinstein, 1992), and profitable with a mechanical ride costing US\$6,000 able to generate US\$24,000 in only one season (Weinstein, 1984).

Dreamland, the last of the big three early twentieth century Coney Island amusement parks, opened in 1904 as the project of a former New York State politician and Brooklyn real estate developer, William Reynolds. He attempted to outdo Luna Park with a bigger and fancier park painted in white and populated with more "respectable" exhibits to lure a middle class

crowd. Luna and Dreamland, more than the thrill ride driven Steeplechase, produced experiential environments taking visitors to places one could only dream: the moon, Pompeii, a submarine voyage, the end of the world, the Boer War, the miniature village of Lilliputia, and, even, Hell. Luna and Dreamland presented spectacles to entertain visitors, while Steeplechase foregrounded the social aspect of visitors entertaining other visitors. Dreamland as a corporate-designed playful place was less daring and more conventional (Denson, 2002), and never as financially successful or popular as Luna or Steeplechase. Dreamland's attempt to impose a more genteel culture failed with Coney Island's masses, who preferred the burgeoning formation of a new, expressive urban culture (Kasson, 1978; Peiss, 1986). The peak of Coney Island was from 1897 to 1911 with all three major amusement parks in operation to become the premiere tourist spot in the United States (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015). They welcomed all visitors throughout their summer season from May to early September. The popularity of the parks coincided with the rise of discretionary income and liberalization of the public attitude toward spending time and money on leisure in the first two decades of the twentieth century (Adams, 1991). In May 1911, the first of the big three Coney Island parks to close was the least popular, Dreamland, which succumbed to fire in an attraction ironically called Hell Gate.

Coney Island's two remaining parks remained popular through the early 1920s, and with a newly completed subway extension to Stillwell Avenue, the beach and amusement areas could see a million people on a given summer day (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015). The success of the Coney Island amusement parks led to a proliferation across the country, including Boston's Paragon Park and Revere Beach, Cleveland's Euclid Beach, Chicago's Cheltenham Beach, Riverview and White City, San Francisco's The Chutes, and many others (Kasson, 1978). For the more genteel citizens who did not want to hobnob with the teeming

masses at Coney Island or other seaside amusements in the country, new parks opened in the suburbs out of reach of public transportation. One of the first was Rye Playland, which opened in 1928 north of New York City in Westchester County. Owned and operated by the county government, the seaside amusement park sits on Long Island Sound with flowerbeds, picnic grounds, a bath house, and a 1,200-foot (365-meter) open air tree-lined mall ending in a 100-foot (30-meter) music tower (Cross & Walton, 2005). Playland could only be reached by car, thus excluding the tenement dwellers in the city. Children had their own special area called Kiddyland with rides adjusted for their size and thrill threshold. There were no freak sideshows. Rye Playland was the decorous park that Coney's critics had long desired. The park was designated a US historic national landmark in 1987 and still operates today. Similar style amusement parks opened in suburban and rural areas across the US.

The zenith of amusement parks in the US was in 1920 with about 2,000, a number that would dwindle to 245 by 1939 due to the Great Depression, Prohibition, an increase in extended leisure travel, and a lack of parking facilities for cars at the urban parks (Adams, 1991). The financial pressure on the two remaining Coney parks, Luna and Steeplechase, led to deterioration with less money for maintenance and refurbishment. The Coney parks were originally designed with adults in mind, so children were noticeably absent in the early years and often found at nursery services so parents could play together in the park (Cross & Walton, 2005). Beginning in the 1920s and accelerating through the 1930s, the parks shifted focus to youth by building more thrill rides, and removing the dioramas, shows, and performances that appealed to adults (Cross & Walton, 2005). The popularity of radio and movie theaters did not so much take away from people's leisure time as shatter the exotic illusions presented by the parks (Kasson, 1978). People still pursued entertainment outside the home by going to the movies for a grander visual spectacle and more realistic window to

global cultures and landmarks. Luna Park did not reopen after being largely destroyed by fire in 1944. President Eisenhower in the 1950s initiated a national highway system and car ownership rose sharply. Americans took public transport less, opting to drive their cars to far-flung leisure locations such as Jones Beach on Long Island. New York's powerful parks commissioner Robert Moses bulldozed neighborhoods and buildings for highways, creating class and racial segregation, and setting off white flight to the suburbs (Caro, 1975). Moses particularly disdained the Coney parks as filled with undisciplined degenerates from the tenements enjoying tawdry and tacky amusements (Frank, 2015), so he made sure to isolate the indigent at Coney as the only beach in New York State easily reachable by public transportation (Cross & Walton, 2005). He put the beaches and boardwalk under Parks Department jurisdiction in 1938 (Koolhaas, 1994), and imposed fines for playing phonographs, forming human pyramids, or laying down newspapers instead of blankets on the beach (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015). In 1941, with Coney's beach facing erosion, Moses moved the boardwalk inland to shrink the size of the amusement park area and demolished buildings (Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015), even though a beach expansion would have been a more economical solution (Denson, 2002).

In the 1950s, high-rise apartment buildings for low-income residents started to open in the area, further contributing to white people's avoidance of Coney Island as a playful place. To prevent the Dreamland site from ever being redeveloped as an amusement park, Moses moved the New York Aquarium onto the former park's location. Steeplechase Park, the last of the original early twentieth century parks, closed in 1964 with the land bought by developer Fred Trump (father of Donald Trump) who demolished the park before its application for landmark status could be approved. A new amusement park, Astroland, opened in 1962 but failed to achieve sustained popularity with New Yorkers, and was

demolished in 2008. During the gradual abandonment of Coney Island, New Yorkers took their cars to Rockaway Beach in Queens, and Riis Park and Jones Beach on Long Island, and for amusement parks to Rye Playland in Westchester County and Six Flags Great Escape (opened 1974) in New Jersey. Coney Island today still provides some amusements including a Mermaid Parade that has become a major annual event since debuting in 1983, and a minor league baseball team called the Cyclones (an affiliate of the major league New York Mets) has been playing since 2001 on a field located on the old Steeplechase Park grounds. And in 2010, a new small amusement park called Luna, in homage to the original, opened and continues to operate. But Coney Island today is only a shadow of its early twentieth century form when a million people could enjoy the playful entertainment capital of the world on a summer day. Unlike Saturnalia and festivals, the Coney Island amusement parks were not a celebration of “something in particular” but rather a generalized fun that could be celebrated at any time during the summer. The parks helped usher in a new mass culture that gave immigrants and working class visitors “an opportunity to participate in American life on a new basis, outside traditional forms and proscriptions” (Kasson, 1978, p. 108). Writers and poets such as Lawrence Ferlinghetti (1958) have used the phrase a “Coney Island of the Mind” to signify a lost, imagined, or wished for place of democratic freedom, cultural intermingling, and collective joyfulness.

4.5 Transition to theme parks

Since ancient times, themed environments have been populated with natural objects, locations, and personages imbued with connotative meaning, which eventually created legends, mythologies, and religions (Gottdiener, 2001). Humans have long produced symbols from the ancient city of Athens to Disneyland. The term theme park was not coined by Walt Disney but by a journalist with the *Los Angeles Times* who needed a designation that

connoted more than an amusement park when describing Disneyland (King & O'Boyle, 2011). King defines a theme park as “a social artwork designed as a four-dimensional symbolic landscape to evoke impressions of places and times, real or imaginary” (King, 2007, p. 837). As experiential media unlike cinema, television, theater, and books, the theme park immerses an individual spatially within the narrative and action (Lukas, 2008). As a business, theme parks require the narratives of the attractions and rides to be compelling enough to keep visitors interested throughout the day buying food, beverages, and commercial merchandise (Clavé, 1997). By contrast, amusement parks are more limited in their imagery by featuring thrills on roller coasters rather than resonance through narrative art. As amusement parks add new rides, their placement is not dependent on an area's thematic coherence. Theme parks must consider carefully the holistic feel of an area before adding or subtracting rides, attractions, eateries, or other placemaking. Theme parks are cinematic by positioning the visitor's line of sight for the advancement of the narrative. Amusement parks rely on physics to determine the degree of safe thrills and torque acceptable to human physiology. A visitor can enjoy a theme park without going on any rides, while “an amusement park without rides is a parking lot with popcorn” (King & O'Boyle, 2011, p. 7).

Pre-twentieth century theme parks could include Neuschwanstein Castle (later the inspiration for Disneyland's Sleeping Beauty Castle) in Bavaria, the Imperial Summer Palace of China's Qing Dynasty (destroyed by the British during the second Opium War in 1860), and Versailles in France (King & O'Boyle, 2011). At Versailles, visitors could take a trip along the Grand Canal to observe the Sun King's exotic collection of animals, birds, and flowers in the menagerie (Jones & Wills, 2005). During the 1700s, at Stourhead in England, park visitors strolled around a lake with allegorical allusions to Virgil's *Aeneid*, the Temple of

Apollo, and statues of Roman gods as a themed landscape (Jones & Wills, 2005). But these places were generally off-limits to the public (Jones & Wills, 2005). Theme parks are a cultural mind map of collective memory with familiar places from films, books, advertising, games, paintings, and other media. The visual chaos of the amusement park is edited out of the theme park so visitors experience seamless transitions, similar to the cross dissolve of filmmaking (Disneyland being designed by filmmakers), between widely divergent thematic spaces. A primary draw of theme parks for visitors is liberation from the tedium of everyday life combined with the freedom and serendipity of the theming, entertainment, food, beverages, and commercial products all in one place (Gottdiener, 2001).

4.5.1 *Knott's Berry Farm*

Knott's Berry Farm theme park in Buena Park, California is only a 12-minute drive from Disneyland. Walter and Cordelia Knott started their berry farm in 1920 and achieved success by recovering and popularizing the boysenberry (combination blackberry, raspberry, and loganberry) from another farmer, Rudolph Boysen, who had given up planting his berry concoction. All boysenberries in the world today trace their lineage to Knott's Berry Farm (Merritt & Lynxwiler, 2015). Cordelia Knott expanded her public tea room in 1934 by adding fried chicken dinners to the menu. Word of the famous chicken dinners spread around Orange County so that the line for service on weekends and holidays sometimes ran over three hours long (Merritt & Lynxwiler, 2015). Walter Knott needed to keep the crowds entertained so he purchased a few music boxes and planted a garden with a small waterfall. Then he built a volcano with steam rising from the top and installed a recreation of George Washington's Mount Vernon fireplace. Eventually the farm became a roadside attraction so that visitors came for food and entertainment. By 1940, Walter Knott initiated a large expansion by putting together an 1800s "Ghost Town" with authentic buildings transported from mining

towns across the West and a large showcase of Western memorabilia (Merritt & Lynxwiler, 2015). He likened Ghost Town to Henry Ford's Greenfield Village as a heritage village and did not charge an entrance fee even though the buildings displaced farmland. Over time, various shows and musical performances were added to the park. In 1951, a train with coach cars became the first ride because of the railroad's strong tie to American history, particularly in the West (Merritt & Lynxwiler, 2015). More attractions would follow, including burro rides, the Haunted Shack walk-through, a rebuilt historic church, and a seal pool.

Walter Knott had been reluctant to add mechanical iron rides to his park fearing it would detract from the visual authenticity of his Ghost Town, but with construction on Disneyland underway in 1954 he knew the park needed a more diverse attraction lineup (Merritt & Lynxwiler, 2015). Walt Disney had been visiting Knott's Berry Farm for Disneyland research since 1952, and invited Walter and Cordelia Knott with golden passes (lifetime admission) to Disneyland's grand opening in 1955 (Merritt & Lynxwiler, 2015). In 1960, Knott's opened a seven-minute dark ride experience on a technological and narrative par with Disneyland called the Calico Mine Ride. The ride's groundbreaking feature was a hidden switchback queue that wound up through the attraction's mountainside to the load station so visitors were unaware of the line's true length while being immersed in the theming. Disney Imagineers replicated this feature for new Disneyland attraction queues. The hidden themed queue is now considered a standard practice of theme parks today (Merritt & Lynxwiler, 2015). In 1966, Knott's opened a brick-for-brick recreation of Philadelphia's Independence Hall, and in 1969, Fiesta Village, a new land and the second after Ghost Town, opened as a tribute to Mexico's cultural contribution to California. In September 1973, Knott's Berry Farm inaugurated the Haunt, the first Halloween theme park event in the world with a maze and actors dressed in monster costumes. By 1981, Walter and Cordelia Knott had passed away

leaving the park in the hands of their children. By the 1990s, the Knott's family had difficulty competing financially with big theme park chains attached to large corporations capable of making significant capital investments in their parks, and thus faced the same dilemma other independently owned parks confronted, either shut down or sell out to a large corporation (Davis, 1996). Disney made an offer, but the Knott's children sold the park in 1997 to Cedar Fair, a large operator of regional amusement parks across the US. With its pre-1955 roster of Ghost Town attractions, Knott's Berry Farm bills itself today, and could be considered, as America's first theme park.

4.6 Disneyland in Southern California

When Walt Disney solicited suggestions from amusement park owners, they advised an investment in thrifty rides, employment of professional barkers to harangue visitors into spending money, establishment of more than one park entrance, and letting the park stay untidy to resemble a Mardi Gras party (Klein, 2004). However, Walt Disney envisioned a park far different from the old seaside amusement centers by keeping the park clean, disciplined, and safe, and free of carnival barkers, freak sideshows, fortune tellers, games of skill or chance, and thrill rides. Disneyland was consciously designed not to be reminiscent of Coney Island style amusement parks for visitors. Walt Disney criticized Coney Island for crude rides, antagonistic employees, chaotic layout, and dirtiness (Findlay, 1992). His visit to Coney, estimated to be between the late 1930s and early 1940s, with his two daughters (Weinstein, 1992), was so disheartening that he briefly considered not building a park at all (Thomas, 1977). He shunned attractions such as the Ferris Wheel that would remind visitors of amusement parks and located the park in central Orange County far from the seashore to avoid the beach crowd. Disneyland eschewed the exotic and "oriental", in favor of cuteness and nostalgia. The buildings of Main Street and the railroad cars were 5/8 scale in order to

seem more like toys. The elite European architecture of Chicago's White City was remediated at Main Street as quaint clapboard structures of the American Midwest (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). Colorful teacups were made gigantic so visitors could ride inside. Disneyland had no animal acts, clowns, or circus acts (except for the unpopular Mickey Mouse Club Circus that lasted only a few months in 1956). Visitors to Luna Park could rent a clown suit to wear for the day (Denson, 2002), but Disneyland strictly prohibited adults from wearing costumes in the park (except since 2005 during special night ticket Halloween events). Disneyland observed a strict separation of religion and theme park unlike Coney Island rides focused on hell, demons, and angels. Dreamland's dark ride "Creation" depicted God forming the planet in six days as in the Book of Genesis. There was no church on Disneyland's Main Street, even though it would have been thematically accurate and appeared on early Imagineer mock-up illustrations of the land. Luna Park showcased an exhibit by Dr. Martin Couney of Premature Baby Incubators that displayed at-risk babies dependent on the new technology for survival. The traumatic prospect of infant death would be unthinkable as a Disneyland attraction (Adams, 1991).

In contrast to Coney Island, Walt Disney was impressed by the clean, brightly colored, and moderately priced Tivoli in Copenhagen during a 1950 visit (Jones & Wills, 2005; Thomas, 1977), and wanted a park as a fantasy land populated with familiar storybook characters. Disneyland was not meant to be a museum of passive exhibits, but rather a place to explore and play, albeit within a white, 1950s middle class imagination. Disneyland encompassed the past (nostalgia), the future (technological optimism), and fantasy (timeless), but avoided the present day, unlike Coney Island (Cross & Walton, 2005). Disneyland was atemporal, with the yearlong temperate climate of Southern California producing a "perpetual spring" (Tuan, 1997, p. 195) as a kind of American Eden (Andersen, 2017). Disneyland transformed

Saturnalia, festivals, pleasure gardens, and mechanical amusement parks into a dream world of powerful emotional associations (Cross & Walton, 2005).

However, when Walt Disney and his Imagineers set out to design and construct Disneyland, they knowingly or unknowingly borrowed or mimicked some Coney Island amusement park conventions, though no documentary evidence exists from the Disney archives linking Disneyland's development to the Coney Island parks (Weinstein, 1992). Nye (1981) argues that the concept of the early Coney Island and Disneyland parks did not differ greatly as all were dream worlds and fantasy lands of escape, play, excitement, and release. On Disneyland's opening day in July 1955 on a 160-acre site previously full of orange groves, all the themed lands, except Main Street, used the same popular cultural products as at Coney Island: westerns, adventure, space, and fantasy (Weinstein, 1992). Kasson (1978) holds that high technology, perfectionism, animatronic robots, and corporate homogeneity set Disneyland apart from early amusement parks. However, the founders and designers of Disneyland and Coney Island parks were both influenced by the aesthetic and attractions of world's fairs as places for adults to have fun. Walt Disney echoed his Coney Island forbears that adults were just children all grown up (Thomas, 1977). Immersed in the management and concerned with the success of their creations, both Thompson and Disney had apartments in their respective parks, with Disney's above the fire station overlooking Main Street's Town Square. The construction and opening of Disneyland in the 1950s coincided with the mass diffusion of television into American homes, as the electronic society for Meyrowitz (1994, p. 68) became "characterized by more adultlike children and more childlike adults". Postman (1994) concurs that the advent of electronic media, particularly television, eroded the barriers between adulthood and childhood. Adults and children both play in Disneyland donning Mickey, and Minnie, Mouse ears.

The design of the three major early Coney Island parks (Steeplechase, Luna and Dreamland) and Disneyland overlapped in some aspects. All featured an abiding emphasis on joy and pleasure, with only one contemporary Disneyland attraction, Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln, completely devoid of humor. However, in 2019, due to low visitor attendance, Lincoln went on hiatus from the Main Street Opera House theater for previews of upcoming Disney Studios films such as *Dumbo* and *Aladdin*. Live music was used to entertain and energize tired visitors at Luna Park, as at Disneyland with the barber shop quartet Dapper Dans on Main Street, Farley the Fiddler in Frontierland, a jazz band in New Orleans Square, and other musical acts across the park. Walt Disney emphasized the importance of the soundscape throughout lands and attractions as visitors did not leave the park humming the architecture. Dreamland's Beacon Tower served as a focal point within the park to help orient visitors in the same way as Disneyland's Sleeping Beauty Castle. Diorama style rides were very popular, though Disneyland's were more intricate and technologically sophisticated than those at the Coney parks. Disneyland's dark ride animatronics recalled the Victorian era fascination with automata and mechanical ingenuity featured on Coney Island rides. Sea Lion was the first enclosed American amusement park, but Steeplechase and Disneyland went a step further with an earthen berm around the parks to keep sightlines of the outside world hidden. In 1963, Walt Disney received a guarantee from the city of Anaheim that no building that could be seen from within the park would ever be approved for construction in the area surrounding Disneyland. Even the sky above Disneyland within a three-mile radius has been a designated no-fly zone since 9/11 (Pimentel, 2015). Admission was controlled with entrance tickets to keep the poor outside the berm. Elaborate park entryways such as the enormous smiling "funny face" of the Coney parks or the train station at Disneyland distinguished between the real world of work and responsibility outside, and the play world

of escapist fun inside the gates. No alcohol was allowed or sold in the Coney Island and Disneyland parks, and rowdy visitors were ejected. Park employees wore tidy uniforms and trained in performative labor at Luna Park and Dreamland, just as Disneyland's cast members trained in Disney traditions. Luna park employees wore fairy tale character costumes such as Alice and the Mad Hatter to play with visitors (Weinstein, 1992), while Disneyland has featured hundreds of meet and greet characters in the park to portray Mickey Mouse, Jack Sparrow, princesses, and many others. Disneyland and Coney Island's parks have been globally recognized as signifying fun and fantasy (Wasko, Phillips & Meehan, 2001; Paranscandola & Paranscandola, 2015).

Similarities notwithstanding, Walt Disney and his Imagineers still abided the elite critique of modern industrial Saturnalia. Disneyland was a repository of mainstream American values made concrete in experiential form (King, 2011). The formation of Disneyland was imbued with the white middle-class consumerist bent of 1950s America, and thus endeavored to sanitize the Coney Island amusement park experience by diverging in a number of ways. By placing Disneyland in the exurbs of 1950s Orange County, people without a car were hard pressed to visit due to a lack of public transportation links, thus cutting off the kind of people who previously went to seaside amusement parks. The park opened at a time of technological and social developments that assisted its early success: "the expansion of the middle class, California development, the baby boom, the national highway system and automobile ownership, and the rise of television as a universal household medium" (King, 2011, p. 223). Disneyland was designed under the authority of one person, Walt Disney, with the cooperation of the local Anaheim government and connections with powerful California politicians including Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon. Coney Island's parks and surrounding area had no single authority or benefactor. Instead, the Coney parks absorbed

antagonistic barbs from cultural elites, suffered under inept or uncaring politicians and bureaucrats, faced encroaching urban neglect, and often experienced revenue shortfalls. The Coney parks did not have the financial benefit of association with a large media corporation, revenue from park and attraction merchandising, synergy with a film studio, and mass media marketing campaigns. Disney's characters and stories could be reintroduced to successive generations through the theatrical rerelease of movies, and later by new personal technologies such as VHS tapes, DVDs, and digital video files. Disneyland then synergistically integrated attractions with the company's merchandising. Coney Island's attractions themed to the Johnstown flood or tenement fires quickly became dated and remote from the memory of new generations. Disneyland placed visitors experientially into the fantasies they had seen on the movie screen. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Dumbo* (1941), *Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* (1949), *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), *Peter Pan* (1953), *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1954), and *Third Man on the Mountain* (1959) all inspired rides at Disneyland in the first decade of operation. Disneyland built attractions of quality, long-lasting material such as steel, concrete, and fiberglass for durability and fire prevention.

During Coney Island's peak years in the early twentieth century, the rides were designed for adult experiences as the kids were left behind in supervised care or at home. Disney built attractions that the whole family could enjoy from children to grandparents, thus refraining from, in the first few years, thrill rides such as roller coasters that younger and older visitors would shun. Rides were not designed to put visitors into close contact, thus eliminating the sensuality and chaos of the Coney Island parks, particularly Steeplechase. Children could take the lead choosing the next ride for the whole family as Walt Disney envisioned Disneyland as a place for parents and children to have fun together (Thomas, 1977). The family atmosphere of the park discouraged groups of young men from entering the park to

flirt with women. The child-centered nature of Disneyland and modern parenting both insisted on decorum and cleanliness. While the Coney Island parks encouraged adults to come and play without children, Disneyland was designed so parents could return to childhood memories with their own kids. Children, in turn, enjoyed seeing their parents drop their authoritative role to become childlike again. Exhibits, particularly in Tomorrowland, were meant to edify as well as entertain visitors in an uplifting manner reminiscent of the White City of the Chicago World's Fair. Disneyland presented a tightly focused and rendered reality of specific childhood stories that adults could re-experience fancifully through the park's attractions. Disneyland did not reconstruct reality, but rather gave visitors the impression of being in another time and place, evoking a nostalgic sense of *déjà vu*.

John Hench, Imagineer and Disney Legend (company hall of fame program), believed variety in design led to a sense of place as long as there were no contradictions (Mannheim, 2002). Under this guiding design philosophy, Disneyland opened in 1955 with five lands each possessing a distinct, symbolic, and unified theme reflected in the architecture, landscaping, transportation, food, beverages, and attractions. Main Street USA harkened back to 1900 America with a nostalgic ambiance of reassurance and sentimentality (Francaviglia, 1996; Hench, 2003; Marling, 1997; Scibelli, 2011). The portrayal of a bucolic small town was a rejoinder to the suburban sprawl, unkempt cities, and atomistic car culture outside the park's berm. Passing through pedestrian Main Street was the only way to enter or exit Disneyland. Adventureland presented faraway places in Africa and Asia waiting to be explored by Western adventurers on the Jungle Cruise boat ride. Frontierland showcased the Old West's rugged individualism and American spirit that subdued nature and indigenous peoples. Fantasyland was populated by fairy tale attractions for Snow White and Sleeping Beauty.

Tomorrowland promoted technology and science as progress with the Rocket to the Moon attraction designed in consultation with famed rocket engineer Wernher von Braun of NASA.

Since 1955, new lands have opened in Disneyland. New Orleans Square opened in 1966 as a nineteenth century Louisiana setting. Bear Country opened in 1972 as a rustic village featuring singing bears and country music. The land's name changed to Critter Country in 1988. Opened in 1993, Toontown allowed visitors to enter the world of cartoons by visiting the homes of classic Disney animated characters including Mickey and Minnie Mouse. In 2019, a Star Wars themed land called Galaxy's Edge opened as the biggest expansion in Disneyland history on a 14-acre backlot behind Critter Country and Frontierland. In the last few decades most attractions of an edifying nature have been removed and replaced by entertainment, particularly in Frontierland and Tomorrowland.

In 2001, Disney opened Disney's California Adventure (DCA), a second theme park less than a minute walk across the esplanade from Disneyland. The name was slightly modified to Disney California Adventure in 2012. The park featured attractions inspired by California including a Hollywood backlot studio, a desert airstrip, and a forested Sierra Nevada land. It also broke a Disney taboo by including a land called Paradise Pier themed to a seaside amusement park with a Ferris wheel and a faux wooden roller coaster with exposed beams (previous Disney coasters always concealed the support apparatus with either a mountain setting or complete darkness). DCA also served alcohol that visitors could carry in plastic cups while walking around the park. Paradise Pier was rethemed to Pixar Pier in 2018 to give more prominence in the park to the animation studio's films, and a Marvel themed land is slated to open in 2020.

4.7 Walt Disney World and Celebration, Florida

After Walt Disney died in 1966, the company continued to expand with the 1971 opening of Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom park in lightly populated central Florida. Walt Disney World became primarily a tourist resort rather than a park for locals as Disneyland was in Southern California (J. Hill, Interview, October 24, 2017). Even today, the Walt Disney World resort holds more than 25 on-site hotels owned by Disney, while Disneyland only carries three Disney-owned hotels. The Disney company built a town south of the theme parks on its vast land holdings in Central Florida. Though then Disney CEO Michael Eisner said the town was a realization of Walt Disney's dream of a future city dubbed EPCOT (Eisner & Schwartz, 1999), Celebration's development was primarily a ploy for Disney to earn money from idle property (Detweiler, 2011). Celebration opened in 1996 as a model for the New Urbanism movement of traditional neighborhood and town design, fostering community with public spaces and encouraging residents to walk or bike. At Christmas time, carols were broadcast from speakers in the downtown area with artificial snow gusting nightly from overhead machines (Anderson, 1999). Still, Celebration's residents had to use their car to drive to work or go on shopping excursions outside town since the downtown shopping area was geared to tourists, not local shopping needs (Ross, 1999). Mostly absent were advertising billboards and the hard sell of Mickey Mouse and other Disney intellectual properties, as Klein (1999) commented that Disney ironically created and positioned Celebration in a pre-Disneyfied world. As some residents began using the public sphere, including the Internet, to complain about community issues such as property values, public education, and downtown shopping (Ross, 1999), Disney divested ownership and control of the town in 2004 to a New York investment firm that specialized in residential and commercial developments (Clavé, 2007). Disney had become anxious that the townspeople's

public grievances could impact the company's public image and reputation, and thus ducked out of the community management business.

4.8 Remediation and themed entertainment today

In 2018, two powerful media entertainment corporations boast the theme parks with the most annual visitors in the world: Disney and Universal Studios. They package pleasure on a global scale with Disney parks in the US (two locations), Japan, France, Hong Kong, and China, and Universal in the US (two locations), Japan, and Singapore, with additional parks slated for China, Russia, and South Korea. Other major players include Six Flags, LEGOLAND, Cedar Fair, Sea World, and Busch Gardens. In addition, there are hundreds of amusement parks scattered about the United States, and thousands more around the world. The amusement and theme parks of today reflect a lineage of remediated playful places that have continually evolved and adapted dating back to Roman Saturnalia as summarized in Table 2.

New types of themed entertainment venues around the world are appropriating parts of the Disney park model including casinos, museums, aquariums, heritage villages, beverage and dining establishments, and urban shopping zones (Cross & Walton, 2005). Sorkin and his co-authors presciently noted in 1992 that US cities were starting to look like theme parks, and theme parks were starting to look like US cities. Theme parks and cities are spaces that are both highly mediated and offer a kind of grand narrative (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). The trend toward themed environmental design has become a global phenomenon.

	Pre-Industrial Saturnalia and Festivals	Pleasure Gardens	Early Mechanical Amusement Parks	Theme Parks
Access	Ephemeral	Late Spring through Summer	Late Spring through Summer	All Year
Gate Fee	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Annual Pass	No	No	No	Yes
Location	Peripatetic	Fixed; Urban	Fixed; Urban	Fixed; Suburban
Target Audience	Adults and Children	Adults	Adults	Adults and Children
Edify and/or Entertain	Entertain	Edify and Entertain	Edify and Entertain	Entertain*
Anti-Alienation Attractions	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Temporal Milieu	Fantasy, Present	Past, Present	Past, Fantasy, Present, Future	Past, Fantasy, Future
Synergetic Media Consumerism	No	No**	No	Yes
Religious Content	Yes	Yes	Yes	No***
Performative Labor	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Elite Approval	No	No	No	Yes

Table 2: Remediation of playful places from pre-industrial to modern times.

*While Disneyland in the early years under Walt Disney included numerous edifying attractions in Tomorrowland and Frontierland, almost all have been replaced in the past few decades by entertainment based on the corporation's intellectual property. Universal Studios also originally operated as a park focused on explaining the filmmaking process, but in the last decade these edifying attractions have been largely removed for entertainment.

**Individual musicians and artists promoted own works, but no overarching media strategy by garden owners.

*** Exception being seasonal faith-based Christmas activities such as the annual candlelight processional on two December nights at Disneyland.

Throughout history at Saturnalia, festivals, carnivals, pleasure gardens, world's fairs, and mechanical amusement parks, people have enjoyed playful places as an intermittent thrill and respite away from daily lives of quotidian chores and concerns. Theme parks such as Disneyland are the latest evolution of the playful place with the novel features of year-round access, annual passes for repeat visits, and an overriding emphasis on escapism that expunges mnemonics of the present day. In addition, as the following chapters illustrate, the development of online social platforms and smartphones in the last three decades has enabled theme park fans to connect and organize online and in the park. The next chapter examines Disneyland as a regular playful place of attachment for Southern Californians on a cognitive, affective, and behavioral level.

Chapter 5: The Place of Disneyland for Southern Californians

This chapter builds on the last that explored the lineage of playful places up to Disney theme parks by analyzing Disneyland as a special local place for many Southern Californians.

Unlike past playful places, Disneyland operates year round from morning to night. In the first few decades of operation, most locals did not go to the park on a regular basis as a visit was considered a special occasion (B. Gurr, Interview, October 8, 2017) and the cost was prohibitively expensive. Until 1982, Disney charged not only for park admission, but also per attraction with a ticket book that once depleted had to be repurchased. The 1982 change to a passport style ticket enabled visitors to enjoy an unlimited number of attractions for the day. The 1984 start of the AP (annual pass) program enabled locals to visit the park every day of the year if desired. The online social platforms of the 1990s combined with the AP program to supercharge the relationship between locals and Disneyland by enabling fans to connect and organize online with other locals to exchange knowledge and information, to form events, meets, and clubs in the park without the involvement of the Disney corporation, and to protest Disney's handling of the park. Today, the approximately one million annual passholders in Southern California have a strong sense of attachment to the first and only park built by Walt Disney. Similar to pleasure gardens and mechanical amusement parks, Disneyland has often been cited by etic observers as vacuous, antisocial, and placeless, but this chapter challenges this assertion by closely examining the particular environmental, cultural, business, and personal factors behind Disneyland's development and evolution that have fostered a special connection between locals and theme park. Manzo and Perkins's (2006) three processes of place attachment provide a framework to analyze the affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of the bond that many Southern Californians hold for Disneyland's social and physical features. This bond underlies the investigation in subsequent chapters of the struggle between local Disneyland fans and the Disney

corporation over discourse, commerce, and social formations online and in the park over the past three decades.

5.1 Place, placelessness, and place attachment theory

While a space is abstract and indistinct in meaning, a place is a space evolved and imbued with meaning and value attracting people through the “steady accretion of sentiment” and experience (Tuan, 1977, p. 33). Relative meaning can be derived from the senses (smell, vision, touch, hearing, and taste), or mediated by symbols understood through one’s range of experience or knowledge (Tuan, 1977). Place is a construct with social and cultural meanings for individuals and groups (Gieryn, 2000; Lefebvre, 1991) that can create subjective and emotional attachment (Cresswell, 2015). Tuan (1974) refers to this acutely personal and profound attachment as topophilia, or love of place. Relph (1976) emphasizes the profound emotional ties, subjective experience, and personally constructed value involved in place meaning. While a space lacks social connections, a place is created by human experience as an affective bond (Altman & Low, 1992).

Relph (1976) saw the erosion of a sense of place, or placelessness, as arising with the global flow and mobility of people through modern transportation technology systems. The post World War II rise of car culture that contributed to relative social isolation within suburban sprawl (as compared to pre-war life within a densely populated urban environment) has often been cited as a leading factor in the decay of informal public life and social commons in the United States (Bellah 1991; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton, 1996; Gratz, 1989; Jacobs, 1961; Oldenburg, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Relph, 1976; Sennett, 1977; Stein, 1960; Traynor, 2012). The loss of small town Main Street as a place has become emblematic of lost community in the US (Lerner, 1957; Findlay, 1992; Francaviglia, 1996), replaced by

automobile-dominated suburbs splitting people's social world into disparate fragments without emotional attachment (Oldenburg, 1999). Leisure time became increasingly privatized and individualized within the home with media technology, particularly television (Oldenburg, 1999; Putnam, 2000), which displaced many activities, especially social ones with friends and family (Shirky, 2010). Socializing shifted from the semi-public places of cafés, parks, and pubs to the privacy of homes (Wellman & Gulia, 1999) with people spending less time in public places with friends or meeting new ones (Wellman, 1992). Digital gadgets ranging from the Internet connected personal computer of the 1990s to the smartphones and tablets of the 2000s have also been cited as technologies that have isolated and dehumanized individuals (Stoll, 1995; Lanier, 2011; Oldenburg, 1999; Turkle, 2011; Virilio, 2000). The number of local gathering places has sharply declined (Oldenburg, 1999; Putnam, 2000), including places where youth and adults socialize together (Sennett, 1977; Oldenburg, 1999). However, no one has considered amusement or theme parks as regularly visited multi-generational social places.

As discussed in Chapter 4, amusement and theme parks have long been criticized by social, cultural, and intellectual elites (Cross & Walton, 2005; Francaviglia, 1995; Immerso, 2002, Kasson, 1978, Parascandola & Parascandola, 2015; Peiss, 1986) and thus not considered as a place (Bryman, 2004; Cresswell, 2015; Relph, 1978). As a category, theme parks have been perceived as belonging to the tourism and entertainment industry, and not as intrinsic parts of their surrounding locality. Bolter and Grusin (1999) thought people visit Disneyland only once or twice during childhood. While many people only visit theme parks intermittently, almost all theme parks around the world have an AP program that enables and encourages regular visits by locals. The assumption is that people prefer to hang out in real, lived-in, local commercial places than the perceived inorganic and inauthentic commercial spaces of

theme parks. Oldenburg's (1999) study of third places considers cozy cafés, taverns, bookstores, and hairdressers as local hangouts but not enormous physical locales with large crowds (Oldenburg, 1999). In a book-length account, former *New York Daily News* sports columnist Filip Bondy (2005) observed a group of New York Yankees baseball fans known as "bleacher creatures" who inhabited the old Yankee Stadium upper deck seating area known as Section 39. Although Yankee Stadium is a cavernous structure that can hold almost 50,000 fans, a pocket of regulars from diverse backgrounds formed a community around a shared interest. Even the starting Yankee players tipped their caps on the field to acknowledge the bleacher creatures who chanted their names at the top of the first inning of every home game. And like Disneyland, sports locales such as football grounds have become hallowed ground to fan groups of "shared emotionalism" (Edgell & Jary, 1973, p. 221). However, sports stadiums are designed to separate the spectator and actor, and can only be fully accessed on game days or briefly for tours on selected non-game days. For American football the stadium may be open for games as infrequently as eight days per year, and for baseball only 80 days per year. By contrast, Disneyland is open every day from morning to night for fans to wander through experientially with all their senses engaged.

Disneyland's critics have often viewed the park through a particular perspective such as the commercial exploitation and regimented control of visitors, and the presentation of inauthentic and diminished culture. Cresswell (2015, pp. 76-77) termed Disneyland "the epitome of placelessness constructed, as it is, purely for outsiders". Relph (1976) saw landscapes produced by "Disneyfication" as "absurd, synthetic places made up of a surrealistic combination of history, myth, reality, and fantasy that have little relationship with particular geographic setting" (p. 95). Richard Schickel (1967), Walt Disney's first biographer, said Disneyland was mostly a cultural horror with no cathartic release from its

symbol-laden attractions. Cross and Walton (2005) considered Disneyland a pseudo-history to showcase American hegemony in the past and into the future. Giroux and Pollock (2010, p. 38) found Disney theme parks “a blend of ‘Taylorized’ fun, patriotic populism, and consumerism dressed up as a childhood fantasy” that sanitized America’s history and ignored issues of class and race while treating visitors as consumers and spectators. Bryman (2004) defined the “Disneyization” of space as creating a ludic atmosphere to veil the true strategy of manipulating the emotions of visitors to open their wallets and consume. For Boyer (1992), Disneyland was a landscape for consumption, not leisure, with visitors acceding to fantastic simulation over reality. The assumption is that theme park visitors spend most of their day rushing to rides and shows, and shopping, and thus lack time to socialize and play. Cross and Walton (2005) believed Disneyland’s simulation of enchantment did not generate a sense of playfulness as the disorder associated with the *paidia* type of play had been stripped away. Jones and Wills (2005) considered Disneyland a regimented experience for visitors directed on how to behave and where to walk.

Although Disneyland’s critics have made valid observations, the critiques primarily derive from an *etic* perspective that has overlooked the *emic* perspective of fans and locals who adore the park in spite of the criticisms of its consumerism, sanitized history, and simulated environment. Warren (1996) and Lukas (2007) argued that much of the postmodern criticism of Disneyland lacked in-depth ethnographic investigation and empirical observation of visitor behavior in the park. For example, Fong and Nunez (2012) concluded in their research that Disneyland was a “world of strangers” after only spending nine hours in one day at the park. Eco (1986) saw Disneyland visitors as robots herded from one ride queue to the next without considering the potential for socialization while standing in line or strolling through the park. *Etic* critics have generally not scratched below surface impressions that pertain more to

tourists, such as at Walt Disney World in Florida, who need to keep the park map open to orient themselves while walking around the park. By contrast, savvy local Disneyland regulars know all the “tricks” such as how to make a free improvised sandwich in DCA by taking fresh sourdough bread samples at The Bakery Tour in the Pacific Wharf section to the free toppings bar with lettuce, tomatoes, pickles, onions, and sauces at Smokejumpers Grill in Grizzly Peak land. Dessert comes courtesy of free chocolate squares at the Ghirardelli Soda Fountain and Chocolate Shop back in the Pacific Wharf area. The conflation by some critics of the experience of tourists and locals as parallel neglects vast differences in background, design, content, and cultural and social milieu among the different Disney theme parks.

In addition, some Disneyland critiques are outdated as the park continuously and significantly changes from decade to decade, and even year to year. To criticize Disneyland for sanitizing American history presumes history-based presentations are still extant in the park. The Walt Disney era of Tomorrowland attractions that lionized American progress in science and space have long been replaced by the corporate marketing synergy of Buzz Lightyear, Star Wars, and Finding Nemo. Frontierland has shrunk in size in recent decades with the 2007 reskin of Tom Sawyer Island into Pirate’s Lair (a commercial tie-in with the Pirates of the Caribbean attraction and film franchise) and the 2016 truncation of the Rivers of America to clear room for the new Star Wars land. The Lincoln attraction on Main Street was displaced in 2019 for Disney Studios film previews. The original lands and attractions of DCA have been largely scrubbed of California history, which was the park’s *raison d’être* upon opening, and replaced by popular Disney texts. For example, the Golden Dreams theater attraction that celebrated the contributions and recognized the hardships of immigrants to California was replaced in 2011 by a Little Mermaid dark ride. A central reason for the wave of replacements is commercial with merchandise based on Disney texts outselling American history by a wide

margin. The second is visitors to playful places have always preferred attractions focused on popular entertainment rather than elite edification, as evidenced by the practically empty theaters during the Lincoln and Golden Dreams shows. Disneyland is a moving target for critique since the park as experiential media undergoes incessant change. Even the notoriously long queues for attractions are being relegated to the past as Disney and Universal theme parks increasingly switch to virtual queues and timed reservations using smartphone and wristband apps.

Place is usually cited as areas where people live such as neighborhoods, towns, and cities, so Disneyland is indeed placeless in the sense that no person other than Walt Disney in his Main Street apartment has ever actually lived at the park. The only regular “residents” at Disneyland are the stray cats that cast members regularly feed to keep, ironically, the park rodent population at bay. However, a non-lived-in place such as Disneyland can still be imbued with meaning and value through sentiment and experience for local fans living in the region around the park. Fan groups have long found meaning in what others characterize as frivolous or insignificant, and their production of meaning is not solitary and private, but necessarily social and public (Jenkins, 2013).

Massey (1994) cautions that the discussion of place is often suffused with nods to stasis, nostalgia, and bounded security. Place has often been seen as bounded and fixed for many people with daily routines and practices in small towns or city neighborhoods (Cresswell, 2015). However, a single place cannot produce a seamless, coherent identity for everyone. The routes, hangouts, and connections throughout one place will vary tremendously to produce multiple identities (Massey, 1994). Social interrelations can extend beyond the area referred to as a place, and the identity of a place can change over time due to the dynamism

of social relations (Massey, 1994). Place should not be considered in terms of insularity and self-enclosure, but as progressive and outward looking within a wider geographical context (Massey, 1994). Robins (1991, p. 41) suggested “placed identities for placeless times”. Other research has expanded the concept of place to illustrate how car drivers “inhabit” roads and vehicles for a sense of place (Urry, 2007), second home owners develop a bond with another domicile (Kelly & Hosking, 2008; Stedman, 2006), and mobile workers create a sense of home in cars, airports, trains, and hotel rooms (Laurier, 2004). The traditional notion of place needs to adapt with a more protean approach.

Therefore, rather than considering place in the traditional sense of a bounded neighborhood of homes and buildings, people can identify and feel a sense of place with a regularly visited proximate locale. Socially produced places undergo signification through production and historical context (Lefebvre, 1991). By integrating nature and culture, each place uniquely emerges with meaning over time while being interconnected within a larger framework of spatial circulation (Lukermann, 1964). Places can be sensed as a “chiaroscuro of setting, landscape, ritual, routine, other people, personal experiences, care and concern for home, and in the context of other places” (Relph, 1976, p. 29). For most people, important places are individualized, varied, and unstable, and related to historical landmarks, personal memories, and behavioral customs (Hubbard & Kitchin, 2011). Places of attachment can run the gamut from planets, continents, countries, islands, towns, neighborhoods, streets, buildings, and specific rooms to spiritual and imaginary locations (Scannell & Gifford, 2014). Place-making can be constructed through the association of particular social activities to a locale (Massey, 1994; Wilken & Goggin, 2012) with length of time in a place often a predictor of attachment (Lewicka, 2014). When routines become focused on a particular location, a “place-ballet” (Seamon, 1980) evokes a sense of belonging within the rhythm of everyday life in that place.

5.2 The problem of place in Southern California

In contrast to the tall buildings and noticeable downtown centers of east coast US cities, the lack of distinct downtowns in post World War II Southern California led to criticism of placelessness. Rather than building density within an urban core, Southern Californians spread outward annexing adjacent farmlands to build an incessant expansion of suburbs (Findlay, 1992). Whyte (1988) criticized the urban design of Los Angeles as inhibiting public social life. Urban architect Gruen regarded Los Angeles as “seventeen suburbs in search of a city” (Gruen, 1964, p. 22) with the rise of suburbia signifying a “land of economic and racial segregation, with phony respectability and genuine boredom” (Gruen, 1964, p. 45). By contrast, Disneyland’s Main Street had a traditional Town Square, which was missing from the sprawl outside the park (Mannheim, 2002). The success of Disneyland motivated others to quickly establish motels, restaurants, gas stations, and other businesses on the park’s periphery to cater to the new visitors. Walt Disney was chagrined by what he saw as a second-rate Vegas developing outside the park (Mannheim, 2002). Gruen (1964) approvingly noted the cellular planning concept of Disneyland’s layout and mix of accompanying transportation systems within the park, but lamented the laissez-faire mess of billboards, bars, nightclubs, and office buildings creating disorder outside the gate. The amorphous shape and enormous size of the Los Angeles metropolis was said to induce a sense of placelessness amongst its denizens that impeded a sense of stable attachment and shared identity (Findlay, 1992). Compact urban spaces promoted social mixing, while the suburbs segregated people by income and race (Gruen, 1964). Austrian-born Gruen (1964) noted how difficult it was to take a pedestrian stroll in Los Angeles where police stopped him to inquire what was wrong and passing motorists offered to give him a lift assuming his car had broken down. The extensive street car railway system in Los Angeles was steadily dismantled for buses after

World War II as US automotive companies lobbied politicians and officials at all levels to promote car transportation and the construction of roads and highways.

Architect Charles Moore famously said, “you have to pay for the public life”, citing Disneyland as providing the public environment of play, and of watching and being watched, that was missing in Los Angeles (Moore, 1965). Gruen (1964) lamented the difficulty of convincing merchants and banks to allocate funds for design and decorative elements, and features and functions unrelated to the sale of merchandise. Businesses feared flower beds would be targeted by thieves, kids would fall or swim in fountains, outdoor eateries would lead to litter, sculptures would get dirty or defaced, bright colors for paint would get dirty (therefore better to use grayish green paint which already appeared dirty), tree roots would crack the pavement, planters would make snow removal cumbersome, and maintenance and cleaning costs would be high (Gruen, 1964). However, in an outdoor urban project where Gruen (1964, p. 202) added those flourishes: “maintenance people discovered to their great surprise that flowers were not stolen, that trash was not thrown around, but that, on the contrary, the 70,000 persons who visited the center on an average day took possessive pride in the beauty offered them”. Gruen (1964) believed people enjoyed sharing life experiences in crowds such as at parades, baseball games, concerts, and other gatherings for work or leisure.

Disneyland was an orderly place compared to the chaotic sprawl of Los Angeles as Walt Disney emphasized the park would “be a place for California to be at home, to bring its guests, to demonstrate its faith in the future” (Findlay, 1992, p. 67). Travel writers in the 1950s and 60s often noted that Disneyland was the best thing in a Southern California plagued by smog, traffic jams, and phony people (Findlay, 1992). By the 1970s, Southern

Californians also saw Disneyland as the opposite of Los Angeles (Findlay, 1992). In the years before his death in 1966, Walt Disney considered Disneyland as more than a counterpoint to the perceived dirtiness and tawdriness of the Coney Island amusement parks, but as a potential model for urban transportation, innovation, community, and an antidote to 20th century urban malaise that isolated the individual (Findlay, 1992; Hensch, 2003). In a 1963 speech at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, architect and community builder James Rouse said Disneyland's technological approach to solving human problems made it "the greatest piece of urban design in the United States" (Mannheim 2002, p. 17). Moore said Disneyland "engaged in replacing many of those elements of the public realm which have vanished in the featureless private floating world of southern California, whose only edge is the ocean, and whose center is otherwise undiscoverable" (Mannheim 2002, p. 19), and at Disneyland "everything works, the way it doesn't anymore in the world outside" (Mannheim 2002, p. 124). As public space contracted during the 20th century, communion with a crowd of strangers at an amusement or theme park could make one feel a part of a community and society (Gottdiener, 2001). Southern California residents came to appreciate Disneyland as a regional landmark and symbol to feel ownership as part of their lives (Findlay, 1992). Perhaps channeling Baudrillard's (1983, p. 12) famous comment that "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation", a writer at the local *OC Weekly* periodical wryly observed:

In an era of carefully manicured plants choking out native grasses, Spanish-revival condos replacing old-style architecture, and planned communities substituting for real ones, Disneyland is about as authentic a SoCal landmark as you could ask for. (Wyn, 1999)

To be sure, Walt Disney did not intentionally design Disneyland to be a model answer to the urban issues facing Southern California, and only in retrospect did observers note contrasts between the park and region, and possible prescriptions Disneyland could offer for urban maladies. The park provided a new urban environment dissimilar from their everyday lives, whereupon just the evocation of the name Disneyland could summon a quasi-religious state of mind (Bryman, 1995; Fjellman, 1992; Wasko, 2001).

5.3 Disneyland as place in Southern California

“Disneyland has a soul”, explained Todd Regan (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). As the founder and CEO of MiceChat, one of the oldest and largest Disneyland fan groups in Southern California, Regan differentiated the original 1955 park from other Disneylands and theme parks worldwide. Cross and Walton (2005) and Adams (1991) compared Disneyland to a religious pilgrimage where the familiar stories and symbols manifested in a place that allowed the faithful to trace divine steps. Ken Pellman, a former cast member and co-host of the Disneyland fan podcast *The Sweep Spot*, cited religious parallels to Disneyland with APs as tithing, Sleeping Beauty Castle as the temple, Disney films as holy texts, passholders as congregants, and Imagineers as high priests (K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017). Visits to the physical sites of fandom have often been described in religious terms as pilgrimages or rituals (Hills, 2002).

Disneyland enthusiasts differ from other media fandoms in two important ways. First, their affective object is tangibly imbued and intertwined with almost 100 years of countless Disney texts (including the Muppets, Pixar, Marvel, and Lucasfilm). Second, most fandom communities exist outside of fixed territorial space (Sandvoss, 2005). While fandoms have sites peripherally important to their cultural texts to visit such as production locales on

Vancouver streets for the *X-Files* (Hills, 2002) and in Manchester for the *Coronation Street* set (Couldry, 1998), or Graceland for Elvis Presley fans (Doss, 1999; Rodman, 1996), fans usually visit once as a pilgrimage with the primary fandom object remaining the music or television show itself. The pilgrimage is symbolic as the sites are often ordinary; Hills (2002, p. 149) describes the Vancouver shooting locations of the *X-Files* as “banal: a back-street alleyway, a university building, a shopping precinct escalator”. Brooker (2017, p. 172) feels a psychological leap of faith is needed for many geographical media pilgrimages such as “when a fan visits Union Station, Los Angeles, it takes significant imagination and investment to transform this busy, modern railway hub into the dingy police headquarters of *Blade Runner*”. Doss (1999, p. 23) recounts that Graceland is a “mundane mansion” and “Elvis’s guitar-shaped swimming pool is awfully teeny”. However, Disneyland is an elaborate spectacle of a physical place and a fandom object frequently visited by local fans on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.

With over one million Disneyland annual passholders (Martin, 2016; MacDonald, 2015), weekly and monthly meet-ups (MiceChat, homeschooling, meetup.com, and social clubs), and annual and biannual fan organized special events (Gay Days, Bats Day, Gumball Rally, etc.), Disneyland is a popular local hang-out for many Southern Californians. Since the 1970s, up to two-thirds of Disneyland visitors have been estimated to be California residents (Findlay, 1992; Gennawey, 2014). Many passholders visit weekly or monthly, and one man has gained fame, and almost 20,000 Instagram followers, by visiting Disneyland daily since January 1, 2012 (Eades, 2017). Disneyland as a fan object is available in person every day of the year, whereas fans in other media fandoms can usually only attend one or two conventions annually (Jenkins, 2013). Disneyland’s architecture of reassurance (Hench, 2003; Marling, 1997) attracts locals to visit the park regularly to experience a sunny

optimism often missing from the Southern California region. One observer opined that Walt Disney built a twentieth century Versailles for all people, not just the king (Jones & Wills, 2005), though Marling (1997, p. 85) quipped a “Versailles for middle class Americans in plaid Bermuda shorts”. Over successive generations Disneyland’s popularity has endured by ranking second in attendance among theme parks worldwide in 2018, behind only Walt Disney World’s Magic Kingdom park in Florida, (TEA, 2019) and first in 2017 as the most Instagrammed place on the planet (Harris, 2017).

From almost the beginning, Disneyland has staged special events to appeal to Southern California locals, who comprise the majority of park visitors, and generate high levels of attendance and revenue. From 1957 to 1968, Date Nite featured conservative music and dancing for young couples. According to then Disneyland executive Jack Lindquist, Date Nite finally made Disneyland profitable after spending the first two operating years in the red, by appealing to local area teenagers (Lindquist, 2010). On weekend evenings since 1965, swing bands (including Tommy Dorsey, Duke Ellington, and the Glen Miller Band) have played at the stage and dance floor next to Sleeping Beauty Castle. Since 1967, the Tomorrowland Terrace stage has featured concerts by local Southern California rock bands. Beginning in 1961, Grad Nite allowed graduating high school students in Southern California to party all night at Disneyland. In 1984, Disney initiated the AP program with a US\$65 pass granting daily admittance to Disneyland for a year. In the first few decades, Disneyland was open year round, but closed one or two weekdays per week for maintenance. However, since 1985, Disneyland has been open every day of the year except for extremely inclement weather, the 1994 Northridge earthquake, and 9/11. By the early 2000s, Disney instituted a multi-tier system with an option for less expensive passes blocked out during typical peak attendance days such as Saturdays, summer months, and the Christmas to New Year’s

interval. Disney also started to offer discount passes exclusive to Southern California residents in order to increase park attendance during the off-season.

Since the 1990s, Southern Californians have used online social platforms to organize their own annual themed events, weekly meet-ups, and occasional scavenger hunts at Disneyland. In the 2010s, the rise of social network platforms that required almost no transaction costs in terms of technical knowledge or financial resources (Shirky, 2008) enabled any local to establish a Disneyland social group with a presence on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and other online platforms. In addition, smartphones allowed locals to take their online groups into the park to connect, organize, and meet. The result has been the flourishing of hundreds of events, clubs, and meet-ups initiated and nurtured by locals with Disneyland as their place of choice to hang out and socialize in Southern California. The assumption that theme park visitors simply spend most of their day rushing to rides and shows has been the conventional view exemplified by Jones and Wills (2005) and Eco (1986) who considered Disneyland a regimented experience for visitors. Not only did etic critics not consider the potential for socialization in many areas of the park, but also the shared identity and attachment of locals to Disneyland as a singular place in a Southern California that lacked a community focal point.

5.4 Disneyland as place attachment for Southern Californians

Manzo and Perkins (2006) identify three processes of place attachment: cognition (identity), affect (emotional bond), and behavior (action and participation), for an individual or group with the social and physical features of a place. Cognition refers to one's sense of self as informed by the neighborhood place and the social interactions therein. Affect refers to one's emotional relationship to the specific place and the locals and local groups therein. Behavior

refers to participation in group planning, preservation, and development efforts focused on the place as well as engaging in social activities such as celebrations. These three processes comprise a framework to analyze a place not necessarily as a bounded, lived-in neighborhood of primary residences, but as a place of attachment that locals regularly visit, gather, and socialize outside their homes. This framework is used in the following sections to understand how Disneyland fans in Southern California have come to exhibit such strong attachment to a place so often termed, and appearing on the surface to be, placeless.

5.4.1 *Cognitive attachment*

The construction of place often begins from a young age with people identifying on a cognitive level with a place and community (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). In this study's survey, most respondents first visited Disneyland as pre-teens with 89% reporting an initial visit before turning 13 years old, and 66% before six years old. During participant observation and interviews, many recalled park trips as a child with siblings, parents, and grandparents that instilled a deep attachment to Disneyland. Karal Marling, a professor of art history and American studies, commented that Disneyland fans feel "as if their childhoods are preserved in amber there" (Dickerson, 1996). Certain locations in the park hold individualized meaning, such as a bench that one woman reflects upon as the last place she laughed and smiled with her then cancer-stricken mother. When Disney modified the view from the bench with new signage, she was dismayed by the visual disruption to a treasured place memory. A couple years later, the same woman got engaged at the park and was planning for a Disneyland wedding. Marriage proposals occur almost every day in front of Sleeping Beauty Castle, though some fans choose other personally meaningful places to pop the question, considering a castle proposal somewhat clichéd. Sandvoss and Kearns (2014, p. 101) observed that "the personal, affective bond between fan and fan object is thus underscored by the construction

of the fan object as a process of personalization as fans select between different texts to create fan objects that correspond with their expectations and experience”. The fan object “is intrinsically interwoven with our sense of self, with who we are, would like to be, and think we are” (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 96). Disneyland fans signify their identity through clothing (from attraction t-shirts to Disneybounding) and a vast array of paratextual products (produced by Disney or fans) that create a cognitive sense of self informed by their local theme park.

Many fans noted a greater identification and fondness for Disneyland the place, than the oeuvre of Disney texts produced by the company, as a living and tangible manifestation of not only favorite Disney films but also stories endogenous to the park. Some of Disneyland’s most popular attractions have no prominent associated Disney text as inspiration or association. These fan favorites include the Haunted Mansion, Jungle Cruise, “it’s a small world”, Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, Space Mountain, and the Enchanted Tiki Room. Pirates of the Caribbean opened in 1967 and remained a park-exclusive text until 2006 when music and characters from the Johnny Depp film franchise were added to the dark ride attraction. The Haunted Mansion in particular has a very active and vocal fan base with fan-organized events (Bats Day, Haunted Mansion Dress Up Day) and social clubs (Hitchhikers, Ghost Keepers, Mansion Militia) revolving around the attraction. Sandvoss (2005) uses Relph’s (1976) concept of “other-directedness” to describe the visitor experience at Disneyland as transpiring through the absent codes and symbols of Disney entertainment media, but many of the most popular attractions are actually inherent to the park.

The surveyed Southern California fans visit Disneyland frequently with 69% having logged 100 or more lifetime visits, and 28% topping 500. They visit regularly with 15% going at least once per week, and 74% going at least once per month. Besides cast members (who

receive free passes from Disney to go with family or friends), 87% reported having an AP. To be able to socialize with family and friends, and participate in fan events, meets, and clubs throughout the year at Disneyland, necessitates the purchase of an AP to make regular visits. Survey respondents were less likely to own an AP to other Southern California theme parks with 20% having a Universal Studios Hollywood pass, 16% for Knott's Berry Farm, 7% for Six Flags Magic Mountain, 7% with Sea World, and only 4% at LEGOLAND. Annual passes at these parks can be purchased for less than US\$200 with fewer, if any, blackout dates, while the least expensive Disneyland pass for Southern California residents is US\$369 with nearly 200 blackout dates (only 7% of respondents had this minimum-level access pass). Knott's even offers an AP with a meal plan so anyone can visit the park and receive two free meals every day of the year for only US\$219. However, Disneyland is still the theme park of choice for survey respondents to have a local AP. In addition, due to the legal age of alcohol consumption being 21 years of age, many Southern California university students use Disneyland as a common place to socialize and hang out as an alternative to prohibited bars and nightclubs. Fans credit Walt Disney's legacy of meticulous attention to detail and the ongoing place-making magic of Imagineering for rewarding repeat visitors with new discoveries. Frederickson and Anderson (1999, p. 337) deem "it is through one's interactions with the particulars of a place that one creates their own personal identity and deepest-held values". Disneyland has an evolving and tangible display of particulars that has produced a large cadre of Southern California devotees.

5.4.2 Affective attachment

Place is also constructed through an emotional connection. The affective is at the core for a sense of community and place attachment that strengthens social relationships and collective action (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). When interviewees were asked whether other Southern

California theme parks could fulfill the same social role as Disneyland, the response was emphatically negative. Social club members, fan event organizers, and event participants all agreed that Disneyland offered a unique environment. The word “magical” was used repeatedly to differentiate Disneyland from anywhere else in Southern California. Noah Korda, the founder and organizer of Bats Day, an annual fan event since 1999 celebrating goth subculture, investigated Knott’s Berry Farm’s Ghost Town as a potential event location, but concluded the lack of a focal point at Knott’s (such as Disneyland’s castle), and fondness for the Haunted Mansion and New Orleans Square were both persuasive factors mitigating against a change of venues (N. Korda, Interview, November 22, 2017). Even though Dr. Who is a non-Disney text, hundreds of Whovians come every year to Disneyland to celebrate Galliday, a fan event since 2014. Amy McCain, the founder and organizer of Galliday, selected Disneyland to celebrate Whovian fandom, even though the park has no attractions or connection to Dr. Who, because in Southern California “no other place has the magic of Disneyland” (A. McCain, Interview, October 31, 2017).

Disneyland is the favorite place outside of home to socialize with family and/or friends for 74% of respondents. While other media fandoms function as alternative social communities (Jenkins, 2013), for many Disneyland fans the park is their primary social community. The themed environment was cited by 51% of respondents as very important to the social aspect of Disneyland, followed by rides, food and beverages, and cast members. Often cited as unimportant to the social aspect were character meet and greets, and shopping (Table 3).

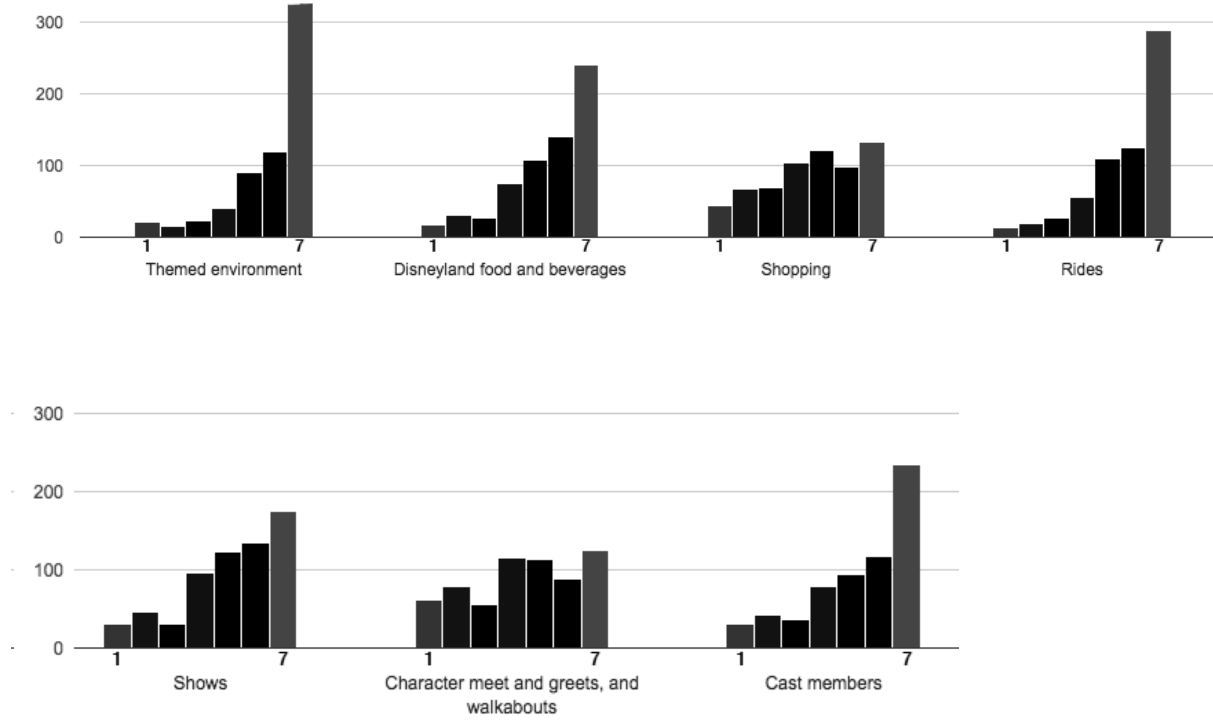


Table 3: For the social atmosphere at Disneyland, how important are each of the following (1 Unimportant – 7 Very important)? (n=637)

Disney research indicates that visitors only spend three percent of their time on rides and at shows, and instead enjoy “the precise commodity that people so sorely lack in their suburban hometowns: pleasant, pedestrian-friendly, public space and the sociability it engenders” (Duany, Plater-Zyberk & Speck, 2000, p. 63). Belying the image of robots ushered from ride to ride and standing silently in lines, 94% talk very often with other members of their group while in queues (Table 4), and 49% very often stroll around the park on a typical day going on few, if any, rides (Table 5). Regular park visitors from Southern California do not consider rides an essential trip activity because they can easily return another day, and have already done the rides innumerable times. Just being present in Disneyland is satisfaction enough.

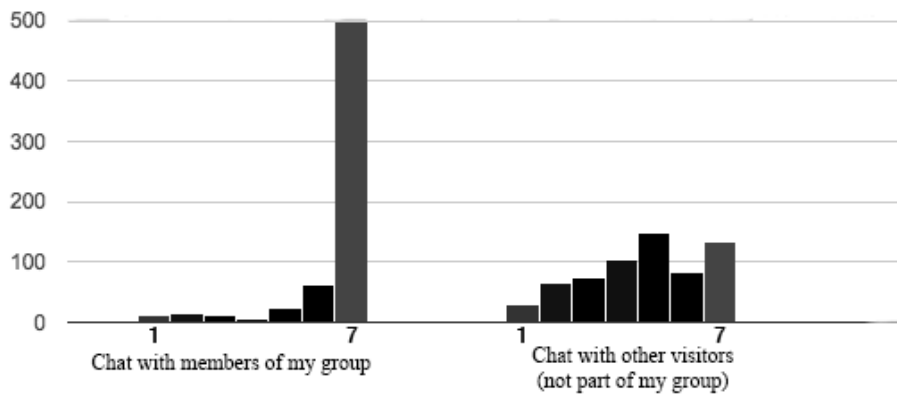


Table 4: While you are in line for an attraction at Disneyland, how likely are you to do the following (1 Never – 7 Very often)? (n=637)

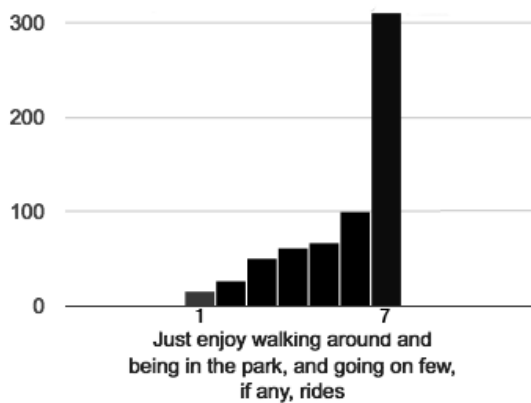


Table 5: On a typical visit to Disneyland, how likely are you to do the following (1 Never – 7 Very Often)? (n=637)

Walt Disney designed Disneyland to be a place for multi-generational families to enjoy rides together without the need for older or younger members to sit out an attraction due to extreme motion or scary show scenes. Going to Disneyland with family very often was reported by 57% of survey respondents, and 69% answered five or higher on the Likert scale for often visiting with family (Table 6). When asked why people go swing dancing at Disneyland on Saturday nights instead of Los Angeles lounges and clubs, the administrator of the Disneyland swing dancing Facebook group said the no-alcohol policy at Disneyland made for an inclusive and pleasant atmosphere allowing children to dance with adults (Anonymous #4, Interview, November 12, 2017). As for visiting with friends from school,

work, or neighborhood, 44% responded with a five or higher for often spending time with friends on a typical Disneyland visit. Families and friends of all ages use Disneyland as a local place to connect and socialize.

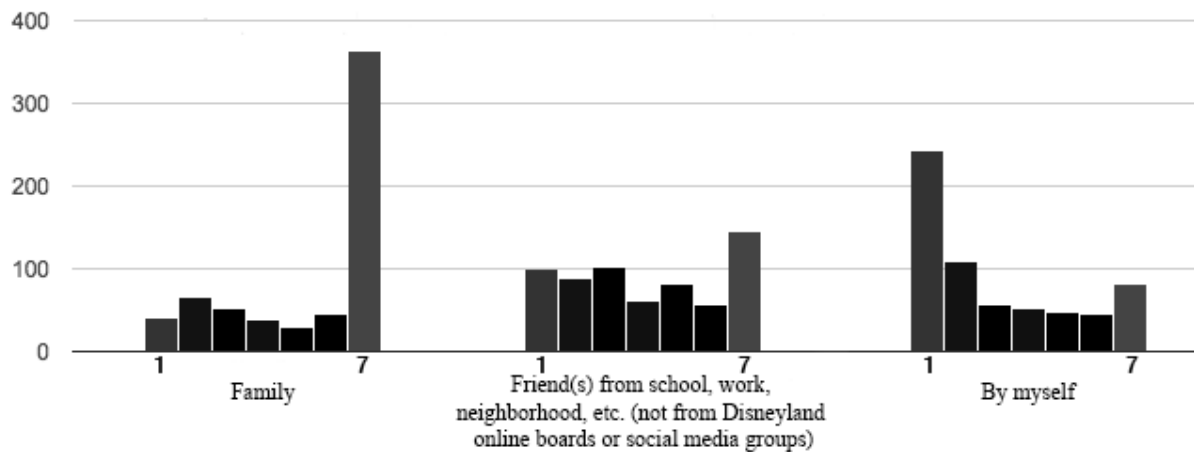


Table 6: Do you typically spend a day at Disneyland with (1 Never – 7 Very often): (n=637)

Though most visit with family or friends, 13% very often spend the day at Disneyland alone, and 27% responded with a five or higher for often going solo (Table 6). Unlike home or other places, being alone at Disneyland is to be within the crowd and community of other Disney fans. Solo trips are common with only 38% reporting never going to Disneyland alone (Table 6). Almost a third, 31%, strongly agreed, and 70% agreed with a five or higher, with feeling trust and camaraderie in the company of other Disneyland fans while in the park (Table 7). If a sense of community develops around feelings of membership in a group with shared history, interests, and concerns (Perkins & Long, 2002), then Disneyland can provide comfort when going through tough times. When the grandmother of MiceChat’s Regan passed away in Kansas while he was living by himself in California, he went to the park alone and took the Disneyland railroad around the park for hours nonstop. The train had been a source of comfort since his childhood, so a day circling the park provided Regan with a soothing place to reflect, decompress, and, at the end of the day, go home feeling better (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). Regan believes, and others informed me, that locals

commonly use Disneyland as an escape to a safe fantasy world to deal with stressful life issues from childhood to adulthood including bullying, legal troubles, marital woes, career anxieties, body image, and self-identity (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). As one local fan remarked in a newspaper interview, “I’m not particularly close to my family so Disneyland stands in for what a lot of other people might already have—something solid and permanent” (Gardetta, 2005).

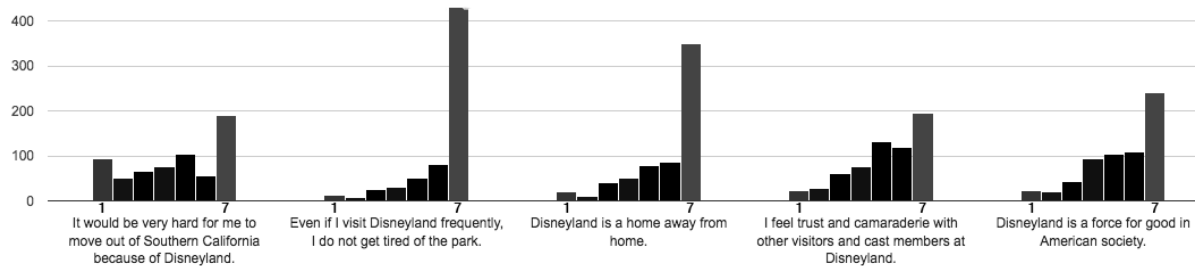


Table 7: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements (1 Strongly disagree – 7 Strongly agree)? (n=637)

Disneyland is an escape from the world with some visitors crying upon entering Main Street as a cathartic release. This need for escape is evident within other media fandoms as Jenkins (2013, p. 282) suggests for fans who “inhabit a world where traditional forms of community life are disintegrating, the majority of marriages end in divorce, most social relations are temporary and superficial, and material values often dominate over emotional and social needs”. The fan object can fulfill a profound need in one’s life (Fraade-Blanar & Glazer, 2017). The difference is that other media fandoms can usually only provide an escape to a screen for interaction, viewing, or listening, while Southern California Disneyland fans can tangibly access the object of their fandom at almost any time and socialize in person. The tangibility of Disneyland, such as being able to touch the stones of Sleeping Beauty Castle, creates a powerful affective connection for fans. While being in Disneyland, 55% have made friends with a stranger since making new friends at meets and events is commonplace.

Besides chatting within one's group, 57% reported five or higher to chatting often with strangers while waiting in queues (Table 4). During two months doing participant observation in the park, and primarily doing so alone, I often chatted with other visitors and cast members while in lines, rides, shops, and walkways. Being in Disneyland can be a social time not only with one's group but also with strangers.

An unwillingness to move away is a leading indicator of place attachment. Leaving Disneyland behind is not easy for the 30% who strongly agree, and 55% agreeing with a five or higher, that moving out of Southern California would be difficult due to Disneyland attachment (Table 7). MiceChat's Regan specifically moved to Southern California from Kansas in the early 1990s to be close to Disneyland after being smitten during early childhood family trips (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). Other fans similarly related stories of migration from across the United States to Southern California for the express purpose of making a home near Disneyland. And living nearby does not necessarily lead to Disneyland fatigue as 68% strongly agreed that even after frequent park visits, they do not tire of Disneyland, and 88% rated this sentiment five or higher (Table 7). Disneyland as a home away from home was strongly agreed by 55%, and 81% agreed with a five or higher (Table 7). This personal connection is so affirmative and earnest that 38% strongly agreed that Disneyland is a force for good in American society, and 71% agreed with a five or higher (Table 7). The affective connection of local fans to Disneyland as a place is strong.

5.4.3 Behavioral attachment

On a behavioral level of place construction, people participate in place planning, protection, improvement, activities, and celebrations (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). Since the late 1990s advent of Gay Days and Bats Day, fans have been creating their own events in Disneyland

without the express permission of the Disney corporation. These fan organized events were attended by 62% of respondents and span a thematic spectrum including Dapper Day (fashion and style), Steam Day (steampunk), Lolita Day (Harajuku fashion), MiceChat Gumball Rally (scavenger race) (Figure 1), Awareness 4 Autism, Tiki Day, Maynard Appreciation Day (honoring a popular cast member), Lyme Disease Awareness, and many others on almost every weekend of the year. Some events attract thousands of participants such as Gay Days (Figure 2) and Dapper Day. Others attract only a handful such as Alive in Our Hearts for couples to commemorate pregnancy and infant loss by commiserating about their experience, taking a group photo in front of Sleeping Beauty Castle, and riding the children-centered “it’s a small world” attraction.



Figure 1: MiceChat Gumball Rally gamebook, February 2018; Photo: Author



Figure 2: Gay Days group photo in front of Sleeping Beauty Castle, Disneyland, October, 2017; Photo: Author

In the early 2010s fans established social clubs with denim vests and patches to identify an affiliation as White Rabbits, Mice with Attitude, Big Bad Wolves, and over a hundred others. The social clubs have no official affiliation or recognition by the Disney corporation. Since being a social club member is an ongoing commitment of time (minimum thresholds for attendance and activity) and money (for denim vests and patches, and a few clubs charge dues), only 22% of respondents reported being a member of a Disneyland social club. The primary reason members joined was social, to meet other Disneyland fans and be part of a family-type group to enjoy the park together. They also form bonds outside the park for barbecues, sports, and community. Members in social clubs build social capital through networking, cooperation, and trust within their “families of choice” (Fraade-Blanar & Glazer, 2017, p. 124).

A sense of community and place attachment manifest behaviorally in participation and practice through “feelings of mutual trust, social connections, shared concerns, and community values” (Manzo & Perkins, 2006, p. 339). Disneyland fans in Southern California see the park as a community space with actions reflecting a sense of joint responsibility. Almost all respondents, 99%, reported having helped another visitor at Disneyland with directions, information, or taking a photo. Community clean-up has been linked to strong feelings of place attachment (Brown, Perkins & Brown, 2003) and 87% have picked up and thrown away the trash of strangers while at the park. In addition, 72% have found and reported lost property, 51% have assisted a cast member, and 22% have tipped or bought a gift for a cast member. In a practice specific to Disneyland, 79% of respondents gave a valid FastPass ticket (essentially a front-of-line attraction pass with a limited number available daily) to a stranger. This practice dissolved in June 2017 when Disneyland switched to a digital FastPass system that eliminated the paper passes that were transferrable between visitors. Some fans enjoy making their own Disney-like magic by giving toys and gifts to other people’s children in the park. Two event organizers said they sometimes come to the park with small toys in their backpack for this purpose (H. Ruszecki, Interview, October 11, 2017; M. Marquez, Interview, October 16, 2017). The MouseWait mobile app was designed by a fan to allow other Disneyland fans to crowd-source attraction wait times, but users devised social practices for the app unforeseen by the developers. Members used MouseWait to give gifts surreptitiously to anyone using the app at Disneyland by stashing cookies, chocolates, or small toys in a Main Street locker, and then sharing the locker number and code with all other app users to go partake in the free gift. MouseWait also allowed members to propose spontaneous meetups and ride takeovers in the app’s lounge while in the park.

In interviews with fan organizers of Disneyland events, meets, and social clubs, all mentioned how Disneyland afforded them a place to develop a vibrant social circle filled with other Disneyland enthusiasts. The three co-organizers of Lolita Day have strengthened their fellowship during the five years running their annual event, as well as friendships made with participants who return every year. For the five-year anniversary event in November 2017, the co-organizers distributed a specially made pin to honor participants who had come with event pins from the four previous years (Figure 3). Organizers of events with less than a few hundred participants (Galliday, Lolita Day, Steam Day) often lose money by not charging for pins, material, and mementos associated with the event, in addition to the substantial time spent on planning and promotion.



Figure 3: Lolita Day event pins, October 2017; Photo: Author

Organizers of larger, more established activities (MiceChat anniversary, Gumball Rally, and Bats Day) report barely breaking even with their events. Dapper Day and Gay Days are the rare exception in generating profit for the organizers. Social club leaders report simply breaking even after paying for social events outside the park or the numerous club vest patches. Regan of MiceChat has been meeting Disneyland fans at the central hub in front of the castle (Figure 4) on most Sundays at noon for over twenty years. Sometimes a few dozen people show up, and other times only a handful. When asked why he has been doing meets for so long when there is no profit and the number of participants is tiny compared to MiceChat's large online following, he replied he simply enjoyed meeting fellow fans at the place he loved. Regan even became ordained to perform wedding ceremonies for all the couples that have met through the MiceChat community (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). Jenkins (2013), citing Sennett's (2008) work on the competing regimes of value on labor, observed that fan work is not just about economic rewards but also affective and social rewards. Indeed, few fans in any fandom earn more than a small profit from their fan work (Jenkins, 2013). Fans can derive satisfaction creating and sharing with a larger community in spite of potential restrictions and tradeoffs with the corporation that owns the intellectual property (Jenkins, 2013). Benkler (2006) also cites attaining social status within a community as a non-monetary reward for non-market production. For most fan event and social club organizers, the accrual of cultural and social capital is not converted or convertible into economic value. The common thread throughout the events, meets, and clubs was of a labor of love for a sense of local place at Disneyland.



Figure 4: Disneyland’s central hub with Partners statue where MiceChat members meet on Sundays at noon, October 2017; Photo: Author

5.5 Disneyland as a contested place

Rather than being the placeless non-place full of strangers that Disneyland’s critics have cited for decades, Walt Disney’s original park exhibits the cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics of place attachment for many locals. As Disneyland is not a lived-in place such as a house, neighborhood, or city, Southern Californians with APs use Disneyland in a manner similar to a neighborhood park. These locals are at Disneyland to be social at events, meets, and clubs, and in queues, walkways, and benches with friends and family, as well as strangers. They are active with scavenger hunts, dressing-up, dancing, singing, and walking through the park. They celebrate birthdays, holidays, weddings, engagements, and friendships, and commemorate loved ones who have passed away. For the Southern California fan who can afford an AP and means of transportation to the park, Disneyland is much more than an ersatz space with iron rides, fast food, and souvenir shopping.

According to Bob Gurr, a retired Imagineer and Disney Legend who worked closely with Walt Disney for 12 years on many early attractions, Walt Disney never intended Disneyland to be a neighborhood park with frequent visits by locals. (B. Gurr, Interview, October 8, 2017). To ensure his animated films would be a recurring family event enjoyed by successive generations, Walt Disney instituted a seven-year cycle for each film's re-release to build pent-up demand and preserve the film's mystique. Gurr cited that Disneyland was similarly conceived as a place to be enjoyed as a dressy family outing every couple years because frequent visits would make the place too familiar and prosaic, thus ruining the magic. He thinks contemporary fans excessively concentrate on uncovering and nitpicking the inner workings of every attraction to the point that the joy of the ride journey itself is lost (B. Gurr, Interview, October 8, 2017). In addition, Gurr believes passholders have become socially addicted to one another with Disneyland as an escape valve used to band together to face the erosion of the American dream and prosperity birthright. Disney's consumerist orientation caters to people with obsessive personalities and provides extensive and abundant opportunities for them to spend time and money (B. Gurr, Interview, October 8, 2017; K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017; T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). When asked what Walt Disney would think today of Southern Californians regularly visiting Disneyland, Gurr looked up to the sky and said, "I'm sorry Walt, this place is now a social hangout" (B. Gurr, Interview, October 8, 2017).

However, Jenkins (2013) maintained that fans do not simply recover the author's meaning, but rework the material to suit the context of their lived experience by inventing something different from the author's intent. Barthes (1975) pointed out that rereading is generally counter to the business and ideological customs of society, and thus stories are constructed to hold our attention only for the initial reading until uncovering the conclusion. Rereading for

Barthes (1975) shifts reader interest away from resolving the primary narrative toward thematic elements, character relations, and social knowledge as the reread book still has the same words but reveals new story elements during each subsequent reading. Barthes (1975) therefore distinguishes between readerly (meaning is solidified by the author) and writerly (meaning is under constant reader reinterpretation) texts. For Barthes (1975), Disneyland would be in the perpetual present as Disney Imagineers constantly update the park to keep the experience fresh for repeat visitors and fans produce new meanings after every modification. Other media fandoms ossify with no new Elvis Presley recordings or, until the 2016 reboot, the regret of X-Files fans “that the most vibrant and rewarding period in the show’s fandom was now lost in nostalgic memory” (Brooker, 2017). Bielby and Harrington (2017) noted that the object of a media fandom often comes to an end with the death of a celebrity, conclusion of a television series, or no new installments in a film franchise, but Disneyland as a physical place lives on and continues to evolve every day. Walt Disney famously said Disneyland would never be finished as he incessantly tinkered with the park’s attractions to tell a better story and entice visitors to return (Tuan, 1997). Disneyland then becomes a superlative example of a writerly text. Indeed, the seeds of Disneyland as a text to be frequently reread were being planted and even recognized by the Disney corporation as early as 1956 with at least some Southern Californians using the park in a manner not intended by Walt Disney. In the official Disney publication, *The Complete Guide to Disneyland* (1956), published only one year after the park opened, a page called Disneyland Data relates the following tidbit, “A 63-year-old lady from Redlands, California, has visited Disneyland once a week every week since opening date, July 18, 1955” (p. 26). When pointed out to MiceChat’s Regan, he exclaimed, with tongue in cheek, “She was the first MiceChatter!”

The Disney company makes changes to Disneyland that have not always corresponded with the wishes and practices of fervent local fans. The reason people go to Graceland or other fan sites is to find “physically manifest places of fandom: a search for authenticity, a search for the real... a search for unmediated experience, of putting oneself, literally, in the place of the fan text and thus creating a relationship between the object of fandom and the self that goes beyond mere consumption and fantasy” (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 61). However, unlike other media fandoms, Disneyland fans in Southern California regularly visit a constantly reimagined and reinvented fan object populated with a vast array of texts since the formation of the Disney company in 1923. The popular emergence of the Internet in the 1990s not only unlocked the potential for Southern California Disneyland fans to create activities in the park beyond the official Disney company ones, but also enabled local fans to protest Disney plans perceived as lackluster or harmful to the park. The next two chapters, 6 and 7, investigate the contest within Disneyland discourse between the Disney company and local fans on online social platforms before and after social media. Chapters 8 and 9 look at the last 30 years to examine, respectively, the impact of online social platforms on Disneyland as a local place for fan social formations, and the fluctuation of fan and Disney power online and in the park.

Chapter 6: Disneyland Online Fandom – Unity and Resistance 1990-2005

This chapter examines the role of the platforms before social media that enabled the creation of fan groups and activities online and at Disneyland. The nature of Usenet newsgroups and web discussion boards impacted the evolving relationship between local fans and the Disney corporation, in addition to shaping the relationship of fans to each other and to the park as a local place. During the 1990s, the Usenet newsgroup alt.disney.disneyland afforded fans social capital to organize with a unity of voice and resistance to the Disney corporation. In the early 2000s, the displacement of Usenet by web discussion boards divided the fandom into a few different sites, but fans still united to support the Save Disney campaign that eventually ousted CEO Michael Eisner in 2005. Usenet and the early years of web discussion boards enabled fans to speak out, while Disney during this early era was slow to understand and react to fans on the new medium of the Internet.

6.1 Early (1990-1999) Disneyland fan community on BBSes, newsgroups, and websites

“The mission of fandom, in fact, is to make mass media social” (Coppa, 2014, p. 77). Before the widespread diffusion of the Internet, the principal medium fans used to regularly interact and exchange information was official and unofficial print periodicals distributed through postal mail (Jenkins, 2013). The official Disney-produced publication for fans was the subscription-only *Disney News* magazine, which started in 1965 as a quarterly, covering Disney media and Disneyland (Korkis, 2016). In 1994, the magazine was rebranded and available for sale on newsstands as *The Disney Magazine*. The magazine ceased publication in 2005 with a special issue celebrating the 50th anniversary of Disneyland. A popular fan-produced unofficial periodical was the *E-Ticket* magazine published from 1986 to 2009 with a total of 46 issues. Other unofficial fan-produced periodicals included the *The Duckburg Times* (1977-1992), *Storyboard* (1987-1995), *The Mouse Club* (1980-1992), and *Persistence*

of Vision (1992-1998) (Korkis, 2016). The print newsletter of the Disneyana Fan Club (originally known as the National Fantasy Fan Club) started in 1985 as the *Fantasy Line Express* and is still published today (Korkis, 2016). Many fan produced print periodicals folded as the Internet became increasingly popular with Usenet newsgroups, Listservs, bulletin boards (BBSes), and ISP discussion boards as platforms for fan interaction (Coppa, 2006). Audience communities (organized around a text) and online communities (organized through a network) integrated for interpersonal uses as communities of practice with habitualized ways of acting (Baym, 2000). The ability to interact online “turned the fan community from a network of local cultures or periodic rituals into a non-stop process of social effervescence” (Duffett, 2013, p. 239).

Mouse Ears was an early popular Disneyland-focused BBS, which was text-based and centered on information exchange (K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017). Ken Pellman recalls being a teenager on Main Street waiting for the early morning rope drop and having a conversation with a family who recognized his ideas and opinions as similar to posts they had read on Mouse Ears. The family asked if he was *the* Ken Pellman who had posted to the BBS, to which he answered affirmatively while taken aback that someone had recognized him through his online writing (K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017). The early forums made fans realize they were not alone in their passion with so many other like-minded people posting ideas, information, and opinions. In addition, any fan with Internet access could communicate with many other fans in an ongoing and evolving mass conversation without the gatekeepers of fan print periodicals. Posters on BBSes often used their real names but not photos or other personally identifying information. Mouse Ears faded away to be replaced by the Mouse House BBS, which was similar to Mouse Ears except Mouse House organized official meetups and scavenger hunts in the park (K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017).

While the print-based fan clubs Disneyana and Mouse Club had previously organized annual meets in the park in the mid-1980s through their print publications, Mouse House was perhaps the first to use the Internet to organize in-person Disneyland meets and events, thus auguring a series of online social platforms that have ultimately enabled the creation of hundreds of meets, events, and clubs in the park for local fans (as examined in Chapter 8).

Internet Service Providers in the 1990s, such as AOL and CompuServe, lowered the economic and technological barriers for getting online by providing users with an easy-to-use graphic user interface for navigation and ubiquitous discs (at first 3.5” floppies and then CD-ROMs) with a large block of free service hours. The ISPs also provided discussion boards and chat rooms exclusively for member use. Todd Regan recalls picking up free discs to get access each month under different user names to explore the Disney discussion boards and chat rooms. He eventually settled on the handle of Dusty Sage as a nod to his upbringing in Kansas (and the migration to California in the 1930s of poor tenant farmers due to the Dust Bowl) and status as a Disney savant since childhood. Regan’s Dusty Sage moniker has persisted to the present day as friends and business associates still use both his handle and real name when referring to him. On the ISP boards and chat rooms, Regan discovered not only that there were Disneyland fans like himself, but also a large contingent of gay Disney fans (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). He embraced a technology that allowed for the amplification of his voice to a large audience to discuss Disneyland, but lamented the ephemerality of the public conversations that disappeared after logging off chat rooms or 30 days from posting on ISP boards (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). Regan enjoyed cultural capital as a Disney expert, and then used the boards and Usenet newsgroups to establish social capital by organizing social Sunday park meets that continue to the present day.

Fan reception has always been shaped through interaction with other fans, and culture and society at large (Jenkins, 2013). Internet communication not only afforded an amplification but also saw the formation of fan groups previously unable to experience regular interaction due to expense, hassle, and geographical disconnection (Shirky, 2008). As early as 1990, in newsgroups such as alt.tv.twinpeaks, fans engaged in online social interaction to pool intellectual resources toward common goals that previously might have remained private meditations (Jenkins, 2006a). Usenet provided multiple newsgroups for Disneyland discussion including rec.parks.theme for general theme park fans, rec.arts.disney.parks for all Disney theme parks, and rec.arts.disney.announce for new Disney company projects including the theme parks. The most active for Disneyland fans became alt.disney.disneyland since the focus was exclusively on Walt Disney's original Anaheim park.

Alt.disney.disneyland also became well-known for critiques of the park (K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017), which was not unusual considering organized fandom has always enjoyed engaging in criticism "where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated and negotiated" (Jenkins, 2013, p. 86). Many posters were local annual passholders who enjoyed identifying anything in the park during weekly visits that did not seemingly meet the high standards originally set by Walt Disney. Since newsgroup posts were archived for back reference by many newsreaders, and then by web services such as Deja News, fans could easily go back and trace any issues or concerns about the park over time. With alt.disney.disneyland as a unifying focal point, fans could engage in a many-to-many group discussion to exchange knowledge and information, and criticize the Disney corporation's management of their beloved park. The affective attachment of fans to Disneyland fostered a sense of ownership that clashed with the overriding commercial objectives of Disney as the legal owner of the park.

The graphic user interface browsers of the World Wide Web, such as Mosaic in 1993 and then Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer, enabled fans to create websites devoted to their interests. One of the first and most popular fan websites was AintItCoolNews (AICN) started by Harry Knowles in 1996. Though AICN's primary focus was films, Jim Hill wrote articles for the site on Disney and Disneyland (J. Hill, Interview, October 24, 2017). At the time, the few Disneyland-centric websites created by fans focused on niche subjects such as the park's trash cans that are thematically distinct to each land, or the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990) at Disneyland for tips on how to enjoy the park in a wheelchair. However, one fan decided to create a website to provide general Disneyland fandom with a voice that would eventually harness the fan collective to challenge the Disney company. Al Lutz was a prolific Disney newsgroups poster who got tired of repeatedly answering the same questions about start times for park shows, so he took over the moribund Disneyland newsgroup FAQ consisting only of park hours and basic information to transform it into a comprehensive guide broadened to seven sections. In 1996, Lutz started a companion website on AOL members space (<https://web.archive.org/web/19990427090252/http://members.aol.com:80/alweho/index.htm>) called the Disneyland Information Guide (popularly known as DIG). Doobie Moseley, the co-founder of Disney fan site Laughing Place (<http://www.laughingplace.com>), said "all of us, and I mean all of us, go back to Al Lutz and the Disneyland Information Guide; that's really the thing that started all of this" (D. Moseley, Interview, November 30, 2017). At a time when Disney only had a limited web presence, the hundreds of webpages that comprised DIG were an unofficial, but comprehensive, website for information about Disneyland (Gardetta, 2005). Unlike other fan websites that provided only positive and/or descriptive coverage of Disneyland, DIG was unafraid to criticize park management by name for

cutbacks to maintenance, costuming, food services, attractions, and any other perceived shortcomings. Disgruntled Disney employees from Imagineers to cast members emailed Lutz with insider information for his site and columns (Gardetta, 2005). The spark of dissent lit by DIG would later spread as a call-to-arms among fans to oust Paul Pressler, President of Disneyland from 1994 to 1998 and Chair of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts from 1998 to 2002, and Michael Eisner, CEO and Chair of the Board of Directors of the Disney corporation from 1984 to 2005.

After participating on alt.disney.disneyland and discovering DIG through Lutz's FAQ, Doobie Moseley started a website called Doobie's Disneyland in 1996 with trivia and trip reports. In 1999, Moseley and his wife Rebekah initiated a more ambitious project, Laughing Place, in an attempt to create a portal similar to Yahoo! but exclusively devoted to Disney-related websites, which, at the time, included 196 sites (D. Moseley, Interview, November 30, 2017; Korkis, 2016). Moseley figured since he was self-employed and often going to the parks that he might as well try to turn the cultural capital attained from running a popular personal website into economic value during the fervor of the dot-com era by starting a general Disney fan website and directory (D. Moseley, Interview, November 30, 2017). Beyond serving as a directory to other Disney-related websites, Laughing Place quickly evolved to become a news and information hub covering all aspects of Disney.

6.1.1 *Fan resistance to Disney management*

Fandom in general has a tradition of forming a basis for consumer activism by talking back to producers, organizing to lobby, expressing opinions, and engaging in criticism (Jenkins, 2013). Early fan discussions on BBSes and newsgroups were generally positive toward Disneyland as fans were simply excited to discuss their fandom with so many like-minded

people. However, soon thereafter, a critical eye toward the park developed on alt.disney.disneyland with Al Lutz being instrumental in the change of perspective through his newsgroup posts and DIG website. Fans whose only recourse in the past was filling out complaint forms at City Hall on Disneyland's Main Street, now could vent with other fans on the newsgroup. One reason the Sunday meets in the park became popular was because online fans wanted to meet in person with Lutz the writer of gossipy and critical articles about Disney. Lutz was a prolific and vivid writer but not necessarily comfortable in crowds of people, so Todd Regan became the social guru and master of ceremonies for the Sunday meets. Regan recalls the early Sunday meets as the "Internet's big bang" for Disneyland fandom as "MiceAge, MiceChat, MousePlanet, Laughing Place, Jim Hill Media, Yesterland - all those Web sites were built by that first group in the hub" (Gardetta, 2005).

The mid 1990s saw two turning points in how fans used the Internet to interact with Disney management, who had not yet figured out a way to deal with fans at the advent of the digital age. The first flashpoint was the cancellation of the long-running Main Street Electrical Parade in 1996 and its replacement by a new night parade called Light Magic in 1997. Initially rolled out in 1972, the Electrical Parade was a beloved Disneyland institution, so Disney celebrated the parade's "glowing away" forever by selling commemorative display boxes with light bulbs from the ostensibly retired parade floats. Anticipation was high for the new Light Magic parade so Disney offered a US\$25 private preview event for annual passholders. Perhaps anticipating a potential fiasco, park president Paul Pressler announced before the start of the parade that the paid event viewers were about to witness was only a dress rehearsal and not an actual premiere. From the start, the parade was visibly unready for audience preview suffering from audio and projector failures, missed cues among performers, and technical features that were advertised but not yet fully operational. Passholders, who

were already wary of the change away from the Electrical Parade, angrily lined up at City Hall demanding refunds as stinging reviews soon hit alt.disney.disneyland dubbing the parade “Light Tragic”. After receiving withering criticism from fans online and disinterest among park-goers, Disney officially put Light Magic on hiatus only a few months later with the *Los Angeles Times* summing up the failed parade as the “\$20 million dud” (Granelli, 1997). Though Disney officially said the parade was on hiatus until 2000, Light Magic never returned. Instead, Disney raised the ire of fans, especially those who bought commemorative display boxes when the Electrical Parade originally bowed out in 1996, by resurrecting the previously “glowing away” forever parade for nightly performances in DCA from 2001 to 2010, and again at Disneyland in 2017. The hasty torpedoing of “Light Tragic” by Disney made fans feel empowered with online communication to bring real change in the park and challenge Disney attempts at spin control (K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017; T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017).

The second flashpoint to highlight fan power was the campaign to have Paul Pressler removed as President of Disneyland. After longtime Disneyland President Jack Lundquist stepped down, CEO Eisner moved Pressler from chief of Disney stores to the head of Disneyland in 1994, even though Pressler had no theme park management experience and was the first Disneyland president who had not been a protégé of Walt Disney. With a retail management mindset, Pressler set out to make the theme park more akin to a huge Disney store. Fans started to note maintenance cutbacks such as burnt out light bulbs not being replaced on Main Street, whereas Walt Disney had a rule that every light bulb would be cataloged and replaced at 75% of life expectancy so Main Street would always appear perfect and pristine (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). In the mid-1990s most fans were unaware of the people running the park and their backgrounds as MBAs, creatives, or cast

members who gradually climbed the corporate ladder. Fans on alt.disney.disneyland collectively researched Disney corporate executives to trace the retail mall sensibility taking hold at Disneyland to Pressler's history as head of Disney stores. Many longtime Disneyland executives from the film studios, Imagineering, or the ranks of cast members were being pushed aside by business school MBAs (Niles, 2004). Park merchandise began to be homogenized across stores and specialty items were removed from shelves. Third shift maintenance staff who worked overnight to maintain the park's rides, shows, and stores were being cut to save money. Park paint chipped and flaked away without refurbishment. The cutbacks increased park profits but fans online cried foul as they witnessed the magic of Disneyland being erased by the sharp pencil people (as Walt Disney disdainfully dubbed them) with accounting and finance degrees.

Fans on alt.disney.disneyland became incensed with what they perceived as Pressler's mismanagement of the park, so Al Lutz decided in 1996 to make an ancillary page to DIG satirically called "Promote Pressler!"

(<https://web.archive.org/web/19990427091849/http://members.aol.com/alweho/pressler/pressler.htm>). The idea was to encourage Disney to promote Pressler away from Disneyland to any other part of the corporation where he would no longer have an impact on the park. Lutz felt anger against Pressler was running too hot on the newsgroup so the site was also intended to be a humorous release valve for fans (Wyn, 1999). Unlike the crafting of fan outrage sometimes found on today's online social network platforms to generate the clicks, views, followers, subscriptions, and engagement for high scores on Social Blade with attendant advertising revenue (Sherr, 2019), Lutz's campaign against Disney management was based on a heartfelt fan belief of the need to "save" Disneyland and not to generate outrage for personal economic benefit. Ken Pellman recalled being at a company presentation for cast

members where Pressler introduced on stage an animator from the Disney Studios who replied to Pressler's introduction "well, thank you, I haven't ever been introduced by somebody who has their own webpage before" (K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017). The reference was to Lutz's "Promote Pressler!" page since having a personal webpage was still a rarity in 1996. The animator apparently thought Pressler put up the page calling for his own promotion. Pressler appeared taken aback by the comment but presumably discovered the page in his "honor" shortly thereafter since the web of 1996 had a comparatively limited number of sites for search engines to index. The *Los Angeles Times* ran a front page story on September 12, 1996, about the "Promote Pressler!" campaign and online Disneyland fan resistance, and a brief article on the campaign also appeared in the January 1997 issue of *Harper's Magazine*. The *Times* story interviewed "cyberrebel" fans who "rode into cyberspace sounding the charge to 'take back Walt Disney's Disneyland'" due to the "crass merchandising, lax maintenance, rumored changes to long-standing attractions and the encroachment of corporate greed on Walt Disney's legacy" (Dickerson, 1996). Rides opened later and closed earlier to save on operating costs. The management consulting firm McKinsey and Company, which was hired by Pressler, recommended a 25% budget cut and elimination of 42% of the jobs in the park's facilities, engineering and construction divisions (Gardetta, 2005). On Christmas Eve, 1998, a 33-year-old park visitor was killed while waiting to board the boat Columbia on the Rivers of America when a heavy cleat loosened, became a projectile, and struck him in the head. An investigation revealed the cleat's fastener had been improperly replaced with a substitute material for financial reasons and the cast member in charge had received insufficient training (CAL/OSHA, 1999). The death was the first in the park's history due to the negligence of Disney, and not due to visitors disobeying park rules such as standing during a ride on the Matterhorn roller coaster. Fans blamed the death on the cutbacks to maintenance and training under Pressler (Gardetta, 2005).

Fans initially thought their wish was fulfilled in 1998 when Pressler was promoted out of Disneyland. However, Pressler was given even more power over Disneyland with a promotion to head of all Disney parks worldwide, and his protégé, Cynthia Harriss, took over as President of Disneyland. The fan relationship with the park was complicated at the time as Regan recalled:

It's a love-hate relationship, it started off as a hate-hate relationship because we saw Disney falling apart. We loved the history of Disney. We did not like what Disney had become, and Disney was terrified of us because there was this burgeoning online thing. They weren't even on the Internet. They didn't even have a web page when we started and they didn't know what to make of it and they didn't like it. (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017)

In the 1990s, the Internet emerged as a new medium that allowed fans to shock and challenge the powerful Disney corporation in defense of their esteemed park. By using one platform, Usenet, that was freely accessible to essentially anyone online, and one newsgroup in particular, alt.disney.disneyland, for many-to-many discussion and organizing, and one website, DIG, as a persistent information clearinghouse, Disneyland fans congregated around the same online venues to organize, protest, and influence Disney. Lutz as fan ringleader garnered considerable cultural capital through his DIG website and posts on the Disneyland newsgroup that led to significant social capital with online fans, but none was cashed in for economic benefit at that time. Even though not all fans on alt.disney.disneyland necessarily agreed with each other, there was unity as to the common online venue for fan debate. If one was not on alt.disney.disneyland then that fan was not a part of the collective Disneyland fan conversation of that era. The early Internet of the 1990s did not offer each shared-interest fandom a choice of many different sites to congregate. Disney executives were similar to

other media executives of the time as generally indifferent and even hostile to fan opinion, while assuming the most vocal fans were not representative of general public sentiment and not a reliable basis for decision-making (Jenkins, 2013). In the first half of the next decade, fans would become even more involved in Disney management issues when they sided with Roy E. Disney, son of company co-founder Roy O. Disney and nephew of Walt Disney, in the Save Disney campaign to oust CEO Michael Eisner and his team including Pressler.

6.2 Mature (2000-2005) Disneyland fan community and the shift to web discussion boards

Usenet newsgroups provided a popular early online platform for fan discussion, but the flame wars and pervasive spam drove fans to pursue new venues with moderators to filter out abusive, off-topic, and commercial posts. The creation of fan owned websites and discussion boards provided a place for enforced civil discussion via moderators, while the owners had visions of dot-com boom era riches. The plan was to parlay the considerable social capital accrued from owning a popular fan website into economic value. In 1999, a group of regulars on alt.disney.disneyland decided to start a website in the hope of making millions as a Disney theme parks vacation advice and planning hub (K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017; T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). The group ultimately decided on the name MousePlanet, subsumed Lutz's DIG, and launched on July 17, 2000, with columns by founding members such as Lutz, Adrienne Vincent-Phoenix, Jim Hill, and others. Todd Regan, as another founding member, recalled "we were sure we were going to start this site and we would sell it out and we would all be rich and be able to go to Disneyland for the rest of our lives and not have to work ever again" (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). MousePlanet organized weekend meets in the park and occasional scavenger hunts. In July 2001, MousePlanet launched discussion forums for Disneyland and other Disney theme parks

around the world. However, the expected riches of owning a dot-com never materialized just as many other web-based ventures discovered during the dot-com bust of the early 2000s.

Despite entreaties to Disney to advertise on the site to reach fans, the company never bought a banner ad, and instead opted to build and market an official Disneyland website.

MousePlanet was unable to generate much income as the founders realized that a business model predicated on the hope of attracting substantial advertising revenue was untenable. The early 2000s was still a premature time to convert online social capital into economic value.

Clashes over personality, finances, and site vision led to the exit of some site founders.

Adrienne Vincent-Phoenix remained and took over as CEO of MousePlanet. Jim Hill left to write for Laughing Place for a time, then started his own website, JimHillMedia.com, and wrote for the Huffington Post covering Disney. In 2002, Al Lutz started MiceAge.com to continue writing his popular columns filled with gossip and criticism of Disney and Disneyland. The new site also featured a number of other former MousePlanet writers, but Lutz no longer wanted to deal with fan bickering and drama so the site had no discussion boards (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). In January 2005, Todd Regan started MiceChat.com as a website composed only of discussion boards focused mainly on Disneyland. Regan's goal was to bring home to MiceChat an online Disneyland fan community that was still deciding which fan website discussion board to join after abandoning the rapidly emptying newsgroups and ISP forums (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017).

In January 2001, Laughing Place launched discussion boards, coded from scratch by Moseley in Visual Basic. The community board for members to discuss weekend and holiday activities, personal matters, and park meets was the second most popular by number of posts after the Disneyland board. The first in-park event for Laughing Place readers was held in

2000 for approximately 75 fans. After the launch of the discussion boards the following year, event attendance grew larger and an annual awards program commenced with nominations and recognition for members considered the kindest, most helpful, most uplifting, etc. The site users dubbed the awards the Golden Doobies in honor of the co-founder of Laughing Place, Doobie Moseley, who was not involved in the administration of the awards program. A dinner was held annually in Southern California on Disneyland's anniversary for the Laughing Place community with a few Disney voice artists and animators in attendance as honored guests. When the winners of the Golden Doobie awards were announced, some recipients broke down crying due to their deep emotional investment in a site where they read and wrote messages every day not only about Disneyland but also to discuss personal issues, triumphs, and tragedies with their friends (K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017). Moseley says the event still "makes me very, very happy to this day to know something I created became a vehicle for all these people to become friends" (D. Moseley, Interview, November 30, 2017). The annual meets on Disneyland's anniversary continued with fan organizers after the Moseleys left Southern California in 2003 to live in Florida, near Walt Disney World. The Moseleys flew back every year for the event until the last one in 2009 (D. Moseley, Interview, November 30, 2017).

6.2.1 *Fan resistance to Disney management*

As past and present Disney managers, creatives, and cast members became alarmed by the perceptible decline of the park and company through cutbacks and changes, they started to see popular fan website columnists as a channel to leak unflattering information about the inner workings of the company. Traditional print news media organizations that normally covered Disney such as the *Los Angeles Times* and *Orange County Register* were reluctant to report leaks seen as unsubstantiated gossip, but fan columnists had less inhibition reporting

disclosures and rumors (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). The Internet afforded amateur fan websites a voice that could compete with professional publications by not adhering to the traditional ethics and strictures of journalistic reporting. After the leaks were published on fan sites, professional news media outlets would pick up the story for publication. This arrangement between fan amateur columnists and professional journalists created a symbiotic relationship as the former received recognition from traditional media outlets and the latter were able to publish rumors that would ordinarily not be fit to print (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017).

Disney suffered a repeat of the “Light Tragic” passholder preview fiasco with the opening of DCA in 2001 on the former space of the Disneyland parking lot. The company offered a number of preview days to passholders before the new park’s official premiere, which once again allowed fans to post reviews online in advance of opening day. The park was themed as a simulation of California icons and destinations even though visitors were already in California and thus proximate to the real thing before setting foot in the park. In addition, Pressler, as a former retail executive, concentrated on merchandising and dining services at the expense of attractions, which were comparatively few, especially for children. The park also lacked a berm so the nearby hotels, power lines, and Anaheim Convention Center were visible from within the park. The attractions eschewed practically all Disney texts, including Mickey Mouse, in favor of California references and theming. Reviews posted to online boards by passholders were nearly unanimous in their scorn and derision of the new park. The special sense of magic that local fans felt with the original Disneyland park was not easily transferable to another Disney produced park. John Hench, who was a Disney Legend, Imagineer, Walt Disney confidante, and the official portrait painter of Mickey Mouse, summed up popular sentiment best at a Disney staff preview where he notoriously remarked,

“I liked it better as a parking lot” (Doctorow, 2004). The word of mouth was so poor that only 10,000 visitors showed up on opening day (Niles, 2004), even though Pressler and Harriss anticipated DCA would fill to capacity daily and thus disappoint visitors who would have to settle for outmoded Disneyland instead (Doctorow, 2004). Harriss as chief of the resort assumed the new park would be so crowded that she blocked out passholders for the first few months after the premiere and shifted numerous cast members from Disneyland to DCA in anticipation of enormous crowds. The notoriously poor attendance at the park became the target of jokes in popular culture as a television episode of *The Simpsons* in 2003 featured Homer suggesting a place to hide with his mother where there would be no one around – Disney’s California Adventure. Unlike the derided Light Magic parade, the new theme park just across from Disneyland could not simply be canceled and replaced with a mothballed but beloved attraction. Opening day ticket prices were the same as Disneyland, but Disney quickly slashed prices to the new park after dismal initial attendance figures. Still, attendance did not increase. Surveys indicated only 20% of visitors in the first year were satisfied with their park visit (Britt, 2001). Disney CEO Michael Eisner still proclaimed the park a success even with lackluster attendance, revenues, and reviews.

Though regarded by Eisner as a potential future CEO of Disney, Pressler left the company in September 2002 to become CEO of clothing retailer, The Gap, Inc. In September 2003, a 22-year-old man died from blunt force trauma on the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad attraction when the rollercoaster derailed due to improper upkeep (Aitken, Aitken & Cohn, 2009). Many online fans blamed Pressler’s legacy of maintenance cost-cutting for the second death in Disneyland history due to park negligence. Harriss stepped down as Disneyland President in October 2004 to join Pressler at The Gap, Inc. Online fans rejoiced at the end of what is still referred to as the dark times of the Pressler/Harriss years at Disneyland. In October 2004,

Matt Ouimet succeeded Harriss as Disneyland President. Ouimet immediately won over fans by ordering an extensive refurbishment of the park in time for Disneyland's 50th anniversary celebration in 2005. In addition, Ouimet took his family to the park on weekends where they would wait in the queues and chat with visitors. Ouimet revived this practice from Walt Disney who wanted to understand firsthand the visitor experience and perspective, and get direct feedback. Walt Disney required other park executives to follow his lead so they would never be remote from the visitor experience at the park they managed. Fans saw Ouimet as a kindred spirit with a sincere attachment to their park unlike most modern Disney executives for whom "the memory of Walt Disney is often considered an impediment to operating the business for the greatest profit" (Korkis, 2016, p. 61). Ouimet's tenure lasted only three years as fans, including MiceChat's Regan, believe some Disney executives were envious of his success and popularity with fans, and forced him out (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017).

Roy E. Disney, the son of Disney company co-founder Roy O. Disney and nephew of Walt Disney, had grown increasingly troubled with Eisner's management of the company founded by his family. Eisner forced Roy E. Disney to resign from the company's Board of Directors, but in a resignation letter dated November 30, 2003, Roy E. Disney addressed seven failures at the company including, much to the approval of fans, the decline of the theme parks:

3. The timidity of your investments in our theme park business. At Disney's California Adventure, Paris, and now in Hong Kong, you have tried to build parks 'on the cheap' and they show it and the attendance figures reflect it. (Disney, 2003)

After resigning, Roy E. Disney started the Save Disney campaign to oust Eisner and his team (Stewart, 2005). Since institutional shareholders and business executives were unwilling to challenge Eisner directly, Roy E. Disney turned to the Internet to gain traction for his

campaign by launching a website, SaveDisney.com, that linked to numerous fan websites that, in return, linked back to SaveDisney.com to spread the word and show support (<https://web.archive.org/web/20050206103259/http://savedisney.org/links/>). Since the death of the founders of the Disney company, Walt Disney in 1966 and Roy O. Disney in 1971, Roy E. Disney was the most public Disney family member still directly involved in the company, and became the public face of the movement. Online fandom on web discussion boards and websites rallied to the Save Disney cause by providing a vocal base of supporters. The Internet based campaign of SaveDisney.com “became the first dissident shareholders to attempt to use the Internet to democratize the notoriously unresponsive system of corporate governance” (Stewart, 2005, p. 493). The Internet afforded fans a voice not only to join and support the Save Disney campaign, but also to gain recognition for their efforts by a prominent member of the Disney family. On the website Roy E. Disney shared an open letter to shareholders:

Now is the time for all Disney shareholders to take the first step in bringing needed change... Join us in voting NO on the re-election of Michael Eisner, George Mitchell, Judith Estrin, and John Bryson as directors... By just saying NO you will send a message the Board of Directors cannot ignore... you will force the Board to recognize the widespread conviction that serious changes in both senior management and the Board are necessary. (Stewart, 2005, p. 494).

The day after Eisner was rebuked by 43% of shareholders at the annual company meeting, Niles (2004) reported:

Bolstered by an online echo chamber of support, Roy's message of dissent spread, attracting the attention of stockholders, analysts, fund managers and, eventually, journalists who could no longer ignore the growing dissatisfaction with what the Disney Company was producing.

A little over a year later, in March 2005, Eisner stepped down as CEO. Bob Iger took over the top position with the baggage of being Eisner's lieutenant, but moved in the first few years to mend fences with fans, investors, and partners with major new investments. In 2007, Lutz scooped traditional media outlets and thrilled fans by reporting on Disney's planned investment of US\$1.5 billion for the overhaul and expansion of DCA. Iger repaired Disney's relationship with Pixar Studios, after clashes between Eisner and Steve Jobs almost led to the end of the Disney/Pixar partnership. Iger later arranged the purchase of Pixar, followed by Marvel, Lucasfilm, and, most recently, 21st Century Fox.

6.3 Decline of Usenet and web discussion boards, and unity and resistance

During the 1990s, the alt.disney.disneyland newsgroup was the most popular venue for Disneyland fans to congregate and debate since Usenet was freely accessible to all regardless of ISP, ungoverned so no one could get booted from the group, and the text-based content suited ongoing threaded discussion. On a micro level, an individual fan could suddenly feel empowered through connecting and interacting with a large number of like-minded fans. On a macro level, Usenet as a platform afforded the creation of a powerful voice for an organized collective of individual fans to challenge a powerful corporation such as Disney in a manner unimaginable before the popular emergence of the Internet in the early 1990s. The unity of the fandom on one newsgroup on the Usenet platform enabled fans to organize and resist the Disney corporation. Over time, the original positive trait of Usenet lacking governance eventually became a fatal flaw as flame wars and commercial spam inundated the newsgroups triggering ISPs to cut off access and fan migration to web discussion boards during the early 2000s. Three boards emerged as the most popular for Disneyland fans to congregate – MiceChat, MousePlanet, and Laughing Place. Although not united on one venue as before on the newsgroup, Disneyland fandom on the web discussion boards still

played an important role in the Save Disney campaign that ousted CEO Eisner in 2005. Fans sometimes maintained accounts on more than one board since each site had a somewhat different character and governing style reflective of the site owners and their relationship with members. On the micro level for discussion boards, individual fans could still interact within a huge gathering of fans, but only under the governance and permission of the few fans who owned the boards. On a macro level, unlike the anarchic spirit of Usenet that Disney could never negotiate or tame, web discussion boards were owned by fans with financial constraints that Iger-era Disney could later capitalize on to quell fan resistance (as discussed in Chapter 9). During this early Internet era, fans who procured cultural capital by prolific posting to Usenet and/or ownership of web discussion boards were initially uninterested and then unable to figure out a way to convert their considerable social capital into economic value. The next Internet era saw the rise of online social networks that caused steady declines in traffic and posting for all three popular Disneyland web discussion boards as fans migrated en masse to new platforms such as Facebook. The unity provided by Usenet and web discussion boards that afforded Disneyland fans the ability to organize collective resistance against the Disney corporation until 2005 faded away with the fragmentation of the fandom brought on by the popular social network platforms.

However, the unity that derived from only one Usenet group and a few discussion boards had other impacts on the fandom. Unity during this era meant the creation of only a limited number of in-park fan organized social activities (as discussed in Chapter 8). Even though Usenet and web discussion boards were accessible to anyone with an Internet connection, many were simply unaware or uninterested in seeking out like-minded fans on the early platforms or attending fan activities in the park. Usenet newsgroups and web discussion boards could be intimidating platforms for newcomers to introduce themselves and join the

conversation after witnessing the insider banter and practices of regular denizens. Due to the ever looming threat of banishment through the governance of site moderators, the nature of web discussion boards could normalize fans into a narrow set of social and content restrictions. While the unity of fandom was pivotal for resisting Disney, the limited number of groups to choose from prevented some fans from finding a congruent social group until the advent of social network platforms.

Chapter 7: Disneyland Online Fandom – Fragmentation and Resignation

2006-2019

The unity and resistance of local Disneyland fans in the last chapter manifested in large part due to the nature of early Internet social platforms up to 2005, and Disney's sluggish move toward online engagement. This chapter examines the evolution of Disneyland online fandom from 2006 to 2019 as increasingly fragmented across numerous platforms with fans eventually resigned to Disney's authority and expertise when making changes in the park. However, the multitude of new fan groups created through the affordance of social network platforms allowed any fan who might previously have felt excluded by the limited social options available during the web discussion board era to find or create a suitable new group on Facebook. The fragmentation also split by generation. Younger fans were more amenable to change in the park and preferred the visually oriented platforms of Instagram and YouTube that were favored by coeval social media influencers. Older fans upset by Disney's plans for the park resigned to change, and migrated to Facebook as web discussion boards declined. The rise of online social network platforms also exerted market pressure on the fan owners of web discussion boards to maintain relevance and compete for the attention and clicks of fans. This era of fragmentation and resignation was brought about in large measure by the low transaction costs and nature of the new online social platforms, particularly Facebook.

7.1 Current (2006-2019) Disneyland fan community and the shift to social network platforms

By 2006, web discussion boards became the popular online social platform for many fandoms. The discussion boards of the three major websites devoted to Disneyland were Laughing Place, MousePlanet, and MiceChat. Todd Regan used the social capital accrued from participation in Disneyland newsgroups and forums, the early years of MousePlanet,

and Sunday meets in the park to shift the fan audience from MousePlanet and other forums over to MiceChat’s discussion boards after the site went online in January 2005.

MousePlanet’s Disneyland forum achieved peak posting activity in 2005 with 9,407 posts in August, but that same month during its initial year of operation, MiceChat surpassed MousePlanet with 11,929 posts (Table 8). In August 2006, MousePlanet’s posting activity dipped by 40% compared to the same month in the previous year to 5,603 posts, while MiceChat’s increased in the same time frame by 28% to 16,594.

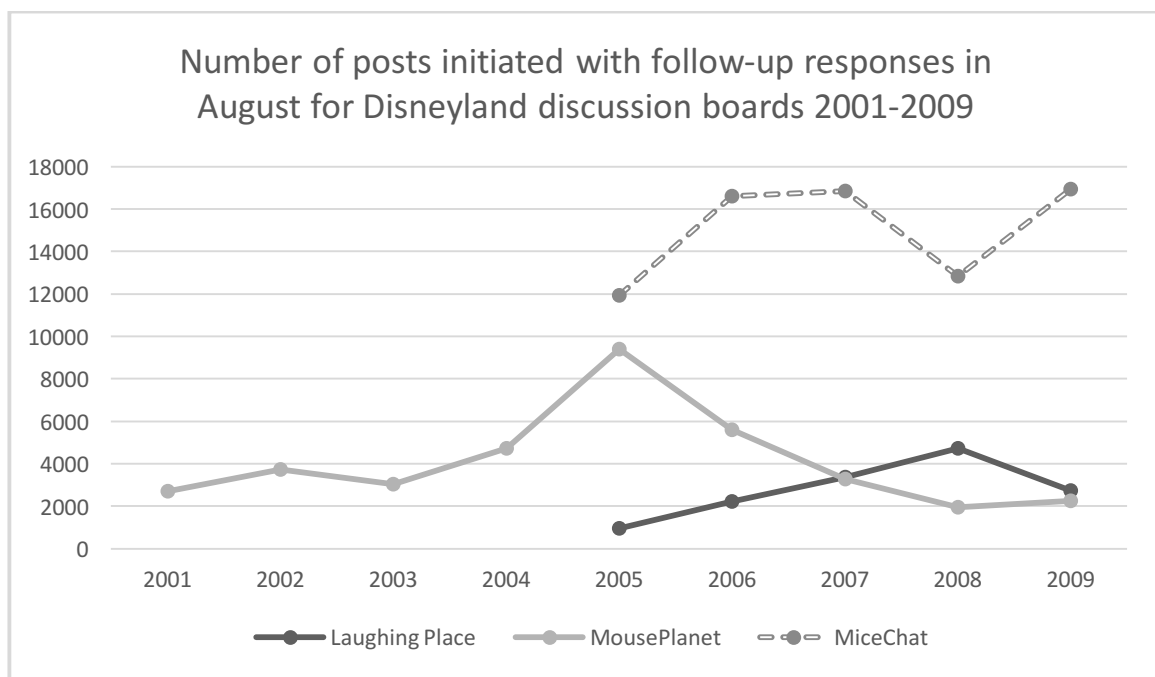


Table 8: Number of posts initiated in August and follow-up responses from 2001 to 2009 for the Disneyland section of the Laughing Place, MousePlanet, and MiceChat web discussion boards.

Notes: Discussion boards launched in February 2001 for Laughing Place, July 2001 for MousePlanet, and January 2005 for MiceChat. Laughing Place suffered a backup server failure in 2004 that irretrievably deleted most board messages.

As the number of users quickly grew over the first few years, Regan expanded offline activities beyond Sunday afternoon meets to group trips to Walt Disney World in Florida, Disney cruises, theater shows, musicals, and photography tutorials. Lutz fell chronically ill so Regan relieved the burden of site maintenance on Lutz by fully incorporating MiceAge

within MiceChat by 2008. With Lutz and other MiceAge columnists aboard, MiceChat became the online site for the most popular articles and discussion boards devoted to Disneyland. Although Lutz retired from regular column writing in 2012, the infrequent, but always highly anticipated, MiceChat gossip column disclosing rumors of new Disneyland attractions and developments continues to be branded the MiceAge Update as an homage to Lutz. In February 2013, the MiceChat community presented Lutz with a custom stenciled and designed window pane in the same manner as the ones Imagineers and other Disneyland dignitaries receive on Main Street at Disneyland. Lutz's window proclaimed him "The Main Street Tattler".

As a computer programmer, Doobie Moseley enjoyed adding technical features to Laughing Place, such as a custom-built discussion board, unlike other Disney fan sites not owned by a proprietor with a technology background. Technology-based competitive advantages dissipated as social network platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram became broadly popular in the late 2000s and started to draw the fan audience away from shared interest websites. Laughing Place's Disneyland forum saw a 43% decrease in posts in August 2009 compared to August 2008. Moseley admits that while Laughing Place was early with discussion boards at the beginning of the decade, the site was late to adopt and adapt to new digital media trends at the end of the decade:

We've been late to so many games. We started Laughing Place early. I did a good job with discussion boards. We did a lot of things early on. I was right on top of things early on. Somewhere along the way we started using Facebook. Late to Twitter. Late to podcasting and eventually it all caught up to Laughing Place and it became a much smaller place than it was. We're not the first Internet site not to see a trend. But we're definitely not one of the first podcasts, we were very late to that game. We were

extremely late to putting video on YouTube and that hurt too. (D. Moseley, Interview, November 30, 2017)

Not all web discussion boards saw such a sudden and steep decline as Laughing Place and MousePlanet. MiceChat's boards still enjoyed robust posting numbers at the end of the decade (Table 8) as many fans were just starting to dabble with the new, at the time, online social network platforms. In Moseley's defense, some older fans were slow not just to adapt to social media but even to adopt any kind of digital media. The Disneyana fan club enlisted Regan to set up a Facebook page for the venerable group, which still relies on a print newsletter to reach all members (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). The administrator of the swing dancing Facebook group recalled in the 2000s that one participant would email the monthly schedule of bands to the group's regulars but some did not even have email accounts so the schedules needed to be printed out and distributed by hand (Anonymous #4, Interview, November 12, 2017). Except for MiceChat's Regan, every interview with discussion board owners and event organizers from the 1990 to 2009 era mentioned being "old" when discussion turned to the challenge of adapting to the emergence of social media during that period. As Moseley concedes even today, "we're not using them (social media) as well as we should be, and we would still like to be a major Disney website, but it's not going to be me because I'm just old" (D. Moseley, Interview, November 30, 2017). Being able to adopt and adapt to the new online social network platforms also opened up a generational divide among fans as discussed in section 7.1.3 below.

By the end of the 2000s, social media was becoming increasingly popular, especially with young people, and by the early 2010s, social network platforms were being adopted at a mass level replacing web discussion boards for many fans. Table 9 illustrates the decline across the board for the three major Disneyland fan websites.

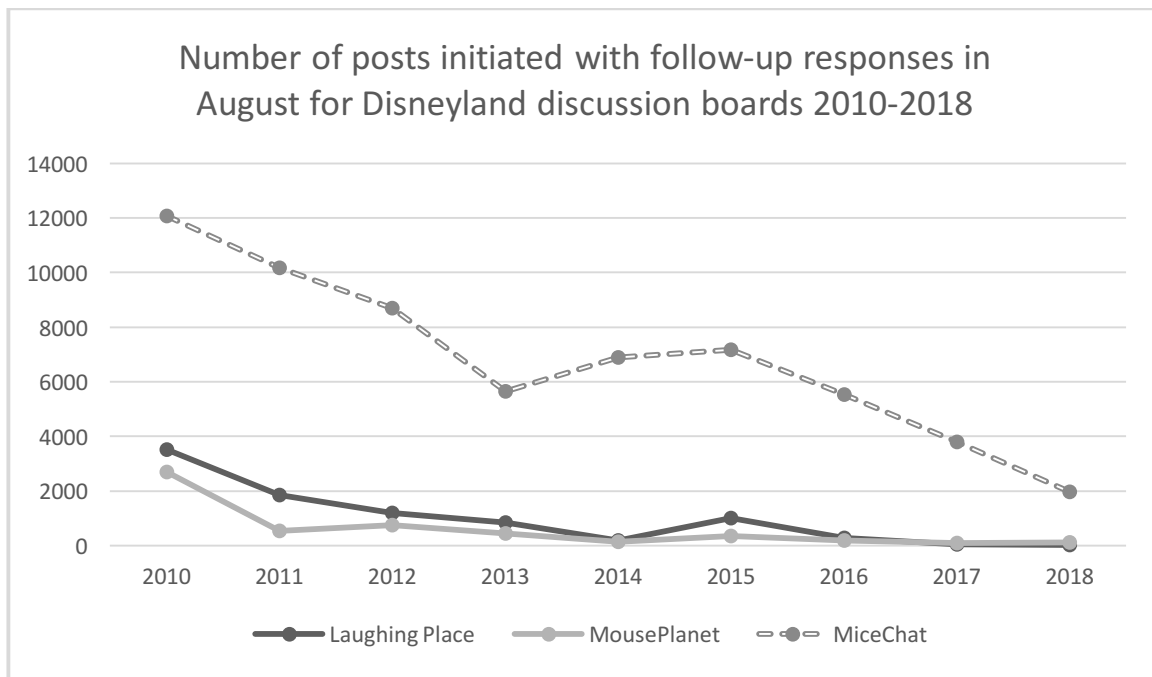


Table 9: Number of posts initiated in August and follow-up responses from 2010 to 2018 for the Disneyland section of the Laughing Place, MousePlanet, and MiceChat web discussion boards.

Laughing Place experienced a 99% drop in Disneyland board posts from 2010 to 2018. In an early 2018 site redesign, Laughing Place removed the link to discussion boards on the home page’s primary navigation bar. Instead, the link was relegated to the final item of a third column sub-menu within a drop-down menu sub-section called ‘More Disney’ (Figure 5). The Disneyland sub-menu does not even contain a link to the boards. One member in a February 22, 2018, post wondered of the site administrators, “before they pull the plug, I hope they at least say... bye”. Laughing Place co-owner Moseley assured the few remaining stalwarts in a March 2, 2018, post that the discussion boards were not going anywhere and a more prominent link to the boards was being considered. However, as of mid-2019, that link has yet to materialize. By 2013, Laughing Place was no longer a full-time job for Moseley, but he considers the site, outside of his marriage and child, to be the greatest experience of his life (D. Moseley, Interview, November 30, 2017). MousePlanet still has a link to ‘Forum’ (along with Articles, Walt Disney World Guide, and Disneyland Guide) in the site’s primary

navigation bar, but posts to the Disneyland board still dropped 96% between 2010 and 2018 (Table 9). MiceChat retains a link to forums in the site's primary navigation bar, but the Disneyland board suffered a steep 84% drop in posts between 2010 and 2018 (Table 9). Fan interaction clearly shifted from website discussion boards to social network platforms.



Figure 5: Laughing Place home page with drop-down sub-menu navigation to the discussion boards link; Screenshot taken on June 17, 2018.

Regan of MiceChat was caught off guard by the rise of social media:

I didn't really understand it immediately. It seemed like something that young people were doing and it seemed like something that was counter-intuitive to what we were trying to accomplish because we really wanted people to post trip reports and have Disney community. And Facebook was the opposite of that because you really are only communicating with your friends and family and we are the antithesis of that. We're putting people in touch with other fans, whether you know them or not. (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017)

After getting a better handle on the upstart social network platforms, Regan has had success drawing a sizable audience to the MiceChat accounts on Facebook and Twitter, but has not found as much traction parlaying his long-standing cultural and social capital among Disneyland fans into large numbers of followers and subscribers on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube where the allure is visual, not textual (Table 10).

Number of subscribers or followers on social media platforms for Disneyland fan websites, influencers, and events as of March 2019					
	Facebook (group)	Instagram	YouTube	Twitter	Other
Laughing Place	10,560	2,467	hidden	24,400	--
MousePlanet	25,126	10,700	2,506	44,400	--
MiceChat	66,875	12,200	7,273	55,100	reddit (119)
Sarah Sterling	21,078	79,800	78,202	17,400	--
Leo Camacho	18,762	123,000	40,180	18,700	--
Francis Dominic	*	76,400	6,223	15,500	--
Gay Days Anaheim	50,218	3,662	5**	2,755	--
Bats Day	10,496	4,350	--	3,262	--
Galliday	4,760	609	14	461	Tumblr
Lolita Day	3,108	963	--	--	--
Steam Day	1,167	--	--	--	Flickr (325)
Disneyland (official)	17 million	7.2 million	71,374	1.34 million	Tumblr Pinterest (54,401)
D23 (official Disney fan club)	817,910	802,000	54,673	495,000	
* Private personal page only ** Inactive since 2010					

Table 10: Number of subscribers or followers on social media platforms for Disneyland fan websites, influencers, and events, as well as the official Disneyland and D23 accounts as of March 2019.

The social media stars of Disneyland fandom, such as Leo Camacho, Sarah Sterling, and Francis Dominic, are all under 30-year-old millennial and Generation Z personages, while Regan is a middle-aged member of Generation X. Although Regan adapted MiceChat for the new platforms, most of the under 30-year-old fans I spoke with during my fieldwork had only

vaguely heard of MiceChat, if at all. With the proliferation of so many Disneyland fan groups enabled by Facebook and other social network platforms, MiceChat was no longer one of a select few groups for fans to congregate, and instead became just another group vying for the attention of millennials and Generation Z fans among a vast number of choices of fan groups online and in the park.

To launch and maintain a website requires a fair amount of money and knowledge for the domain name, hosting service, and underlying technology. For MiceChat, the hosting service alone costs US\$2,000 per month due to security needs from being a frequent target of distributed denial of service (DDOS) attacks after then video columnist Sarah Sterling got ensnared in the Gamergate backlash (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). Although Sterling only posted her views about Gamergate on personal social media accounts, any Google search at that time revealed she was a video columnist for MiceChat, so the fan site was hit by DDOS attacks as a much easier target for take down compared to the corporate owned social network platforms. To start and maintain a social media presence requires little technical knowledge and costs nothing for the usernames, hosting, and technology provided by the platforms. Since the transaction costs, not only in terms of money but also time, effort, and attention, to form new groups collapsed (Shirky, 2008), young fans, notably social media influencers, were able to compete with and siphon off the audience from established fan websites.

Disney also created official social media accounts for Disneyland that connected directly with fans and easily surpassed the amount of subscribers and followers of fan websites, influencers, and events (Table 10). The YouTube account of influencer Sarah Sterling is the sole exception with more subscribers than the official Disneyland channel (though the official

Disney Parks account, which covers all global Disney theme parks, has more than ten times the subscribers of Sterling). The older fan websites have seen more success reaching fans on Facebook for information and discussion, and Twitter to disseminate news. Influencers primarily reach fans through YouTube and Instagram. Event organizers (covered in Chapter 8) mainly reach participants with Facebook. Influencers used social network platforms as the most effective means to establish and display cultural capital while building social capital with young followers just as Regan and Moseley from the previous era used, in a similar manner, web discussion boards as the most effective online platform. Starting in a new era allowed influencers to brand themselves by choosing the most effective platform of the day, while older fans who started websites with discussion boards were stuck with an expensive and technologically cumbersome platform from an earlier Internet era. When some fans over 30 years old were asked whether being a social media influencer would be of interest, they reported feeling too old for that young person's game, but if they were 20 again then they would love to give it a try (Anonymous #7, Interview, October 27, 2017; Anonymous #8, Interview, October 29, 2017). The time of having a limited choice of venues for online fan discussion ended with the advent of a new era with choice among hundreds of online fan groups. This shift impacted not only fans interacting with each other, but also the interaction between Disney and fans.

Anyone, though primarily young people, could take advantage of the low transaction costs of social network platforms to create accounts in an effort to attract an audience. Some, such as Sarah Sterling, posted YouTube video content in conjunction with fan websites such as MiceChat before striking out on their own after gaining exposure to the longstanding site's audience (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). Sterling originally focused on Harry Potter fans but there already existed a large crowd of content creators for the J.K. Rowling

oeuvre. Instead, she built cultural capital from discovering an underserved niche by producing content about being a Disneyland cast member, as well as pro tips and advice for visiting Disneyland, and then, notably, for Disneybounding, after the practice was originated by Leslie Kay in 2012. Disneybounding provided a reason to turn the camera on the self to showcase one’s Disney inspired style rather than the park’s attractions, and was particularly suited for the visual orientation of Instagram and YouTube. The practice also afforded a reason to create content in locales outside of Disneyland, such as shopping at the mall to assemble an outfit, or at home to try on different ensembles. Young influencers banded together to form groups such as Thingamavlogs, which included Sarah Sterling, Leo Camacho, Tiffany Mink, and Patrick Dougall (Figure 6). Their YouTube channel chronicled the Disney adventures of four young fans in a manner somewhat reminiscent of the classic television sitcom *Friends*. Thingamavlogs disbanded in October 2017, even though the channel had nearly 100,000 subscribers at the time. The four members have since concentrated on their individual channels and careers, though they still collaborate at times.



Figure 6: Thingamavlogs members, from left, Camacho, Mink, Sterling, and Dougall, Twitter account with October 5, 2017, farewell post; Screenshot taken on June 17, 2018.

Another popular influencer, who frequently appears with former Thingamavlogs members, is Francis Dominic. He built cultural capital on Instagram by chronicling his experience as an intern in the Disney College Program. Dominic's popularity continued to grow even after his time in the program ended. Social media content creators became influential as tastemakers for fashion, photography, and dining at Disneyland, particularly with young fans. Sterling is known for Disneybounding and commentary, Camacho for Disneybounding and cosplay, and Dominic for style, even starting his own clothing line. Other influencers concentrate only on the park's food and drinks, such as the YouTube vloggers Magic Journeys. Being an online fan influencer for the Southern California theme parks has become so widespread that a conference focused solely on the topic was held for the first time at the Knott's Berry Farm resort hotel in March 2019 (<https://www.awesomeretreat.com/>). Sessions included tips on photography, writing, monetization strategies, and getting noticed by theme park and hotel operators.

Young aspiring influencers were not the only ones to take advantage of the low transaction costs, as any fan now had a free and easy way to reach an enormous, potential audience on social network platforms, particularly Facebook. And anyone who felt out of place or had dissimilar interests with the meet-up participants of established groups such as MiceChat, could form their own Facebook groups to connect with likeminded fans. One founder of a social club recalled attending a couple MiceChat meets in the late 2000s but not clicking socially with the group members, so she was elated when the concept of Disneyland social clubs became popular in the early 2010s on Facebook groups by allowing her to find a small special group of people she loved hanging out with at the park (Anonymous #6, Interview, November 6, 2017). As Mike Marquez, the coordinator of numerous smaller Disneyland fan events, remarked:

Disneyland is the happiest place on earth. The Disneyland social community is not the happiest place on earth... so many different types of people. (M. Marquez, Interview, October 16, 2017).

Disneyland fandom is not unusual in this regard as fan communities are often rife with feuds, divisions, and personality conflicts (Jenkins, 2013). Young fans in particular started to find each other on Instagram and YouTube instead of Facebook and the older discussion boards (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017). Disney under CEO Bob Iger also saw a broadening and expansion of Disney fandom overall as the company acquired popular intellectual properties such as Marvel in 2009 and Lucasfilm in 2012, which were incorporated into the park as attractions and meet ‘n greets, and by fans through Disneybounding (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017).

7.1.1 Fragmentation of the fandom due to social network platforms, but mostly Facebook

“And then Facebook killed us off”, concluded Moseley after considering the evaporation of the Laughing Place discussion board community (D. Moseley, Interview, November 30, 2017). Before social network platforms there were a limited number of active discussion boards to talk about Disneyland online. As in Usenet newsgroups, debates on the boards could get heated and turn into flame wars, though the boards had moderators to ban the unruly and delete divisive posts. Unlike unmoderated Usenet newsgroups, a user banned from a web discussion board was essentially exiled from that fan community. MiceChat’s Regan referred to the spiral of invective posts leading to banishment as a YAGE – “yet another grand exit” (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). Moseley observed that some fans could not abide the negativity of the web boards so the establishment of Facebook provided a way to associate only with existing friends and avoid heated debates with strangers. Many fans enjoyed self-selecting socially into smaller Facebook groups. Small

groups provided environments more conducive to convergent thinking so members could agree on a point of view and interact more closely with better conversational environs because the social density was easier to support (Shirky, 2008). Where Meyrowitz (1994) saw electronic media leading the individual to subdivide into narrower groupings, the easy access to common information on digital media accelerated the fragmentation of groups into ever finer distinctions. The online social networks also lowered the discovery cost for anyone looking to join a like-minded group for “a few clicks of a mouse can inform anyone, anywhere, about membership opportunities at any time, instead of relying on word of mouth or traditional advertising campaigns” (Fraade-Blanar & Glazer, 2017, p. 75). As Moseley explained:

And so people who initially come to the website to talk Disney and have friends, over time realized I don't want to argue about Pirates of the Caribbean (the ride) one more time. I just want to get in touch with my friends. Well, it's much easier to keep in touch with my friends on Facebook than on our discussion boards. That was the natural evolution of things. (D. Moseley, Interview, November 30, 2017)

Community was the second most popular board section, after Disneyland, on Laughing Place, but Facebook was an easier platform to keep in touch with all one's friends and groups in one free, convenient, and easy to use website and app. In addition, people grew weary of registering on web discussion boards to leave comments to strangers, and instead preferred to do so on social network platforms with people they already knew (Sandvoss & Kearns, 2014). Korda experimented with boards on the Bats Day website (<http://www.batsday.net>) and then Yahoo! groups without seeing much traction with either in the early 2000s. However, he saw success immediately with MySpace, and then particularly with Facebook, which became the dominant way of interacting with fans as the event website continues to see less and less traffic every year (N. Korda, Interview, November 22, 2017). For the five

fan organized events analyzed in Table 10, the number of members in event Facebook groups was considerably more than their corresponding Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter presences. None used YouTube extensively, if at all, two did not use Twitter, and one did not even use Instagram (opting for Flickr instead). According to the study’s online survey, whose participants were primarily sourced from Facebook groups, 75% of respondents named Facebook as their favorite online platform for connecting with other Disney fans (Table 11). Facebook was most popular because respondents said the platform was easy to use, convenient, nearly universally adopted, and the only social media platform some people used.

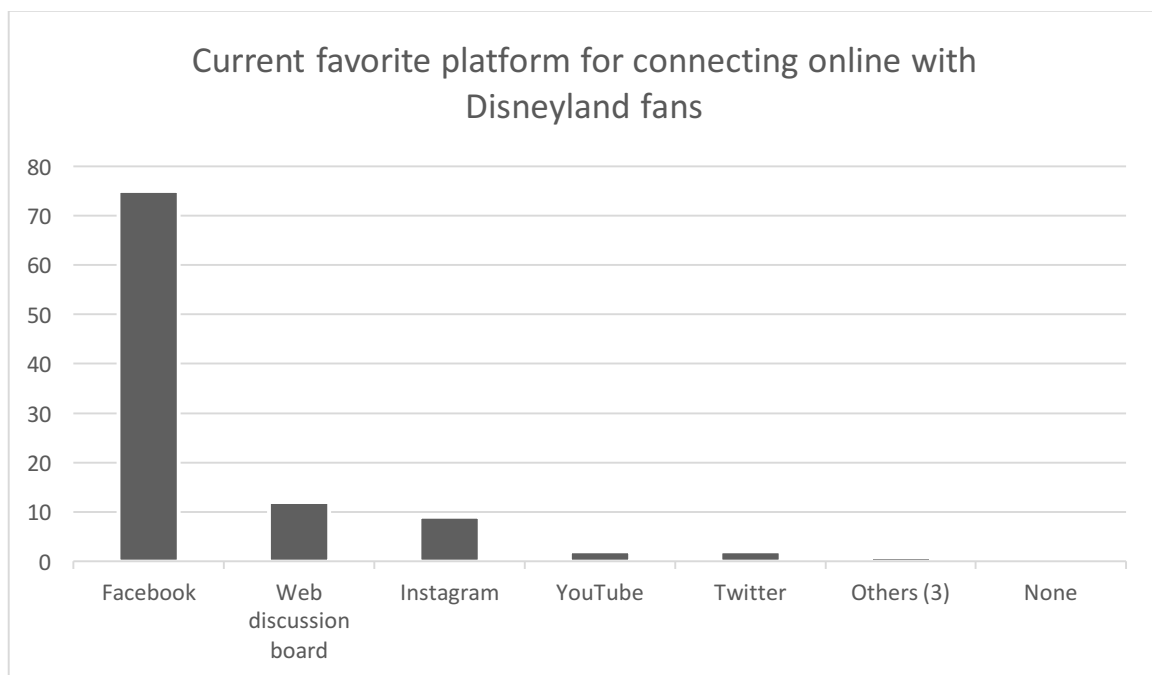


Table 11: Current favorite platform for connecting online with Disneyland fans (n=637).

When asked in the survey to indicate which online platforms fans had ever used to interact with other Disneyland fans, 92% named Facebook, followed by Instagram with 51%, and web-based discussion boards at 50% (Table 12). A majority of surveyed fans also named Facebook as the first online platform they used to connect with other Disneyland enthusiasts (Table 13). During the 2010s, web discussion boards faded away as practically everyone joined Facebook and discovered they could create and/or join a multitude of Disneyland

groups that suited their particular social needs and desires (K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017).

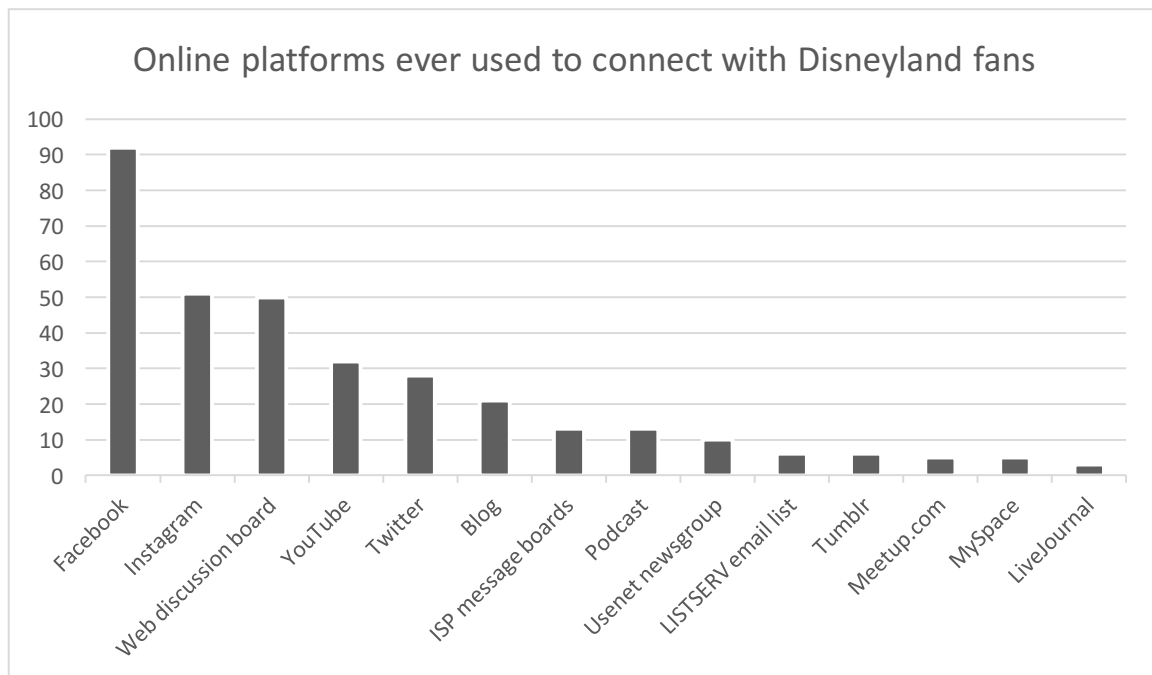


Table 12: Online platforms ever used to connect with Disneyland fans (n=637).

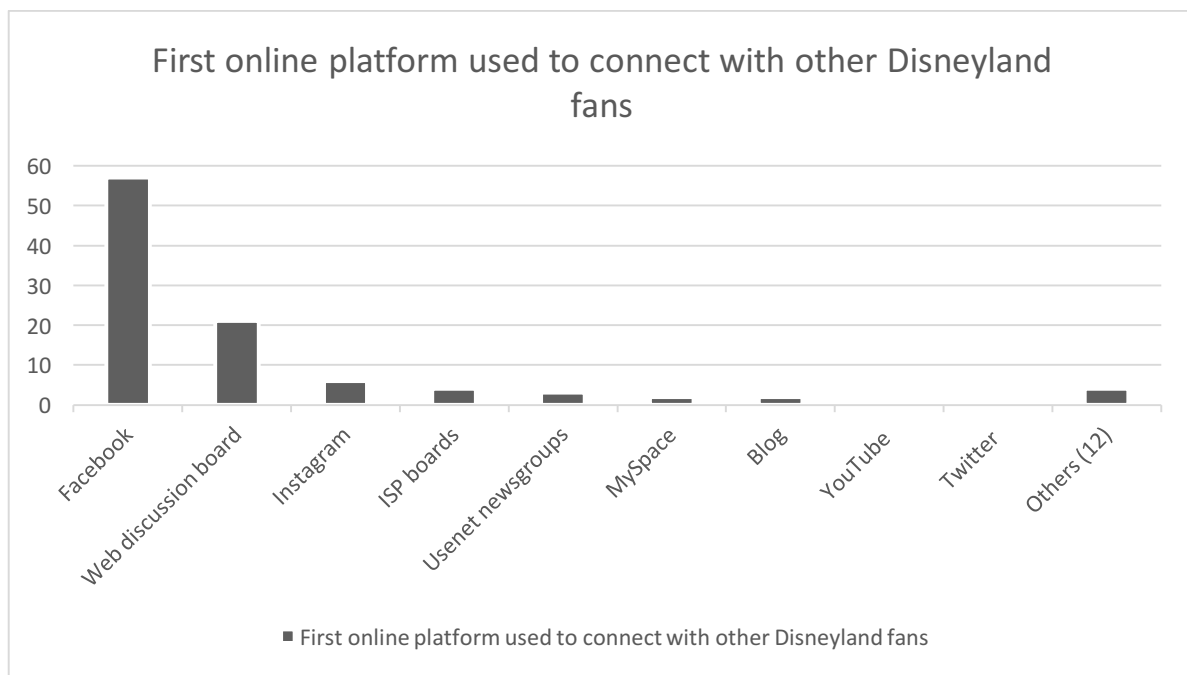


Table 13: First online platform used to connect with other Disneyland fans (n=637).

Mike Marquez credits the organizers of early events such as Bats Day for paving the way for him to create so many new events in the park (M. Marquez, Interview, October 16, 2017). As soon as Marquez discovered Facebook groups, he created “Unofficial Disneyland Events and Gatherings” to promote his fan events in Disneyland. The group has over 3,000 followers, with some hailing from the around the world, though Marquez believes most are local passholders (M. Marquez, Interview, October 16, 2017). Marquez says fans have started all kinds of Disneyland Facebook groups including “family friendly groups, parent groups, teenage groups, you have dark groups, you have 18 and over groups, you have dirty Disney groups, if you have any type of group you can think of and Disney from bad to good, it's there” (M. Marquez, Interview, October 16, 2017). Almost anything associated with Disneyland has a Facebook group, or even multiple groups.

At first, Regan thought Facebook would be similar to Friendster and MySpace, burn brightly for a brief period, and then fade away (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). However, as Facebook kept growing, Regan noticed that community based discussions about eating dinner, weekend plans, making crafts, etc. started to disappear from the MiceChat forums. In an attempt to appeal to MiceChat members migrating to Facebook, as well as attracting new fans, Regan created not just one catch-all MiceChat group, but a number of Facebook groups to cover varied interests such as Sunday meets, Gumball Rally, Mice Trips, news and information, and fan discussions. Regan has tried to fashion Facebook as a marketing tool by placing article teasers on Facebook groups with concomitant links to the full content on the MiceChat website. Facebook is the number one driver of traffic to the MiceChat website followed by Google searches and then Twitter, though 50% of visitors still arrive directly from the address bar or a bookmark (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). When MiceChat was solely a website, the audience was all in one place on the site, but the

proliferation of social media platforms has dispersed fans to such an extent that some are not even aware of the website and only know MiceChat through the site's Twitter, Facebook, or podcasting presence (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). Compared to the in-depth and protracted conversations on website boards, Regan criticized Facebook's discussion system for not indexing or displaying in a manner conducive to extensive interaction, instead encouraging people to ask repeatedly the same questions because the search functionality is so cumbersome (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). Regan believes that the overnight success MiceChat had in 2005 would be nearly impossible today due to the difficulty of standing out when there are now so many Disneyland fan groups and accounts spread across social network platforms, and more constantly being created. Being among the first was advantageous, though other sites that were among the first, such as Laughing Place and MousePlanet, have not been able to keep up as well with all the newcomers. Regan wonders if only reaching a few hundred views, followers, or subscribers is worthwhile to all the new groups that constantly pop up, and though some fold after a while, many persist in the hope of catching fire with fans or simply derive satisfaction from sharing their passion regardless of low traffic and little chance of financial remuneration. However, for fans who used to feel ill-suited in outlook, interests, or relations within the limited ecosystem of fan sites in the web discussion board era, the affordances of social network platforms such as Facebook to create and/or join an abundance of groups has been a blessing.

7.1.2 Market pressures

Moseley fondly recalls the days before social media when he would go to a park event, return home, do a write-up with photos, post the report on the Laughing Place website, place a link on the newsgroup alt.disney.disneyland, and then thousands of fans would click through to read the article the next day (D. Moseley, Interview, November 30, 2017). Today, to wait

until returning home from a park event to write and post a report is often too late when almost anyone can not only post but broadcast live from the park using Facebook, Periscope, or YouTube. And with so many content creators, standing out from the crowd has become much more challenging. Some individuals and groups go to the park almost every day to make videos for tens of thousands, hundreds, or only dozens of views. When Pirate's Lair Island reopened in June 2017 after being closed for over a year due to nearby construction on Star Wars land, the first rafts of the morning from Frontierland to the island were full of YouTube vloggers, influencers, and fan website staff to do live reports and posts. They discovered that nothing had changed on the island itself. Conceivably, in the near future, every slice of Disneyland will be viewable whenever the park is open via live streaming by fans. Moseley wonders, "where are we going to differentiate, and can we actually make money at this, in this point in life with all the competition?" (D. Moseley, Interview, November 30, 2017). Many fans create and post content from their day-to-day Disneyland trips without any expectation of economic reward, and have thus created a challenging environment for anyone trying to make money from content creation alone (D. Moseley, Interview, November 30, 2017). On the other hand, the restrictive ecosystem of the web discussion board era meant fewer voices were able to reach fans. With social network platforms enabling almost any individual or group to post photos and videos online, fans can avail a diverse and plentiful array of perspectives.

Since Facebook has afforded the creation of so many new groups catering to Disneyland fans, event organizers have to choose judiciously the groups to promote their events because Facebook will suspend a user account that posts essentially the same message to a number of groups within a 24-hour period. Marquez's personal Facebook page was suspended for seven days after posting an event promotion to more than five groups in a day (M. Marquez,

Interview, October 16, 2017). While organizers need to market events widely to reach and persuade enough fans to participate, they run the risk of Facebook flagging and suspending their accounts as spam. Since organizers are quite dependent on Facebook for fans to discover events, groups, and clubs, competition among organizers for followers and shares on the platform has become quite keen. One way to stand out from the pack is through paid promotion, which Facebook instituted in 2012, but Disneyland fan events and clubs make little, if any, money even if they attract many new participants. While the use of paid promotion might increase exposure and prestige in some cases, interviewees either reported never using the tactic or found the results lackluster (Anonymous #2, Interview, November 14, 2017; H. Ruszecki, Interview, October 11, 2017; M. Marquez, Interview, October 16, 2017).

Regan tries to redirect traffic from MiceChat's Facebook groups to the MiceChat website so he can generate advertising revenue. Ideally, Regan believes advertisements on Facebook groups should generate a percentage of money for group administrators since they create the content that drives visitors to use Facebook (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). At the same time, he is chagrined at fans who enjoy the MiceChat website's curated content for "free" while using ad blocker extensions on web browsers that deny the site revenue from advertising impressions (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). MiceChat's popular Monday morning (California time) Disneyland Update is only available on the website but is promoted with backlinks across all MiceChat social media accounts. Regan faces deadline pressure on Sunday nights to post the Monday update by sunrise, otherwise visitors check the site, see no update, and do not return assuming there will be no update at all (Anonymous #1, Interview, October 17, 2017). Regan works on MiceChat approximately 50 hours per week

hoping to break even financially to pay the monthly US\$2,000 hosting service bill, while also working a regular full-time job (T. Regan, Interview, November 27, 2017).

The social media influencers also derive relatively little economic value from the online platforms they use to present content, though they do not need to pay the platforms any money to upload, display, and store content. The long-term influencer goal is to use their cultural capital to steadily build the social capital of a large, engaged (measured by likes and comments) audience in order to impress Disney, and form a partnership or get a full-time position with the company (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017; Anonymous #9, Interview, November 16, 2017). The influencers focus on evergreen content, such as videos on how to do the most rides in a day or “secret” bathroom locations, which are relevant for years of ever-accumulating views, unlike the park news style updates of MiceChat, MousePlanet, and Laughing Place that are outdated shortly after being posted. Regan contends a key operational difference between Generation Xers such as himself and the young social media influencers is his lens focuses primarily on the park itself, while the influencer lens focuses mostly on themselves with the park as a backdrop (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). The young social media influencers play primarily to an under 30-year-old audience (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017; Anonymous #9, Interview, November 16, 2017), while MiceChat attempts to appeal to the broad range of age groups as the “full buffet” (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017) but attracts a comparatively older audience that highlights the generational divide among Disneyland fans.

7.1.3 Fragmentation of the fandom due to generational divide

A new generation of Disneyland fans came of age with social media in the late 2000s and used the revolutionary platforms to connect with each other by spotlighting themselves at the

park. By contrast, older fans had customarily connected by foregrounding the park itself. A prominent Disneyland social media influencer recalled joining the MiceChat discussion board as a young teenager new to Disneyland online fandom but feeling out of place with the seemingly older crowd (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017). Instagram and YouTube felt more comfortable because “you can see who you're talking to and relate to them in a different way than you would on kind of an anonymous message board” (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017). The influencer also points out that Disney prefers to work with influencers through Instagram and YouTube as primarily visual platforms, and not through the text-laden fan websites and discussion boards. The influencer’s public Facebook page is used less to connect with fans because Instagram and YouTube are more useful for sharing new content, connecting with new people, and growing an audience primarily composed of young people who hope to work for Disney someday (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017). In addition, young people are more attracted to Instagram and YouTube as primarily visual and youth oriented platforms as opposed to the text-based posts of an older audience on Facebook. The social media influencer feels older Disneyland fans possess:

a general disdain for a younger, burgeoning group of Disney fans who like things that they don't like. I feel like fewer young fans coming into the fandom are like quote unquote purists like a lot of older fans are and they like things like Paint the Night and they don't like Main Street Electrical Parade and they love Guardians of the Galaxy and they don't like Hollywood Tower of Terror, and all of these kind of hard hitting and closed topics in the Disney fandom. And I found that I feel like a lot of these older fans feel I represent the younger demographic. (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017)

Main Street Electrical Parade, which debuted in 1972, was replaced by a new nighttime parade called Paint the Night in 2015, and the Hollywood Tower of Terror, based on *The Twilight Zone* television show that debuted in 1959, was reskinned in 2017 as a *Guardians of the Galaxy* attraction based on the popular Marvel films. On Twitter, where the younger and older generations cross digital paths, young social media influencers sometimes attract the opprobrium of older fans for appearing self-centered (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017). Dis-Twitter and the #distwitter hashtag are used to signify the intense and opinionated current of Disney fandom on Twitter that frequently divides along the lines of older traditionalists versus younger Disneyphiles (Anonymous #9, Interview, November 16, 2017). Regan takes a cyclical view that Disney fans are uncritically idealistic when young, but develop a sharper critical eye as they age (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). On discussion boards and during my fieldwork, some fans said that Disney and Imagineering are the foremost experts at creating great theme park experiences and should be trusted to make changes without fan skepticism and griping. Another popular young influencer, who enjoys using Twitter to make comments and communicate with brands, and Instagram to pose and have fun, feels:

A lot of the older fans think we don't know anything. They're very entitled. I mean they have every right to be here, they've loved Disneyland for so long. But I definitely think that there are some people who are very opinionated and put people on Instagram down or definitely put people down who are on YouTube... but people forget we're just happy to be here to share all these things. And then all these older generation people are just looking at everything in a negative perspective. And always tying in that Walt wouldn't want this and would never want that. I'm like just enjoy it, you're still going to pay. You're still gonna go to these events. You're still going to

do all these things that Disney offers, that complaining about is just going to waste energy. (Anonymous #9, Interview, November 16, 2017)

By turning the camera on themselves with the park as a backdrop, influencers built cultural capital by promoting themselves as a new kind of brand constructed within the Disney milieu. Korda laments the exacting construction demonstrated by younger Bats Day participants for stylish self-presentation on social media to the exclusion of the music, art, and history of the goth subculture (N. Korda, Interview, November 22, 2017). On the other hand, older fans are not considered by younger fans to be particularly adept at Disneybounding (Anonymous #7, Interview, October 27, 2017). By simply pointing their camera, influencers can make an obscure Disney backdrop become Instagram famous with followers subsequently mimicking the shot, such as the blue wall at DCA (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Screenshot of Instagram account of Leo Camacho (@mrleozombie) with, from left, Camacho and Sterling in front of the blue wall at DCA.

While Disneyland has always been a remediated environment comprised of the company's films, television, and music (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), the park is now mediated once again

For MiceChat to remain relevant in the social media era, Regan scrambled to appeal to younger fans by not only posting regularly to Instagram and YouTube, but also adapting his media persona and presentation. Before 2015, almost all MiceChat photos and videos showcased the park with Regan almost never on camera. At the MiceChat Sunday meets, new participants often only knew Regan by his online handle, Dusty Sage, and were unaware of his physical appearance, while young influencers use their real names to become park celebrities that young visitors seek out to approach for selfies (Anonymous #7, Interview, October 27, 2017). Although Regan dislikes what he calls the reality show aspect of cattiness and feuding characteristic of some social media influencers, he has, since 2015, somewhat reluctantly posted occasional photos of himself on the MiceChat Instagram account interacting with costumed characters, trying new park food and beverages, and posing in front of attractions. For YouTube videos, he now sometimes shoots on-camera intros and outros, and recruited younger contributors to handle most of MiceChat's photography and social media duties. Regan says he is trying to put the "millennial lens" on MiceChat content (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017), though attracting millennials and Generation Z into the older skewing MiceChat fan base is perhaps too far a reach. In addition, if Regan changes MiceChat's style, content, and delivery too drastically then he runs the risk of upsetting the older crowd that comprises the longtime foundation of the MiceChat audience. The acknowledgement of cultural capital among Disneyland fans has become predicated by generation. A MiceChatter in her early 30s, who was looked upon suspiciously and rebuffed at the first few Sunday meets as a young newcomer by older members, contends older Disneyland fans "just don't like change" (Anonymous #7, Interview, October 27, 2017). Understanding the importance of inclusivity with a new younger member in order to attract other young adults, Regan looked after and encouraged the newcomer to keep attending until receiving eventual acceptance from older members (Anonymous #7, Interview, October 27,

2017). Another 30-something year-old fan faces a difficult choice on Sundays choosing between the MiceChat assemblage and groups with younger members. As an older group, MiceChatters sometimes enjoy alcoholic beverages at DCA, but usually disband in the afternoon after enjoying only a ride or two together. Groups with younger members cannot consume alcohol legally, but usually spend the entire day and night enjoying the park (Anonymous #8, Interview, October 29, 2017). There are so many social events, clubs, and meets, especially on Sundays, that anyone can self-select into a specific group but not always one spanning the divide between the generations.

7.1.4 Fan dissatisfaction with Disney/Disneyland management

The perspective of 87 year-old Disney Legend and retired Imagineer Bob Gurr is echoed by fans unhappy with the current direction of the park: “I’m sad to see Disneyland change so it’s no longer Walt’s park” (B. Gurr, Interview, October 8, 2017). This frustration resonates with one long-time fan who visits the park almost every day:

I’d love to have lunch with Walt Disney. He’s my hero. The way Walt wanted this park to be and the way with his attention to detail and his whole vision for this and how it’s just wrong (now) just amazes me. (Anonymous #1, Interview, October 17, 2017)

Gurr hears from fans at events and conventions that the acquisitions made during the tenure of CEO Iger of Pixar, Lucasfilm, and Marvel, and their concomitant expanding roles in the parks, have diluted the trademark Disney feel of Disneyland and the Disney company. Walt Disney and the original Imagineers, including Gurr, designed Disneyland to be a “happy place” in the words of the park’s dedication speech. However, for the Star Wars land that opened in 2019, Gurr felt, based on the models and illustrations, “everything is true to *Star Wars*, but it’s kind of a morose looking place” (B. Gurr, Interview, October 8, 2017). In the

mid-1960s, Walt Disney directed Imagineering not to make the exterior of the Haunted Mansion appear ramshackle but rather pristine from the outside to match the rest of the spotless park. The setting of the new Star Wars land, a run-down spaceport replete with smugglers, stormtroopers, and rebel spies clashing between weather-beaten, blaster-strafed, rusted buildings, does not recall the architecture of reassurance (Hench, 2003; Marling, 1997) that made Disneyland a sunny place of attachment for many Southern Californians. Even the trash cans are themed to the ramshackle character of the land with pre-chipped paint and stains of orange rust. In a first for a Disney theme park, Imagineering did not use non-diegetic background music throughout the land in a bid for immersive authenticity that sidelined the famous, emotionally resonant *Star Wars* scores of John Williams. One fan reported on the MiceChat Facebook group of returning to Main Street to enjoy the cheerful Disneyland marching band as a “palette cleanser” after visiting the new Star Wars land that resembled a “bleak abandoned nuclear facility”. Imagineering opted for stark, gritty realism true to the environmental diegesis of the films over fantastical hyper-realism. Gurr concedes the Star Wars land will give ardent fans one more reason to hang out at the park, while Disney becomes “an organization which says come hither, we have all the heroin you want, come right in” (B. Gurr, Interview, October 8, 2017). Indeed, just to enter the Savi’s Workshop attraction in the new land requires a US\$200 up front payment to custom build a toy lightsaber.

Fans also worried when the former head of Disney consumer products, Bob Chapek, was named the chief of Disney parks in 2015. Fears of a return to the Paul Pressler era only heightened with a 2017 restructuring of Disney corporate that included the merger of the parks and consumer products portfolios into one mega division called Walt Disney Parks,

Experiences, and Consumer Products with Chapek at the helm. MiceChat's Regan looks at the recent management news through a historical arc of

a very interesting series of booms and busts for Disney. And we're there to write when times are high, we're talking about how fabulous things are. When times are low, we're talking about how bad they are. And right now Disney is riding a sort of high. They're cresting and they're about to head back into potentially some darker waters.

(T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017)

If magic is wrung out of the parks for ever increasing profit margins, then fans like Regan see themselves as watchdogs ready to begin a new Save Disney campaign, if necessary (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). The *Orange County Register* has in the past referred to MiceChat as a Disney watchdog site (Tully, 2012). Within almost every Monday Disneyland Update column, Regan needles Disneyland managers on some neglected aspect of the park from the ever-peeling murals of Toontown to an unsightly plastic hedge divider at the River Belle Terrace restaurant. Disney executives have told Regan that MiceChat's critical coverage have, at times, infuriated them but also helped the company improve (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). Company insiders have been leaking information to fan columnists such as Lutz, Regan, and Hill since the advent of online platforms in the 1990s. As the Disney company has grown immensely in the following decades, there have been even more leaks:

Disney is really like 32 little companies, all of which have their own agendas, their own schedules, their own projects that they're working on. And they often butt heads so they come at things from different angles and sometimes just getting them to coordinate it, to push a film like say *Coco*, really is wrangling cats. They're getting better at it, but it's a lot of stumbling and fumbling. But on the other hand, what's great about when people stumble and fumble, they get frustrated and they need to vent. And

that's typically when somebody gets on the phone to me and starts sharing stories that I probably really shouldn't hear. (J. Hill, Interview, October 24, 2017)

Unless Disney achieves perfect coordination, comity, and cooperation between all the company's competing personnel, departments, and agendas, fan columnists that offer a critique will continue to report insider news and gossip that then gets picked up by traditional media outlets (J. Hill, Interview, October 24, 2017; T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017).

7.2 Fan resignation in the era of social network platforms

The peak of fan resistance to Disney was in 2005 with the toppling of CEO Michael Eisner during the Save Disney online campaign. Although MiceChat's Regan stands ready to start another Save Disney campaign if management returns to the "dark times" of the Pressler era, the question is whether such a campaign could garner sufficient online support to make an impact on Disney in the Internet milieu of today. Since 2006, online Disneyland fans have not mustered any opposition potent enough to influence Disney management to change a decision or oust an unpopular executive due to two factors. First, the voice of the fandom has fragmented into a vast number of groups on social network platforms, particularly Facebook. Second, the Disney strategy of co-opting fan website owners and social media influencers by offering access in exchange for positive online coverage has also quelled resistance (covered in detail in Chapter 9). Even MiceChat's Regan in mid-2018 started attending early access events at Disneyland in order to obtain the photos and videos necessary to stay on par with all the influencers, groups, and websites that had long been working with Disney. While MiceChat continues to bring relatively minor cosmetic issues to Disney's attention such as replacing an unsightly plastic hedge or servicing peeling paint, if Regan wants to continue to

enjoy early access to park events then large-scale, biting criticisms will need to remain muzzled.

A recent, notable failure in fan resistance was the outcry over the truncating of the Walt Disney designed Rivers of America in 2016 for the creation of Star Wars land. Walt Disney designed the park as thematically coherent lands interspersed with a variety of IP and original stories, and never one IP dominating an entire land. On online discussion boards and Facebook groups, and in conversations with fans in the park during fieldwork, most fans welcomed a Star Wars land but preferred a location in the already thematically confused DCA or in a new purpose-built third gate park that fans sarcastically dubbed “new-IP-acquisition-land”. In 2017, many fans, primarily older and traditionalist, were livid when Disney announced that the bride auction scene from the Pirates of the Caribbean attraction would be replaced (Figure 9).



Figure 9: Bride auction scene in the Pirates of the Caribbean attraction at Disneyland, November 2017; Still from video: Author

There was no previous fan protest calling for the scene to be changed so the reason for the removal was internal to Disney. Outraged fans lit up web discussion boards and social network platforms to condemn the change to one of the most cherished attractions in the park. However, the era when a few fan leaders with social capital could organize and project a united fan voice from the newsgroup alt.disney.disneyland in the 1990s or the few popular web discussion boards of the 2000s was long gone. In the late 2000s, the fan voice increasingly became dispersed on hundreds of groups, boards, and accounts strewn across an expansive online social network landscape. In addition, some fans, primarily younger ones, supported the change as a nod to modern sensibility in a bitter generational break with older fans. In the end, disgruntled fans resigned themselves that Disney was going to do whatever they wanted in the park so there was no point even attempting an organized protest to change Disney's mind. The only recourse was to vent online and within social circles at the park. Disney replaced the scene and reopened the attraction in June 2018 with the ride continuing to be one of the most popular in the park.

The resigned perspective was a stark shift from the era discussed in the previous chapter when online fans believed they had real power to compel Disney to make substantial changes such as cancelling a lackluster parade and ousting top corporate executives, or balking at patronizing the bland, trite DCA upon opening. If the same DCA of 2001 opened today, the park would most likely be packed to capacity with influencers, groups, clubs, and everyday fans all vying to be first with photos and videos uploaded to the most popular social platforms, particularly Instagram and YouTube. Today, when Disney releases a new "limited edition" popcorn bucket for sale in the park, the purchase line stretches for hours and a torrent of images hits social media immediately. Unlike 1990s Disneyland fans who eagerly awaited each Al Lutz post full of gossip and news to challenge Disney on the newsgroup,

there is no longer, and probably will never again be, a ringleader recognized by popular fan acclaim with the cultural and social capital necessary to lead the charge against Disney. Fans are now diffused among so many groups and platforms that a Lutz post today would only reach a fraction of online fandom. In addition, Lutz's cerebral personality and demeanor would be a poor fit for the oral and visual spotlight of Instagram and YouTube. The young camera-savvy influencers who dominate those platforms with tens of thousands of followers want to work with, not against, Disney, so resistance will not be forthcoming from their quarter. Similar to fans from the prior generation who thought they could profit financially by working with Disney through their dot-com era fan websites, social media influencers also believe career success lies in a close relationship with Disney. On the micro level of social network platforms, individual fans can still interact with other fans but only within smaller slices of fandom under the governance of Silicon Valley corporations. However, all those small slices offer a great deal of choice for each individual to find a steady and suitable social group. On a macro level, the fragmentation of Disneyland online fandom by social network platforms has led to collective fan resignation replacing united resistance to Disney. However, a by-product of the fragmentation caused by social network platforms has been the rapid increase in the number of events, clubs, and meets in the park as discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 8: Fan Activities at Disneyland: from a Few to a Multitude 1990-2019

The previous two chapters explicated the transformation of Disneyland fans online from a stance of unity and resistance to fragmentation and resignation shaped in large part by the nature of online social platforms over the last 30 years. This chapter examines how that same succession of online social platforms also played a significant role in transforming the way local Disneyland fans used the park through fan organized events, meets, and clubs. Fan organized activities in the park were infrequent in the 1990s and 2000s, but their number increased rapidly during the 2010s. Early online social platforms inhibited the creation of new fan organized park activities. There were few websites with online fan leaders due to the high transaction costs of owning and running a popular site, which corresponded to relatively few fan organized activities in the park. The rise of social network platforms, particularly Facebook, fragmented Disneyland fandom due to the low transaction costs of creating new online fan groups, but also enabled many fans for the first time to organize their own events, meets, and clubs in the park. In addition, fans who previously saw the few existing in-park fan meets and events as socially incongruous were able to choose from an abundance of options when searching for a compatible group, especially with the advent of social clubs. This chapter provides a historical overview of fan social formations at Disneyland and how their rise from only a few in the 1990s to a multitude by the end of the 2010s has been shaped by the nature of the three dominant online social platforms of the last 30 years.

8.1 Disneyland as a safe place for meeting new people at events, meets, and clubs

While online social platforms have afforded fans the opportunity to first meet new friends online in shared interest forums and then arrange in-person meetings in the park, most have not done so. Table 14 illustrates that only 15% of survey respondents reported with a five or

higher on the Likert scale as often going to Disneyland with someone they had only connected with personally through social media or discussion boards, and 61% reported never doing so. Most local fans do not use online social platforms to connect directly with other fans and then meet at Disneyland.

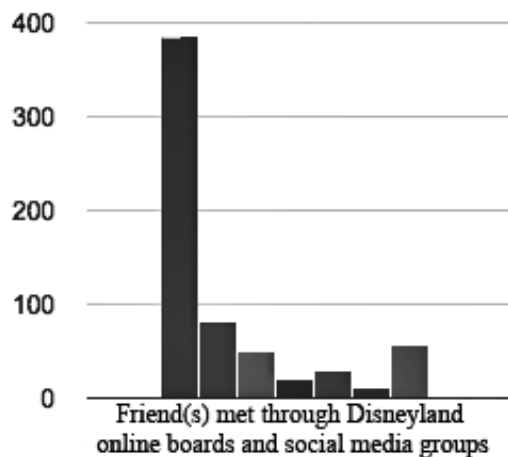


Table 14: Do you typically spend a day at Disneyland with (1 Never – 7 Very often) (n=637)

However, 62% of respondents reported attending a fan-organized event in the park, and 80% heard about the event through Facebook. Fans often discover meets, clubs, and events online and then attend them in-person to meet new people within a large group rather than using online social platforms to arrange one-to-one get-togethers in the park. As discussed in Chapter 5, while in Disneyland, 55% have made friends with a stranger since making new friends at meets and events is commonplace. From even the earliest days of online social platforms, MiceChat’s Regan realized meeting strangers within a crowd at park events or meets was more desirable:

In the early days before Facebook, to meet somebody you really needed to show up to a meet-up. So nobody used their real name. Everyone was an avatar. You didn't want to go meet some stranger with Monorail Blue as their name. So MiceChat (meet-up) was a safe place for these people to meet and get to know each other... I encourage people to come to our meet-ups... I don't care what their level of interest is, whether

they're a true fan, loves Disney, grew up with Disney, wants more information or they're what Disney calls a foamer: somebody who lives and breathes Disney... so they're at Disneyland almost every week or some cases everyday... I create a space for people of all types to get some information or community. (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017)

Meets, events, and social clubs are popular as a safe way for fans to meet strangers with the same shared interest contemporaneously in large group social mixers at Disneyland without the potential awkwardness or risk of an initial one-to-one personal meeting that was arranged online. Within the large group social mixers at the park, one can judiciously self-select into a small cozy group of like-minded compatriots with comparatively less pressure or fear of judgment. With airport style security checkpoints at every entrance to the parks and Downtown Disney district as well as extensive security personnel, Anaheim police department officers, bomb sniffing dogs, and surveillance throughout the resort, Disneyland provides perhaps the most secure public place in Southern California to get to know and hang out with new people after discovering the many fan-organized meets, events, and clubs available online. However, unlike the affordable entrance and ride fees, and convenient public transportation links that underpinned the democratic nature of the early 20th century Coney Island parks experience, steep annual price hikes for park admission tickets in recent decades and a continuing lack of public transportation options have made Disneyland off-limits to locals of more modest socioeconomic means.

8.2 Early fan events and swing dancing at Disneyland

Although Disney first started selling APs in 1984, the program had a low profile and was only lightly promoted until the early 2000s (K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017). At the start of the program in 1984, passes were useful mainly to locals with a reason to visit

regularly such as the swing dancers who had been coming to the park on weekend nights since the late 1950s. However, the popular diffusion of the Internet in the 1990s allowed fans to not only interact with each other but also to discover and exchange information about the relatively inexpensive AP program, which only cost US\$140 through the late 1990s. When Ken Pellman worked as a cast member at Disneyland in the 1990s, he observed an increasing number of passholders frequently in the park. APs became especially popular among teenagers of the widespread goth, punk, and ska scenes in Southern California at the time. The teens enjoyed hanging out at Disneyland so much that they tacitly understood not to plan parties in Orange County on Friday nights since their peers would be at the park (Schrader, 1997). Parents were happy to drop their teenagers off for the night at the ostensibly safe place of Disneyland, though a 17 year-old was arrested in front of Sleeping Beauty Castle for selling LSD to goth teens (Schrader, 1997). One teen group in the late 1990s arguably became Disneyland's first private club calling themselves the Disneyland Arcane Crew while hanging out in Tomorrowland garbed in goth attire (Lam, 2014). These teenagers, often sporting Mohawks, dog collars, and anarchy patches (Schrader, 1997), were called "wall plants" by cast members as they usually congregated against particular walls in the park (K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017).

Disney started to more prominently promote the passholder program at the Disneyland ticket booths and website in 2000, when the price increased by 25% to US\$199 with the realization that there was a large local fan base willing to pay for year-round access (K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017). A one-day park ticket cost US\$43 in late 2000, thus making an annual pass cost-effective after only five visits. Since 2002, Southern Californians have been exclusively offered regional passes at a discount. And in 2008, to entice even more more locals to become passholders, a no-interest monthly payment program for passes was

instituted exclusively for Southern Californians. As a part of AP culture, some passholders enjoy flaunting their APs in lanyards dangling around their neck as they purchase park merchandise, food, and beverages with an AP discount. Disney has reaped a consistent revenue stream by selling APs that have filled the park with locals every day of the year. Also, without the AP program, most fan organized events, meets, and clubs never would have thrived due to the prohibitive expense of purchasing single day tickets to visit on a weekly or monthly basis.

Even though Disney has promoted and staged events for locals since the 1950s (as discussed in Chapter 5), the most enduring has been swing dancing since 1958 at the dance floor next to the castle. The weekly episode is considered the longest, continuous swing dancing event in the world (Tully, 2013). Many participants are regulars with APs to make the Saturday night visit, and some have been coming as far back as the 1980s, and even a few from the 1970s. Of survey respondents, 16% have gone swing dancing at Disneyland. The administrator of the Disneyland swing dancing Facebook group calculated the cost of a Disneyland AP as more economical than weekly trips to a Los Angeles swing dance club, plus the added benefit of enjoying the many other attractions in the park (Anonymous #4, Interview, November 12, 2017). In the early years, and even today, most discovered the event through word of mouth from friends or stumbled upon the dancing while strolling through the park on a weekend night. The swing bands are hired and paid for by Disney, so the regulars make an effort to bring newcomers off the sidelines and onto the dance floor to demonstrate to management the ongoing mass appeal of the event. The regulars understand that Disney could save money by scrapping the treasured event if attendance ever ebbed too low (Anonymous #4, Interview, November 12, 2017). Friendships and relationships have blossomed from the weekly dances where “we've seen them from when they meet, they start dating, they're engaged, they're

married, they're having kids” (Anonymous #4, Interview, November 12, 2017). The swing dancers create their own themed nights without Disney involvement, such as Mouseketeer night when regulars don Mickey Mouse ears and white t-shirts with their names in block lettering (Figure 10). However, while fans engage in their own promotion and practices, the event has always been entirely organized, operated, and controlled by Disney.



Figure 10: Disneyland swing dancers on Mouseketeer night, October 2017; Photo: Author

During the mid-1990s, Disneyland allowed a private tour company to hold an annual private event called Gay Night after the park had already closed for the day. Most shops and restaurants were shut, and there were no fireworks or parades. When Disney canceled Gay Night for 1998, two fans organized Gay Days as a replacement without the involvement of the Disney company. The event took place during standard park hours so participants mixed with daily Disneyland visitors rather than being segregated. Gay couples, in full view of all

park visitors, could hold hands walking down Main Street, a most potent symbol of Americana at Disneyland. Co-founder Eddie Shapiro never liked the separate Gay Night event which felt akin to being given access on the side through a service door after families had gone home (Shady, 2011). The event attracted over 2,000 participants in the first year and has grown to become one of the biggest annual fan events at Disneyland drawing tens of thousands to the resort for the weekend (Shady, 2011). While other fan events in the park are predominantly attended by locals, the Gay Days event attracts participants across the country with some making the event their only visit to a Disney resort for the year. Disney helps facilitate the event by working with the event organizers, but the company has no input into the activities and programs beyond offering promo screenings at the Grand Californian resort hotel of select ABC shows such as *Will & Grace* (Kinser, 2015). When asked whether direct involvement from Disney would be welcome, Shapiro replied, “our programming is of our own choosing and I am very happy not to require Disney’s sign-off on what we do during Gay Days” (Martin, 2019). The organizers distribute a glossy brochure full of activities for the entire three-day weekend (Figure 11).

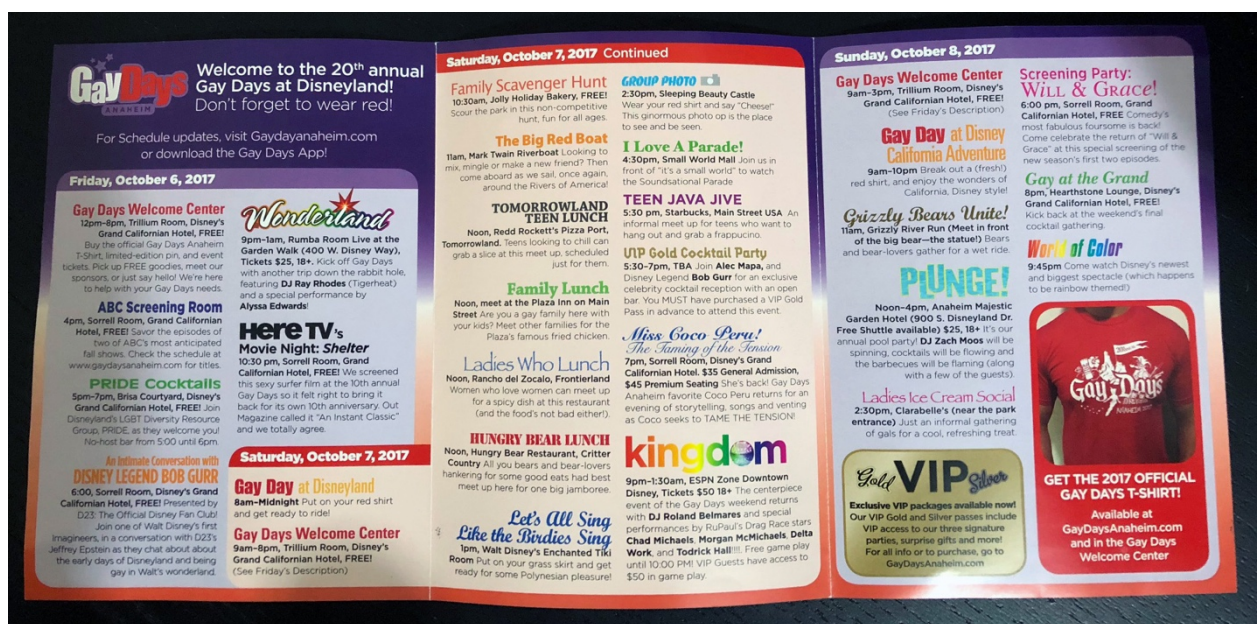


Figure 11: Gay Days Disneyland 2017 brochure interior listing the weekend’s activities.
Photo: Author

Participants are encouraged to wear red t-shirts to signify their large presence in the park and identify each other (Kinser, 2015). Marketing the first event in 1998 consisted of word of mouth, passing out fliers in West Hollywood, canvassing at festivals and streets fairs, and posting messages in Internet chat rooms (Kinser, 2015). Today, Facebook has become the primary platform for reaching potential participants and keeping in touch with past attendees.

Founded in 1999, Bats Day is also a long-standing fan event at Disneyland. Noah Korda and his Long Beach goth club recruited approximately 90 event participants in the first year (N. Korda, Interview, November 22, 2017). Unaware that Gay Days as a fan-organized event had taken place the year before without interference from Disney, Korda did not know what to expect from park management if caught facilitating Bats Day in the park. In the early years, news of the event spread by fliers in clubs and word of mouth as Korda enjoyed the delicious irony of gloomy goths meeting at the self-proclaimed “Happiest Place on Earth” (N. Korda, Interview, November 22, 2017). The number of attendees increased every year with 170 in the second year, 350 in the third, 500 in the fourth, and 800 in the fifth (N. Korda, Interview, November 22, 2017). Korda believes the launching in 2000 of the Bats Day website with many photos of participants dressed in goth attire helped popularize the event with a wider fan audience. Bats Day eventually grew to thousands of participants for the weekend with activities at the park, and a marketplace and costume ball at a nearby non-Disney owned event hotel.

Before social media, Disneyland witnessed very few fan organized social formations. First, many fans in the early years not only did not know of the few fan events that existed since they were still primarily marketed by traditional offline means, but also did not know it was even possible to organize an event in the park without Disney’s permission. Lack of

awareness and precedent inhibited the growth of fan organized events in the 1990s and 2000s. Second, the few sites for fans to congregate online in the Usenet and web discussion board era corresponded to a limited number of events and meets in the park. There were only three major web discussion boards: MiceChat, MousePlanet, and Laughing Place. In addition, any fan trying to garner publicity for a newly created event with a new website faced a tremendous uphill battle from the bottom of search engine rankings. Few fan website leaders meant a finite number of annual scavenger hunts and/or anniversary parties during a year. For event organizer Korda, the advent of social media extended the reach of his event to new participants through the sharing of news and photos with MySpace, initially, and then Facebook to increase attendance at Bats Day in the late 2000s (N. Korda, Interview, November 22, 2017). Of the very few new fan organized events in the 2000s, the emergence in the latter half of the decade of Harry Potter Day in 2006 and MiceChat's Gumball Rally in 2008 coincided with the early ripples of social media before the mass adoption of the new online platforms triggered a deluge of new fan-organized park social activities in the following decade.

8.3 Post-2010 surge in new fan events and social clubs at Disneyland

In the 2010s, the low transaction costs of social network platforms provided a tremendous boost in new fan events and the advent of social clubs. Some fans looked to long-standing events as exemplars for starting a day in the park dedicated to their passion. Drawing inspiration from Bats Day as a dress-up event, the co-founders of Lolita Day thought Disneyland could use an outing dedicated to harajuku style (H. Ruszecki, Interview, October 11, 2017). The co-founders contacted Korda, the founder of Bats Day, to get advice on organizing and running an event. Establishing online outposts for the event was technologically simple with a website (sans discussion board) done using the WYSIWYG

builder Wix (<http://disneylandlolitaday.wixsite.com/home>), a Facebook group, and an Instagram presence. Updating content each year has been simple with Facebook as the primary platform to reach and communicate with participants, though the organizers deem the website better organized and easier to navigate (H. Ruszecki, Interview, October 11, 2017). No money is made from the event, which attracts approximately 150 participants, though the organizers spend a bit for Facebook advertising and the creation of annual event buttons for registered participants. Even though Lolita fashion is not related to Disney in any way, co-founder Ruszecki believes almost any fan interest can be correlated to Disney in some manner, so Disneyland and one's pastime can be integrated and enjoyed together.

For Galliday, Amy McCain also looked to Bats Day as an inspiration for a Dr. Who themed event in the park. Although she started a website, without a discussion board, using Wix (<https://www.galliday.com/>), as well as Tumblr, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube accounts, the event's Facebook group and Messenger app have been the most effective for reaching and interacting with participants (A. McCain, Interview, October 31, 2017). The founder of Steam Day, which also has a website with no discussion board (<http://www.steamday.com/>), concurred with McCain that Facebook and Messenger have been the most instrumental in attracting and interacting with participants, as well as the utility of asking past fan event organizers, especially Korda, for advice (Anonymous #2, Interview, November 14, 2017). The first Steam Day in 2012 attracted only seven people, but in recent years approximately 35 people have participated. The organizer attributes the lower numbers of participants to the relative scarcity (not easily available at the mall) and intricacy of steampunk attire (though dressing up is not required to join the event) compared to the ease of being able to wear black on Bats Day or stylish clothing on Dapper Day.

As a former DJ and party coordinator, Mike Marquez has used the knowledge of his past professional experience to promote and stage numerous fan events at Disneyland every year including: Nerdy Day, Superhero Day, Haunted Mansion Fashion, GLOW Disneyland & Pajama Jam, Star Wars Day: Light vs. Dark, Awareness 4 Autism, Conga Line Day, Alive in Our Hearts (Awareness for Pregnancy and Infant Loss), Disney vs. Pixar, Pokemon Go 2, Date Nite Under the Starlight, Raver Day, and more, with each having an individual Facebook event profile while using no other platform for promotion.

Dapper Day (<http://dapperday.com/>) started in 2011 as an event dedicated to stylish fashion both vintage and modern so participation was accessible to anyone willing to dress up for a day in the park without Disneybounding or being costumed. Besides a marketplace in a Disneyland hotel ballroom that charges US\$10 for admission to access clothing sales, haircuts, and a few workshops, Dapper Day has no in-park events, meets, or group photos so intergroup sociability is limited compared to other events. It is simply a day for thousands of participants to see and be seen in voguish attire at Disneyland.

Scavenger hunts in Disneyland have always been popular with event organizers and participants from large groups such as Gay Days to small ones including Steam Day. One annual event that is entirely a scavenger hunt is MiceChat Gumball Rally, which fielded almost 400 participants in 150 teams for the 10th anniversary rally in 2018 (Figure 12). Although some fans come for events from other states and even abroad, most participants are locals and annual passholders (H. Ruszecki, Interview, October 11, 2017; Mike Marquez, Interview, October 16, 2017).



Figure 12: MiceChat Gumball Rally group photo on Big Thunder Trail at Disneyland. Center reclining in sunglasses and blue/white gingham shirt is Todd Regan, MiceChat CEO, February 2018; Photo: Author

Before social media, fans looking for an organized and consistent weekly group to enjoy the parks together had only a few options with MousePlanet, and then MiceChat, Sunday meets or through searching the community section of website discussion boards. However, for fans who had dissimilar interests or felt socially incongruous with members of the web boards, the new online social network platforms afforded a wide landscape to find park companions within all the new online groups. Social clubs started informally in the early 2010s, but from 2013 became better organized and well-known. The Facebook group the Social Clubs of Disneyland is a gateway for clubs to post information and recruit members. The group maintains a list (as of May 2019) of 138 social clubs that have their own logos, bylaws, and constitution. No club is added to the list without a club patch and a couple months of operation to demonstrate earnestness, though there are probably a hundred more social clubs that are not even listed on the Facebook group (Anonymous #6, Interview, November 6,

2017). With so many active clubs on tap, the group co-administrator believes there is a club for everyone no matter one's personality or social preferences (Anonymous #6, Interview, November 6, 2017). Members of social clubs are easy to spot in the park with their denim vest jackets and patches identifying an affiliation. Though referred to as punks and gangs in a feature article of *VICE* magazine (Van Meter, 2014), members in the online survey specified a sense of family and information exchange as their primary motivations for joining a social club. Besides MiceChat and social clubs for meets, the Disneyland Fan Club on meetup.com has over 5,000 members since being established in 2011. Though the club only meets officially at Disneyland on the second Sunday of every month, in addition to special events such as releases of new Disney films, members occasionally post messages and receive replies from others to enjoy an impromptu meet-up in the park.

Smartphones provided another way for fans to meet each other while in the park through the fan-developed MouseWait app, which was released in 2009 as a vehicle for crowdsourcing attraction wait times at Disneyland. Though not devised as a social tool by the app's developers, fans found a way through the app's lounge to interact while in the park, and plan meets and ride takeovers (Anonymous #3, Interview, October 29, 2017; Anonymous #8, Interview, October 29, 2017). Members identified themselves by printing their screen names on specially designed buttons rather than using their real names, with even the app owner known and referred to simply as "admin" (Anonymous #3, Interview, October 29, 2017; Anonymous #8, Interview, October 29, 2017). By wearing the button, one identified as a MouseWait member and could join up with anyone else in the park also wearing a MouseWait button. Ride takeovers would often comprise over 50 members after receiving word on the app only a few hours earlier. The group became so large that annual events were held in a ballroom at the Disneyland Hotel in the early 2010s (Anonymous #3, Interview,

October 29, 2017). In 2013 and 2014, the large MouseWait community began to splinter due to a rise in cliques, gossip, and personality conflicts that led some members to leave for the new, at the time, social clubs, while others simply closed ranks within a small personal group and no longer associated with other app users (Anonymous #8, Interview, October 29, 2017).

8.4 Fragmented fandom of myriad events, meets, and social clubs

From the survey, 62% of respondents have attended a fan-organized event or meet at Disneyland. Almost every weekend there is fan activity at the park with Dapper Day, Gay Days, Bats Day, and the MiceChat Anniversary Weekend ranking as the most popular in participation (Table 15). In the survey, fans recorded participation in 38 different events and meets at Disneyland, though there are at least a couple dozen more with Facebook groups. Survey participants learn about events and meets primarily from Facebook, followed well behind by word of mouth, web discussion boards, and event websites respectively (Table 16). However, Korda cautions that even though Facebook affords anyone the opportunity to create a group for an event, that does not mean it is easy for an event to attract a critical mass of participants, and be successful (N. Korda, Interview, November 22, 2017). Korda estimates that Bats Day attendance peaked in 2013 with stagnation and decline since that time due to the proliferation of fan organized activities in the park that have sapped event loyalty due to:

Short attention span theater, it's kind of like I'm getting bored with this event, what can I do now? Which event can I jump to? Because there's such a vast variety of these events out there now with these theme days. (N. Korda, Interview, November 22, 2017).

Galliday has run every spring and fall since 2014, with the first event attracting 200 people, snowballing to 1500 by 2015, but dipping back to 350 by Fall 2017, which McCain attributes

to event fatigue (A. McCain, Interview, October 31, 2017). With so many events and meets, in addition to social clubs, attracting participants has become more challenging.

Fan organized events and meets ever attended at Disneyland	
Dapper Day	75%
Gay Days	46
Bats Day	27
MiceChat Anniversary Weekend	17
MiceChat Gumball Rally	13
MiceChat Sunday hub meet	11
Harry Potter Day	11
Steam Day	8
Galliday	7
Meetup.com Disneyland Fan Club meet	6
Lolita Day	5
Mouse Adventure	4
Ska World	4
Tiki Day	4
Glow	2
Home-schooling meet	2
Star Wars (fan event)	1
Pin-up Day	1
MouseWait meets	1
Haunted Mansion Fashion	0.6
Awareness 4 Autism	0.6
Disney Addicts	0.6
17 other events or meets	< 0.5

Table 15: Fan organized events or meets attended by fans who have attended at least one in the past at Disneyland (n=393)

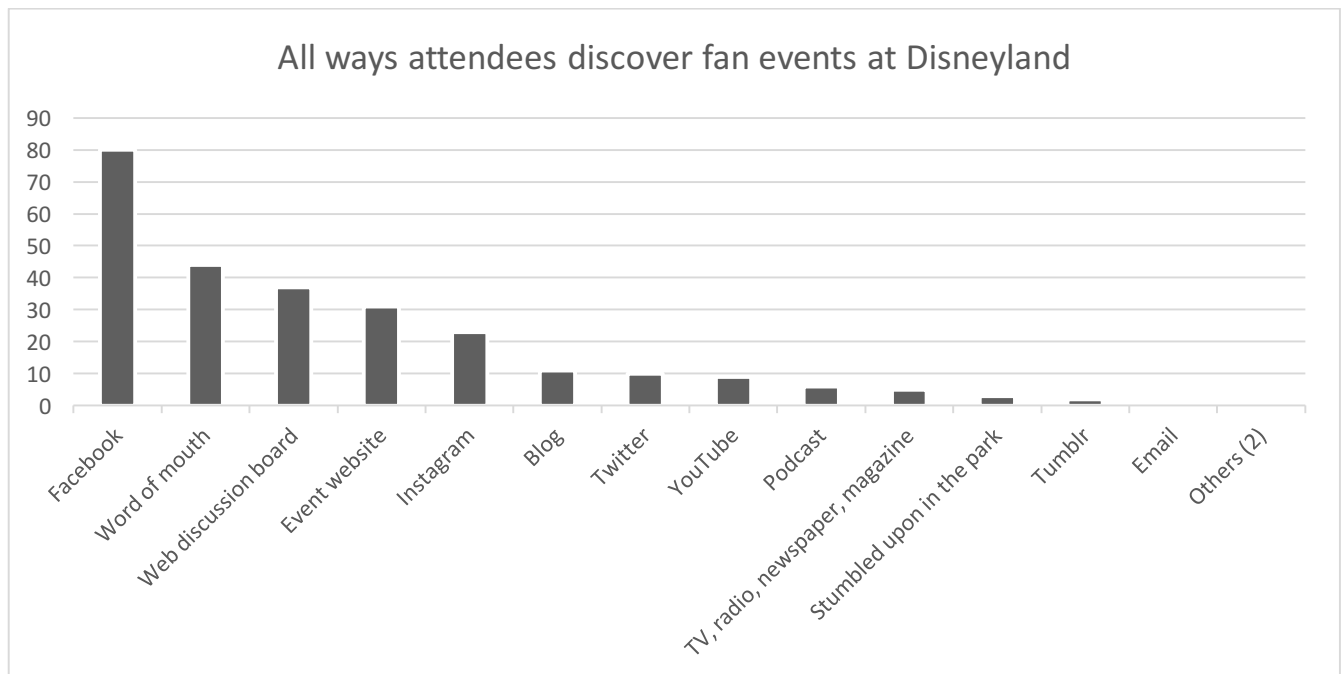


Table 16: All ways attendees discover fan events at Disneyland (n=393)

Of survey respondents, 22% claimed current membership in a social club. Of these, most, 73%, joined a club from 2014 onward. A large majority, 69%, used Facebook as their primary online platform for social club organization and communication (Table 17). As to why social clubs became popular, displacing older and larger meet groups, the co-administrator of the Social Clubs of Disneyland Facebook group said:

I think that a lot of little groups instead of one giant group where you get lost kind of in it, the little ones are better because you get to know the people more one on one. If you have a giant group, you don't get that personal one on one closeness of knowing everyone as much. So, I think that's why it started breaking off into smaller groups. So I know that's why my group, we have to keep it small because we liked the one on one, get to know them, so we meet every Sunday... so most of them, about four or five of them, come every Sunday, and then the other ones that work here (at Disneyland), they'll do it before work to come and then go to work afterwards.

(Anonymous #6, Interview, November 6, 2017)

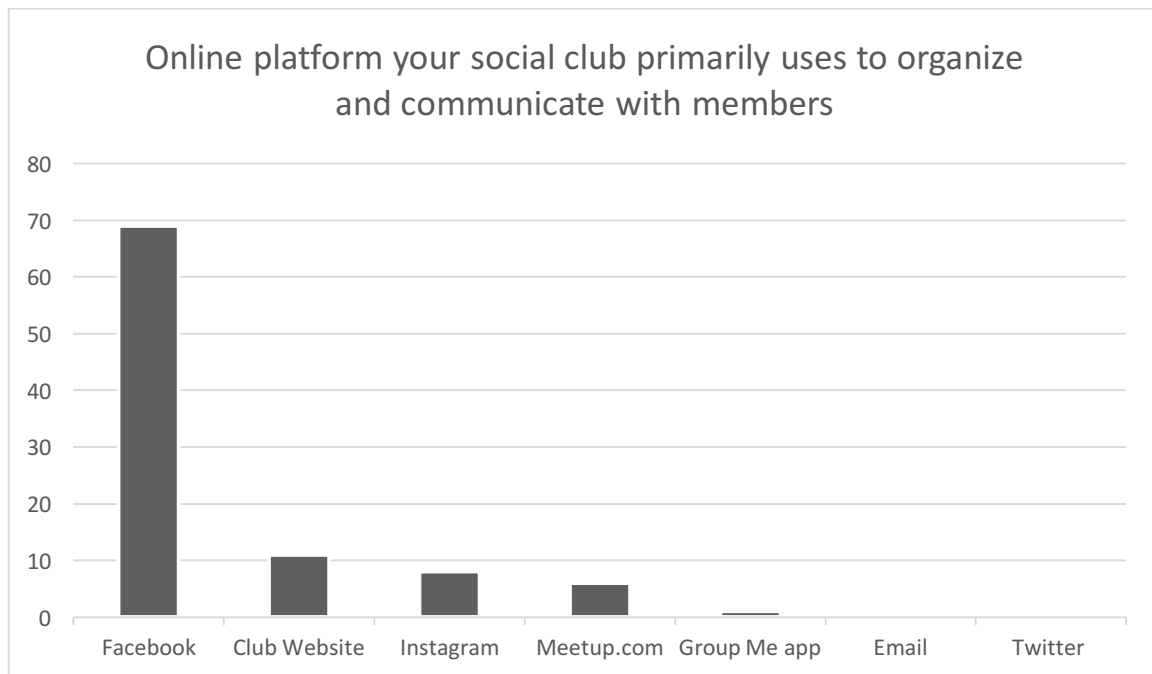


Table 17: Online platform your social club primarily uses to organize and communicate with members (n=142).

The smallest social clubs have become as tiny as only two members (Anonymous #8, Interview, October 29, 2017; Lam, 2014). The largest social club, Main Street Elite, had hundreds of members but disbanded due to the complications of managing such a large group of different personalities (Anonymous #8, Interview, October 29, 2017; Lam, 2014).

Memberships in large groups tend to be less tightly connected, and therefore fracture more easily (Shirky, 2008). Many social clubs meet on Sunday not only due to weekday work schedules but also because lower-tier APs are not blocked on Sundays. New recruits prospect with different social clubs before settling into one for a couple weeks. Then members of the club take a vote to admit or deny the newcomer (Anonymous #6, Interview, November 6, 2017). One former social club member compared the process to rushing a university fraternity or sorority (Anonymous #8, Interview, October 29, 2017). The co-administrator of the Facebook group acknowledged that social clubs are sometimes stigmatized as gangs by other Disneyland fans, but contends the clubs are predominantly composed of Disney nerds similar to other visitors in the park (Anonymous #6, Interview, November 6, 2017).

Nevertheless, some regular park visitors feel uneasy with the clubs after hearing stories of disruptive initiation rites, theft of attraction decorations, line-cutting, disability-assistance abuse, drug use, or altercations between rival clubs over park turf (Anonymous #1, Interview, October 17, 2017; Lam, 2014). Other fans feel Disneyland itself is the show, so club members with their custom attire, as well as black-clad Bats Day goths and Disneybounders, are perceived as detracting from a magical Disney park experience. With such a large number and broad range of clubs, generalizing any traits would be suspect except to say the huge amount of clubs overall has made sustaining a big all-encompassing club seemingly impossible.

Besides the denim vest clad social clubs, there are social cliques that maintain Facebook groups with exclusive membership such as the Disneyland bride communities consisting of women, and a few men, planning weddings at the park. To gain admittance to the group, a prospective bride must show a signed Disney wedding contract, answer a questionnaire to prove a relationship with Disney, and provide the specific venue and date for the nuptials (Anonymous #7, Interview, October 27, 2017). After admittance, the new member must interact with the group to a certain posting threshold or risk being booted. The bride group with the strictest admission protocol had 119 members as of October 2017. The members take the Disney bride identity earnestly with special group shirts and Minnie ears, along with occasional meets in the park and an annual charity event (Anonymous #7, Interview, October 27, 2017).

Korda believes with so many events and meets in the park all attempting to outdo one another that a shakeout is inevitable as well as a possible crackdown by Disney (N. Korda, Interview, November 22, 2017). Regan laments that the incessant proliferation of groups and events has

led to the fragmentation of a Disneyland fan community that he once tried to unite (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). Since most social clubs and meets, as well as events, are scheduled on Sundays, fans reported feeling somewhat compelled to choose one group for consistent weekly participation to avoid the perception of being seen as a social dilettante, which therefore narrows the opportunity to explore other social groups. However, the much greater choice in fan organized events, clubs, and meets afforded by social network platforms, particularly Facebook, has meant greater opportunity for each fan to find the group(s) that suits social needs and desires.

8.5 Market pressures on fan labor

Although creating a Facebook group for an event is free, putting together a successful event in Disneyland can take a lot of time and cost money. McCain says Galliday is a huge amount of work, so she feels fortunate to have volunteer assistants who create event buttons, answer questions, and direct crowds (A. McCain, Interview, October 31, 2017). As for monetary compensation from the event, McCain says she gets “nothing out of it other than saying, ‘hey, I did this’” (A. McCain, Interview, October 31, 2017). The Steam Day organizer sees the trade-off as losing money but gaining friends and building a community (Anonymous #2, Interview, November 14, 2017). While fan organizers possess cultural capital as leaders within the fandom, and social capital from cultivating a network of fans year after year, most derive no economic value. Only events that draw over 10,000 participants are able to generate significant economic value for the fan organizers by attracting major sponsors such as the venerable clothier Brooks Brothers for Dapper Day, and Delta Airlines for Gay Days. These corporate sponsors, as well as ticketed evening parties in non-Disney venues, financially enable the event organizers to rent ballrooms at the Disneyland resort hotels for marketplaces, seminars, and information centers. After Dapper Day in 2017 started to charge

a US\$10 entrance fee to its previously open marketplace, fans complained about overt monetization (Anonymous #8, Interview, October 29, 2017). Some think Korda gets rich from Bats Day without understanding event costs such as the need to pay Disney to be allowed to take group photos of over 50 people in front of Sleeping Beauty Castle or the Haunted Mansion (N. Korda, Interview, November 22, 2017). Korda recalled even being chastised on web discussion boards in 2006 for splurging on a “batsday” vanity license plate for his car (N. Korda, Interview, November 22, 2017). The Black Market, the Bats Day marketplace, charges US\$5 for early entrance. Korda is always stunned that some fans wait outside until the minute after the paid entrance window closes in order to avoid the small fee that helps pay for the venue. Regan thinks most fans know he does not make a profit from the MiceChat website or events (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). At events, Regan does not charge authors of Disney-related books to set up a sales table even though he pays for the venue. Events with narrower and less commercially viable themes, such as Dr. Who, steampunk, or harajuku fashion, are unable to attract sponsors or vendors to rent a ballroom or set up a marketplace at a hotel. As an organizer of many fan events, Marquez believes Disney should embrace organizers since the events bring additional people and revenue into the parks (M. Marquez, Interview, October 16, 2017). Marquez cites Glow Days, which encourages fans to buy Disney glow sticks for a night of luminous play at the park, as one of his most popular annual fan events presumably generating Disney extra revenue from glow stick sales that weekend. Indeed, all event organizers commented that Disney must enjoy the money their event participants bring into the park. The social capital of fan event organizers is transformed into economic capital for Disney.

8.6 From a few to a multitude via online social platforms

Whereas early online social platforms afforded the creation of only a limited number of events and meets at Disneyland, the nature of social network platforms enabled a tremendous increase in social formations in the park. Facebook groups and Messenger have been key for new fan organizers to start, develop, and facilitate their event dreams into reality at the park. Social club members, in particular, reported feeling ill-suited socially within the limited number of meets and events of the previous platform era, and appreciated the extensive choice of Disneyland social groups afforded in the new era afforded by Facebook. For many fans, Facebook was their first platform to ever connect online with other Disneyland fans as reported by 57% of survey respondents, while web discussion boards were 21% and Usenet newsgroups were only 3%. Overall, 70% of respondents felt that online social platforms had a positive effect on their experience in the park. The standardized presentation of profiles, content and discussions on Facebook meant long-time prolific posters on older platforms could no longer showcase their plumage of distinctive avatars, signature files, and status badges to wag at intimidated newcomers. Likewise, Facebook group administrators possess scarce digital plumage to reward regulars so loyalty to a specific group became less important as fans could simply shuttle among a multitude of groups for any reason. Facebook democratized shared interest group creation by establishing a simple, fast, free, and uniform process with access to the largest potential audience of any online platform. Every fan could now discover a multitude of groups online, go to the park to meet and hang out with different groups, and eventually settle on the most suitable one(s) to meet up with regularly.

On a micro level, individuals went from a paucity of choice in online social groups and events, meets, and clubs in the park during the 1990s and 2000s to a panoply in the 2010s. On a macro level, the organizers of events and meets during the first two decades of online

platforms enjoyed cultural capital as an elite few fans who accrued social capital by connecting many people in the park. Their cultural and social capital has subsequently been diluted by the entrance of a multitude of new fan event, meet, and club organizers, who have often been younger, more technologically nimble, and empowered by the low transaction costs of social network platforms (Table 18). Influencers emerged as a new kind of exceptional fan with considerable cultural capital but unable to connect people socially in the park due to restrictions by Disney park operations as discussed in the next chapter.

	Usenet Newsgroups	Web Discussion Boards	Facebook (Social Network Platforms)
Events and Meets	Very Few (less than 6)	Few (less than 12)	Many (50+)
Social Clubs	None	None	Many (200+)
Fan Organizers	Few	Few	Many
New Group Transaction Costs	High	High	Low

Table 18: Proliferation of events, meets, clubs, and fan organizers at Disneyland, and the transaction costs of establishing new newsgroups, web discussion boards, and Facebook groups on the three major online social platforms of the last 30 years.

“To harness the productive activities of amateurs” within a social network market, video game companies design and shape their product to encourage gamers to create and share gameplay elements that profit the company while potentially displacing paid labor and reducing costs (Banks & Humphreys, 2008, p. 415). However, Disneyland was never designed and shaped with fan production in mind until very recently with small-scale additions such as Instagram-worthy walls, merchandise, food, and beverages. The productive activities undertaken by fans in the park have often caught Disney by surprise. Media companies prefer to set the terms of participation for fans, and sometimes perceive fan production as a threat to their creative and economic control (Jenkins, 2013). Fans are inherently difficult to control as they organize events, meets, and clubs for in-park play and

social experiences that Disney has so far been unable or unwilling to offer. Yet these fan organized activities in the park have not displaced economic value that would have normally accrued to Disney and, instead, have actually benefited the company with increased attendance, and food, beverage, and merchandise sales. The next chapter discusses Disney's evolving tactics to control fans, including the proliferation of fan organized activities in Disneyland during the last decade.

Chapter 9: The Fluctuation of Disney and Fan Power 1990-2019

Efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control have often been cited as hallmarks of Disney theme park operations (Bryman, 2004; Cross & Walton, 2005; Wasko, 2001). Disneyland was designed and constructed in the 1950s under the assumption of only occasional visits by locals with no notion of fan organized events, clubs, and meets in the park. However, the last three chapters illustrated that online social platforms from the 1990s to 2010s played a significant role in transforming the relationship between fans and the Disney corporation online and in the park. While Disney owns the Disneyland and DCA theme parks, the 78,000 visitors who pass through the gates on an average day often have their own ideas, motivations, and practices once inside. As discussed in Chapter 6, Usenet and early web discussion boards allowed fans to organize and protest Disney policies with a united voice online but only a limited number of fan organized activities emerged in the park. In Chapters 7 and 8, social network platforms led to a fragmentation of fan groups online that facilitated the creation of a multitude of events, meets, and clubs in the park, but fragmented the fan voice online into ever thinner slices often divided by generation. This chapter uses Foucault's concept of power-knowledge to analyze the 30-year fluctuation of Disney and fan power online and in the park.

9.1 Foucault on power-knowledge

Foucault (1991) takes a genealogical approach to power as being in continuous flux and negotiation, and not a deterministic system of constraints. Power is omnipresent, and exercised at every level of the social body, not just the higher echelons. Power is diffused, not concentrated, discursive rather than coercive, and constitutes agents rather than being wielded by them. Power is relational with an unstable network of practices, techniques, and procedures that necessarily generate resistance. Power is not centralized with an owner or

location, and neither is resistance. Power is not a commodity that is “acquired, seized or shared, something one holds on to or allows to slip away” (Foucault, 1981, p. 94). Power for Foucault is “more like an environment in which practices were enabled and inhibited: practices which, by being conducted, contribute to power” (Prado, p. 142). Power can be productive and positive, and not necessarily repressive and negative. There is no resolution but rather the creation of a new constellation of power relations.

Foucault identifies a shift from the sovereign, or juridical, power of top-down forms of social control with physical coercion to the disciplinary, or capillary, power of diffused social surveillance. Normalization is a process accomplished through the organization of space and/or time impacting behavior and activity (Foucault, 1980). People discipline themselves without overt coercion. To exemplify disciplinary power, Foucault adapts Bentham’s proposed 18th century prison structure of the Panopticon as a metaphor for the processes of disciplinary technologies that can assume a totality of control over an individual’s behavior and body. Disciplinary institutions include the enclosed spaces of hospitals, asylums, schools, prisons, and army barracks that eventually spread their mechanisms to all of society. The discipline of internalized surveillance is self-regulating, thus replacing physical repression in effectiveness. Rather than the top-down system of sovereign power, everyone participates and reproduces knowledge through everyday actions and perceptions that are in constant flux. Conduct is perceived and internalized by others in their own situations to become normalized and embodied in cultural norms as a new discourse. Power constitutes accepted forms of knowledge and “truth” as produced by discourse and institutions, and reinforced by the media, educational systems, and shifting ideologies. Power produces reality and cultural norms with associated social discipline and conformity. Since power and knowledge are then inherently integrated, Foucault coins the concept as power-knowledge.

As examined in the preceding chapters, the flow of power through early online social platforms benefited fans who, in Chapter 6, constructed knowledge through discourse on Usenet and DIG to protest against Disney regarding Disneyland and corporate management. In Chapter 7, local fans used online social network platforms to form a discourse building a conducive environment online and in the park for the development of a multitude of events, meets, and clubs. This chapter shows that Disney has seldom used coercive power against Disneyland fans in Southern California. And when used, the results have been generally ineffective. Instead, Disney steadily determined how to shape online discourse using the nature of new social platforms, as well as the gradual co-option of fan practices, media, and activities, to construct a knowledge environment that precipitated the fan internalization of company authority in all regards except, for now, fan organized activities in the park.

9.2 The 1990s: Disney power in the park and fan power online

Similar to other media companies in the 1990s, Disney initially tried coercive power online by sending fans cease-and-desist letters to combat copyright infringement. However, targeting intellectual property violations did nothing to abate the rapid rise in fan criticism of Disney in online forums. Disney was caught flat-footed by a 1990s online social landscape that established a united fan voice to protest company actions and plans. There was no way to buy a Usenet newsgroup to silence a community, and there were so many posters, often using pseudonymous handles, that attempting to co-opt the burgeoning number of online critics was impracticable. Disney tried to counteract the negative online discourse about Light Magic by turning to the legacy media tactic of running television and radio ads with purportedly real park visitors singing the praises of the new parade (K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017). However, the old-fashioned advertising campaign failed to stem the negative chatter online.

In response, as a preventive measure, Disney ceased AP preview events for a time after the Light Magic debacle due to fear of instant post-event backlashes on the Internet (K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017). “Light Tragic” became a galvanizing force for online Disneyland fans who built a new discourse on Usenet as a platform outside Disney’s control to challenge the company. In the 1990s, Disney faced organized protest online from newly empowered fans able to disrupt and offset Disney’s long-established media marketing campaign strategies.

Within the park, Disney had to deal with two new issues in the 1990s. First, Disney had to devise a policy to govern cast members who criticized or commented about their employer online. Ken Pellman wrote regularly on BBSes under his real name while working in Disneyland as an 18-year-old cast member. After someone printed out and submitted his online posts to park security, he was called to an office with managers several rungs up the ladder to be given a stern lecture even though he had not written anything confidential or damaging to the company (K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017). Disney used coercive power to impose strict rules forbidding cast members from identifying as company employees when posting online or ever writing anything negative about Disney or Disneyland. However, Pellman was only caught due to attaching his real name to the posts. Since deindividuation was an accepted practice of early online social platforms, cast members could easily work around the posting policy by using a handle. In addition, Disney could not prevent annual passholders from writing criticism of the company online. Since many Usenet users posted using handles, linking posts to the real names of AP holders was unfeasible. In addition, revoking APs and banning local fans from the park for voicing criticism online of the company would have likely led to a public relations fiasco. Since coercive power proved ineffectual in quelling fan protest online, Disney in the following

decades adopted subtler techniques to realize disciplinary power through the shaping of online discourse.

Of the first two fan-organized events at Disneyland, only Gay Days had such a large number of participants as to be noticed immediately by park operations. Though Disney took an approach of benign neglect to Gay Days by calling the event unofficial with no listing on the park calendar (as fan organized activities are still considered unofficial today), park management offered refunds in the early years to any visitor who complained about sharing the park with the LGBTQ community. For Bats Day, Korda recalls that Disney was unaware an event was taking place in the park for the first five years, even when scores of participants wearing all black posed for photos in front of the Haunted Mansion. Since fan-organized events were novel at the time, no discourse had yet been established of whom to contact among local fans for guidance on whether and how to work with Disney. In the early years Korda wondered if the event would be terminated by security if discovered by Disney. Outside of Gay Days and Bats Day, there were no other themed fan-organized events in the 1990s because nobody knew whether Disney would grant permission, there were no precedents to abide and a lack of awareness of existing fan events, and the time, effort, and expense of marketing and staging a successful event were daunting. In the 1990s, Gay Days and Bats Day primarily marketed through traditional means such as word of mouth, posting fliers in clubs, and ads in print periodicals. Further under Disney's radar in small groups, fans started to use early online social platforms to organize a few scavenger hunts and meets in the park that would serve as a portent of the surge in small-scale events, meets, and clubs to come later. Besides Gay Days, fan events and meets in the 1990s were so few in number and small in size that Disney hardly noticed, if at all.

9.3 The 2000s: Disney power in the park and online

After the acrimony between Disney and fans during the Eisner/Pressler era, Bob Iger's ascension as CEO allowed a reboot of the company's relationship with online fans who were drained from the continuous decade-long protest against the former Disney management team. The 2000s also saw the migration of fans to web discussion boards as Usenet activity steeply declined. Disney no longer needed to deal with the many denizens of an ungoverned, unowned, and contentious alt.disney.disneyland newsgroup, and instead could focus on a few web discussion boards that were owned and governed by only a small number of fans. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Disney viewed online fans warily. At press events, Disney invited print and broadcast journalists, but no representatives from Internet-only sites, thus essentially abandoning online discourse about the park to fans. However, Disney eventually realized that working with fan websites could lead to a mutually amenable, and even profitable, relationship. When a print journalist was unable to attend a Disney press event in the early-2000s, the reporter asked Laughing Place's Moseley to replace him and cover the function. At the event, Moseley met Disney public relations managers who knew little of online fan media, but started to invite him to future park events as probably the first Internet-only venue on Disney's press list (D. Moseley, Interview, November 30, 2017). Disney, perhaps unknowingly, was taking its first step toward reshaping online discourse about the park. Thereafter, Moseley felt Laughing Place was treated the same as any other traditional news outlet with Disney paying attention that he got the right camera shots and interviews. Moseley already possessed a great deal of social capital with online fans through his website, but invitations to Disney events provided Moseley with additional social value by meeting and making connections with Legends and Imagineers, and developing many long-lasting friendships (D. Moseley, Interview, November 30, 2017).

As an echo of the 1950s payola practice reimagined for the Internet era, Disney offered access to special events, such as press screeners of new Disney films or park attractions, to proprietors of popular Disneyland fan websites in exchange for positive reviews online. In addition, bloggers who were not Disney or Disneyland-focused, and instead appealed to more general audiences such as mothers and young families, themed entertainment, travel and tourism, and youth and teen culture, were given access to Disney press events since the bloggers were excited to receive the perks of working with Disney, and gladly provided positive coverage in return online. Fan sites generally obliged Disney's wishes for fear of losing a lucrative relationship that provided early access to great content for their audience, while Disney benefited from a reshaped online discourse about the company and park. The negativity of Usenet users changed to the positivity of website owners and bloggers. Disney enjoyed distributing information through fan owned sites with seemingly authentic fan voices because the company had not yet figured out how to communicate directly and effectively with fans online (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). MiceAge and MiceChat declined Disney's access model to remain critical voices of Disneyland's shortcomings, and hence Regan often found himself not invited to Disneyland press events (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). Disney attempted to use astroturfing techniques on the MiceChat boards to fabricate a more positive discourse but moderators publicly exposed the deceptive posters after tracing the IP addresses to the Team Disney Anaheim building behind Disneyland (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). MiceChat's critical perspective has been so notorious that when Regan has proclaimed genuine affection for a new Disneyland attraction, some fans accuse him of being a sellout to Disney (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). Nevertheless, the fan migration away from Usenet to web discussion boards enabled Disney to establish a quid pro quo of providing access to company events for

positive coverage by the small number of Disneyland fan site owners. Disney could then, for the most part, control online discourse.

By the fifth year of Bats Day in 2003, as hundreds of black-clad goths squeezed in front of the Haunted Mansion for a group photo, Korda realized he could soon encounter trouble with Disney. A cast member approached him to suggest contacting park management to help with coordination. Though Korda previously worried about approaching Disney for fear the event could be shut down, he was pleasantly surprised when management offered help getting the photos he needed. Disney also provided Korda with liberal guidelines for acceptable goth fashion in the park as long as participants did not cosplay Disney characters, carry real or fake weapons, or wear costume accoutrements that could snag, injure, or interfere with the mobility of other park visitors. Korda credits Bats Day for paving the way for Disneyland to adopt a fan-friendly approach in regard to the fashion requirements of future events (i.e. Steam Day, Lolita Day, etc.) and Disneybounding (N. Korda, Interview, November 22, 2017). Disney used the opportunity to set the rules of practices and procedures for fan event organizers to follow in an attempt at normalizing the few fan activities in the park. The number of fan organized events at the time remained limited due to the high transaction costs of establishing fan websites and the difficulty of in-park organizing in an era before social network platforms and smartphones.

By enticing most website owners and bloggers with privileged status as a form of cultural capital that built social capital with fans, Disney was able to reshape, in large measure, online discourse to establish control of a fandom that Disney had observed at the beginning of the 2000s as a nuisance and threat. The few event organizers internalized Disney's rules of engagement with the park. However, this brief period of ascendant Disney power online and

in the park would dramatically change with the rise of social network platforms in the next decade.

9.4 The 2010s

9.4.1 *Disney power online by co-opting social media influencers*

Laughing Place's Moseley marvels at Disney's turnaround from issuing press event invites exclusively to print and broadcast journalists to today's outright embrace of fan website reporters and social media influencers (D. Moseley, Interview, November 30, 2017).

MiceChat's Regan estimates that nearly 90% of invited guests at the Disneyland and Universal Studios press events he attended in 2017 were Internet-only outlets and primarily social media influencers. Some had less than 5,000 followers or subscribers to their accounts, but the theme parks perceive influencers as one of the best ways to reach a large young audience. While the ad-sponsored YouTube videos of content creators in Disneyland violate Disney's rule against commercial filming in the park, Disney has not curtailed the practice presumably because the videos provide free advertising of the park's food, beverages, shows, and attractions. Unlike early fan website owners such as Lutz, Regan, and Moseley, many young influencers see a social media presence as a stepping stone to getting noticed by Disney for a full-time position within the company (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017). And since the goal is a job with Disney, the influencers shy away from any negative criticism and accentuate the positive of the company on their social media accounts:

I'm not down to fight about things like the Tower of Terror getting rethemed (to *Guardians of the Galaxy*) because at the end of the day it's going to happen anyway. It's not worth having bad blood with Disney if I'm hoping to become employed by them someday. (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017)

The young influencers defer to Disney's brand authority to make changes in the park thus shaping the online discourse by setting norms, especially for their young followers, on the company's terms. The influencers work not only with Disneyland, but also other Disney departments including the studios, animation, interactive, and consumer products (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017) as a leveraging of the conglomerate's diverse media assets. Rather than using established YouTube content creators with millions of subscribers, Disney has recruited young social media influencers with only tens of thousands of subscribers but an "authentic" fan voice showcasing Disney-centric content (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017). Many brands now focus on micro-influencers with 50,000 to 250,000 followers, or even nanoinfluencers with only thousands of followers, in order to tailor messages to niche groups (Maheshwari, 2018; Melas, 2018). Disney is willing to recruit influencers with sizable young audiences even if they previously violated company copyrights on YouTube. Todrick Hall, a former cast member, had posted provocative parodies of famous Disney songs but the company hired him anyway to be the mentor of the new Mickey Mouse Club (Anonymous #5, Interview, November 17, 2017; Seemayer, 2017). To cultivate and profit from social media influencers, Disney in 2014 purchased Maker Studios, one of the biggest multi-channel YouTube networks at the time, in Southern California for US\$500 million. When purchased, Maker Studios represented approximately 55,000 YouTube creators whose content received over 5.5 billion views from 380 million subscribers (Barnes, 2014). However, lower than expected revenue growth and persistent unprofitability prompted Disney in 2017 to cut jobs at Maker Studios, scale the roster back to only 300 content creators, and absorb the remnants into the Disney Digital Network, which works with influencers across Disney's various business units (Ingram, 2017).

Disney originally had strict rules prohibiting identifiable cast members from discussing Disneyland on online platforms, even in a positive manner, until the policy changed in the early 2010s with social network platforms (Anonymous #7, Interview, October 27, 2017; K. Pellman, Interview, October 21, 2017). According to Disney's Employee Policy Manual, posting on social media about the park is permitted except speaking on behalf of the company, disclosing confidential information, or photos of any backstage area privy only to cast members or that reveal the personal identity of costumed characters such as Mickey Mouse, Maleficent, etc. (Pedicini, 2015; The Walt Disney Company, 2016). Disney recognized that young, social media savvy cast members could be an asset in promoting online the company's products. Some of the most popular Disney-centric influencers worked or currently work as cast members. Sarah Sterling has posted YouTube videos discussing her two years as a cast member, and Francis Dominic was a cast member until late 2017 (influencer statistics in Table 10). A co-host of the Magic Journeys YouTube channel (75,600 subscribers), which is dedicated to the enjoyment of Disneyland dining, works in the park as a server in the exclusive members-only Club 33 restaurant but does not reveal the Disney employment on the channel. Disneyland food and beverages showcased on the channel are customarily proclaimed delicious. According to one popular influencer, Disney is fine with cast members having an active social media presence focused on Disneyland as long as everything is "professional and very civil" (Anonymous #9, Interview, November 16, 2017). However, cast member influencers cannot allow followers and subscribers to disrupt their job duties at the park by, for example, taking selfies if approached (Anonymous #8, Interview, October 29, 2017). Some influencers are transparent about their Disney employment, past or current, but others are not candid about their relationship with the company thus leading to issues of ethical disclosure and conflict of interest. Employing influencers as cast members gives Disney significant leverage, implicit or otherwise, over their content since the cast

member influencers are dependent on the company for their everyday jobs, which often do not pay enough for basic living expenses in Southern California (Martin, 2018). For the influencers who are not current cast members, their aspiration to work for Disney also provides the company with significant implicit leverage in ensuring positive coverage. Since the influencers of their own accord already upload plenty of positive Disneyland content, Disney provides access to other sections of the corporation beyond the theme park so influencers can create positive content about all facets of brand Disney (Figure 13). This access by Disney allows influencers to accrue the cultural capital necessary to increase the number of subscribers and followers to their social media accounts. Influencer social capital then becomes economic value for Disney in the form of ticket, food, beverage, and merchandise sales across all the company's divisions due to enthusiastically positive exposure on influencer accounts.



Figure 13: Screenshot of Instagram account of Leo Camacho (@mrleozombie) at Pixar Studios promoting the release of the *Incredibles 2* film in partnership with Disney Digital Network, May 2018.

Influencers can also knowingly, or not, start a sensation around a Disney consumer product. An Instagram post of a popular influencer wearing a rose gold Disneyland spirit jersey helped the park to sell out the shirt the following weekend, get restocked the week after, and then sell out again (Anonymous #7, Interview, October 27, 2017; Anonymous #8, Interview, October 29, 2017). Rose gold became such a hit that Disney marketed products from Minnie Mouse ears to churros in the suddenly vogue color. Regan believes new attractions, food, beverages, and park designs are now crafted by Imagineers with consideration paid to Instagram worthiness (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). Martens (2019), who covers Disneyland for the *Los Angeles Times*, reported that the new Star Wars land was designed to be an “Instagrammer’s paradise”, with the lounge area of the walk-through Millennium Falcon featuring the famous chess table. Themed entertainment industry observer Niles contends, “Disney (and other theme parks) design their food as much for Instagram as for customer's taste buds these days” (Niles, 2019a). A MiceChat review reveals a potential problem when Disney creates Instagram-worthy food:

Captain Marvel also has some of her own special food offerings. The items are colorful. Lots of red and blue food coloring. Unfortunately, sometimes food meant for Instagram isn’t always the best tasting. Now that we have photos of these items, we likely won’t buy them again. (Villamor, 2019)

In April 2019, Disney opened a Mickey Mouse museum optimized for Instagram photo-taking as a separate ticketed attraction in the Downtown Disney district (Niles, 2019b). The power and influence of the Instagram platform means Disneyland’s optics must be regularly updated by Imagineering since influencers and everyday visitors constantly hope to upload images of something new, interesting, or cool in the park. Disney obliges with frequent menu changes at park restaurants, seasonal food and beverage festivals, holiday decorations, film

studio promotions, redesigned walls, and temporary attraction overlays for Halloween and Christmas in order to maximize exposure on Instagram and other social media platforms all year round.

The relationship between the influencers and Disney is a quid pro quo where influencers gain access, prestige, and content by attending special events and trips to Disney parks and properties around the world, while the company receives enthusiastic, positive coverage from youthful influencer voices that establish Disney's preferred norms of discourse to their young followers and subscribers on social network platforms. However, there are two provisos to note in these relationships of unequals. First, influencers need Disney much more than Disney needs any particular influencer. Without access to Disney's cultural capital, influencers might lack access to enough compelling content on their own to attract and hold many subscribers and followers. Any individual can be replaced by Disney with a bevy of young budding influencers eager for opportunities with the company. This tacit internalization of disciplinary power by influencers ensures an online discourse normalized to praise all things Disney. Second, the relationship between influencers and their followers is also one-way since the cultivation of cultural capital on platforms such as Instagram necessitates scaling a large audience without reciprocation. Influencers accrue social capital, but their followers do not. While fans in a general sense provide direct economic value to a media company by watching, listening, or attending, and purchasing primary or secondary products, the influencers provide the coveted indirect economic value of endorsing, sharing, and recommending that helps recruit and retain audiences that sustain and proselytize a media property and company (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013).

For fans who enjoy the social aspect of park events and meets, there is disappointment in the preoccupation of some fans with influencers:

“Where everything's heading right now instead of people coming together as a community, there's the outliers that are making money off of this stuff moving away from, ‘hey, let's hang out, let's do fun things,’ to look at what this guy was able to do because he has who knows how many followers and social media stuff.” (Anonymous #3, Interview, October 29, 2017)

Social capital is therefore being cultivated for economic value, not for organizing fan social activities in the park. Regan believes a cult of personality has developed around the influencers, but this grip will ultimately dissipate as the young audience discovers that influencers essentially parrot the same unremittingly positive coverage as found on Disney’s official social media accounts (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). This assertion is seemingly supported by fan studies research that points to transparency and authenticity as important fan values that favor social motivations over commercial ones (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). However, this contention assumes young fans will eventually seek the sort of Disney critique that MiceChat has traditionally offered. As influencers set the conventions of the discourse, young fans might wish to continue throughout their lives basking in the positivity and reassurance of Disneyland as a special local place of palliative escape from real life troubles. Indeed, one of the many Facebook groups devoted to the park is called “Disneyland and Positivity” with over 5,600 followers. When asked about implicit pressure to post only positive coverage, influencers said there really was none because their love and passion for the park and company displayed on their social media accounts was entirely genuine and heartfelt (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017; Anonymous #9, Interview, November 16, 2017). A regime of truth that posits Disney can do no wrong allows the company to control the influencers, who in turn influence young fans.

As for Disney's approach to a long-time fan website such as MiceChat in the social media era, some company departments reach out to procure news coverage, but others still balk due to a need for control and a fear of negative stories (T. Regan, Interview, November 28 2017). MiceChat has been caught in a Catch-22 with a reputation as a Disney watchdog that causes the company to distrust the site to do positive stories if provided advance access, while fans complain about selling out to Disney if the site posts news derived from press releases or reviews without critical commentary. In addition, when Regan takes a heartfelt stand at odds with many traditionalist fans, such as supporting Disney's 2017 decision to replace the bride auction scene in the Pirates of the Caribbean attraction, he reports receiving vituperation up to and including death threats (T. Regan Interview, November 28, 2017). However, by mid-2018, Regan apparently relented by attending and posting videos on MiceChat from early access press events for new park offerings at Disneyland. His reviews from the events have been positive, thus prompting some MiceChat members to grumble about selling out to Disney. In fairness to Regan, standing alone as a Disney watchdog has been a daunting, lonely, and unprofitable stance. Even the *Los Angeles Times*, the fourth largest circulation daily newspaper in the US and largest outside the East Coast, was subjected to a short-term Disney news and advertising blackout after Disney said an investigative news article on the company's allegedly shady political and business ties with the city of Anaheim "showed a complete disregard for basic journalistic standards" (Chmlelewski & Patten, 2017). The *Orange County Register* came to Disney's defense against its cross-county rival calling the *Times* news story a "hit piece" with a "seemingly pre-determined narrative" (Chmlelewski & Patten, 2017). Disney is sending a clear message to press outlets, fan or legacy, that unflattering coverage of the company will result in not being invited to early access park events that can generate a lot of website and social media traffic, such as the much-

anticipated openings of Star Wars land in 2019 and Marvel land in 2020. According to a *New York Times* article on the Disney blackout:

Disney has a history of taking punitive action against news organizations and analysts when they publish articles or analysis that it deems unfair. Company representatives consistently tell journalists that the media's access to its films and executives is "a privilege and not a right". (Ember & Barnes, 2017)

While the *Los Angeles Times* and MiceChat straddle a precarious fence between coverage and criticism, influencers need only post flattering coverage that pleases Disney and meets the expectations of young fans while not needing to pay heed to criticism leveled by older traditionalist fans and newspaper readers. Disney has constructed an approving online discourse about the brand, park, and company by producing an internalized discipline among social media influencers and fan website owners to "authentically" tout whatever the company needs to promote or risk losing access and perks.

9.4.2 Fandom fragmentation online and in the park

During the 2010s, the fan voice fragmented into a large number of Disneyland fan groups on Facebook and other social network platforms. The low transaction costs of starting a group on Facebook also facilitated the creation of a multitude of new fan organized events, meets, and clubs that resisted Disney's attempts at normalization by operating independently, to different degrees, of Disneyland park operations. Organizers for Lolita Day, Gumball Rally, and the numerous events by Marquez, do not inform Disney in advance of holding their events. Advance notice would provide Disney an opportunity to cancel or set onerous preconditions, so the events are run under the assumption that park managers will be reluctant to anger many fans by shutting down an in-progress event. On the Sunday morning of the Lolita Day event, the organizers set up a registration area using the wrought iron tables and

chairs under the canopy of the former Motor Boat Cruise area in Fantasyland. While a couple dozen participants were queueing to register for the event and take photos, a Disneyland operations manager approached to ask what the organizers were doing. “It’s Lolita Day”, one replied, at which the Disney manager’s face immediately turned five different shades of panic while presumably making an immediate mental association with the Nabokov novel. As the manager struggled for a few seconds to vocalize a response, the co-organizers clarified Lolita as harajuku fashion and handed over a business card with an explainer. The manager then regained his bearings, wished them a successful event, and walked away. When asked whether Disney would ever be willing to work with Lolita Day in a manner similar to Dapper Day and Gay Days by marketing correlated merchandise and food, a co-organizer deemed the possibility unlikely due to the name “Lolita”, the event’s narrow niche interest, and harajuku fashion not being broadly saleable by Disney (H. Ruszecki, Interview, October 11, 2017). While Disney perhaps has trepidation as to the event’s theme, the organizers say they plan to continue to hold Lolita Days in the park for many years to come.

For the over 400 participants in the MiceChat Gumball Rally scavenger hunt, Regan avoids the potential complication of setting up a registration desk within Disneyland by decamping only a few hundred feet away from the park gates at the outdoor patio tables of La Brea Bakery, a non-Disney owned business in the Downtown Disney District. The arrangement benefits both the bakery manager, who receives hundreds of Gumball Rally contestants as potential customers throughout the day, and Regan, who secures a staging area for the event outside Disney’s control but still proximate to the park. With so many Facebook groups, social network platforms, apps, discussion boards, and websites for organizing events, clubs, and meets, the lack of awareness among Disney management of everything that happens within two theme parks averaging 78,000 visitors a day is unsurprising. And new fan

organized events pop up every year on Facebook groups and in the park with recent newcomers Adventureland Day in 2018 and Pirate for a Day in 2019. As mentioned in Chapter 5, almost half of local fans on a typical visit enjoy just walking around the park while going on few, if any, rides. The events, meets, and clubs are a manifestation of fan resistance to the notion that Disney is providing a comprehensive and fulfilling park experience since the activities offer social and creative elements that fans desire but do not find in the park. Fans organize their own activities because they want to play in the park in their own way. Considering all the disparate fan activities occurring in the park, Korda is “amazed that Disney allows us to do the stuff that we do” (N. Korda, Interview, November 22, 2017). However, in the past few years, Disney has become stricter on dress that veers too close to Disney cosplay, and attempted to discourage large group photos of 50 or more people in front of the castle by charging event organizers for crowd control and set up (N. Korda, Interview, November 22, 2017). Some organizers mentioned that Disney definitely checks the social media accounts of their events (Anonymous #4, Interview, November 12, 2017; M. Marquez, Interview, October 16, 2017; T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). When a popular influencer posted to Instagram on Dapper Day offering to take photos of Disneybounds at a certain time in the World of Color viewing area in DCA, Disney security was waiting at the location to scuttle the photo session (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017). Disney is able to apply coercive power more decisively with influencers than fan event organizers since the former are beholden to the company for status and perks, unlike the latter.

For popular social media influencers, staging a Disneyland meet is impossible. When Thingamavlogs (Figure 6) arranged a park meet in 2015, fans of the influencers lined up to get autographs and take selfies. Disneyland management quickly shut down the meet because

the fan queues were snarling park traffic and the influencers were being confused by visitors for bonafide Disney celebrities or characters (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017). As a rule, influencers can post to Instagram while enjoying a day in the park but cannot provide location specific information for their followers to meet up, so unlike fan organizers of events, clubs, and meets, influencers cannot create in-park social events (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017; Anonymous #8, Interview, October 29, 2017). Alternatively, influencers occasionally arrange to meet followers outside the park, such as having a table at the Dapper Day marketplace in the Disneyland hotel or at the biennial Disney D23 Expo at the Anaheim Convention Center (Anonymous #5, Interview, October 17, 2017).

Existing outside the Disney intellectual property zone can sometimes be an advantage for events as Galliday participants can cosplay as their favorite doctor without running afoul of Disney's in-park adult costume ban that applies only to Disney characters (A. McCain, Interview, October 31, 2017). On the other hand, in the first year of Galliday, participants preplanned a ride takeover of the Jungle Cruise with a Whovian cast member captain cracking Dr. Who jokes for the entire boat trip. After Disney management found out about the Whovian-themed cruise, the captain was ordered never to veer again from Disney's approved script (A. McCain, Interview, October 31, 2017). Some organizers, such as for Gay Days, Bats Day, Steam Day, and Galliday, contact and notify the park in advance of their event. Disney attempts to regularize the events by issuing costume guidelines, a reminder to label the event as unofficial, and discount codes for participants at the resort hotels and ticket booths (A. McCain, Interview, October 31, 2017; Anonymous #2, Interview, November 14, 2017).

With an 11% participation rate for event-going survey respondents (n=393), Harry Potter Day was one of the most widely attended fan events at Disneyland, even though the J.K. Rowling stories are not Disney intellectual property. Starting in 2006 as a modest scavenger hunt, the event gradually grew by 2014 into an intricate interactive fan experience produced for free by the organizers, who notified Disneyland's operations and marketing departments about the event (Necrosis, 2016). On event mornings, participants would be sorted into four teams within Yensid's (the sorcerer's name from the 1940 film *Fantasia* and 'Disney' spelled backwards) School of Sorcery (named Dashwood, Rickett, Grizcom, and Willowdell), provided with printed game materials, and then tasked with tracking down school faculty scattered about the park, answering trivia questions, gathering clues, and solving a mystery. In the evening, organizers and participants gathered on the Small World Promenade in Fantasyland to hear the results and distribute awards. However, on the 2014 Harry Potter Day, Disney security abruptly shut down the event. The prevailing reason for the sudden termination was unclear but participants were told walkways were becoming too clogged and faculty were accused of signing autographs when they were checking off list items in player booklets (Necrosis, 2015). Security rounded up the faculty and threatened park expulsion for anyone who did not immediately cease event activities. Though Harry Potter Day would never again be welcome at Disneyland, the co-organizer had final thoughts on the event:

I know that life can provide fantastic, magical and rare moments when a convening of people in a particular place at a particular time can light up one's timeline like a fabulous roman candle exploding across the stars... In conclusion: I formally apologize to Disneyland's current proprietors for inviting a thousand of my friends through your turnstiles. I won't do it again. (Necrosis, 2015)

As the demise of Harry Potter Day demonstrates, Disney owns the place and can assertively use coercive power to shut down any event at any time even though fans consider Disneyland

their safe, happy, local place of escape. However, fan event organizers reported being unaware that Disney had forcibly shut down the Harry Potter event. The commonly held assumption was that the Harry Potter organizers had simply ceased running the event for personal reasons. The lack of awareness as to the fate of Harry Potter Day is unsurprising in the 2010s due to the fragmented state of online fan news and blur of so many in-park fan activities every week. Furthermore, some fans believe that with the increasingly high cost of an AP, Disney is obligated to grant them entry to the park to play with other fans as they wish as long as park operations is not unduly disrupted. Shopping malls are free to enter so restrictions are expected and accepted by entrants, but the large sum of money for an AP to Disneyland is understood within the fan discourse as an entitlement guaranteeing access and freedom of social formation. Since the termination of the event at Disneyland, Harry Potter fans in Southern California can instead visit Universal Studios Hollywood and the ornately themed Wizarding World of Harry Potter land that opened in 2016. Ironically, Universal Studios Hollywood has yet to witness a fan-organized Harry Potter event.

Each fan organized event runs only once or twice per year, though participants generally attend a number of different events over the course of a year. Many social clubs, however, meet in the park almost every weekend, and particularly on Sundays. Though some park regulars perceive the social clubs as gangs, members see their group as a Disneyland family. Disney implicitly allows members to wear denim vests with patches identifying club associations and to enjoy the park as any other visitors. However, a rancorous dispute between two social clubs in 2016 that led to a 2017 lawsuit filed in Orange County may cause Disney to reconsider park policies. The leader of one club accused the members of another social club of demanding protection money to run a charity event in Disneyland, issuing threats of violence, defacing club property, filing false police reports, and making defamatory

comments about him being a pedophile on social media, podcasts, and neighborhood posters (Koenig, 2017). And certain to get Disney's attention, the plaintiff named Disneyland as a defendant in the lawsuit for failing to take steps in the park to stop the other club's "malicious conduct" (Koenig, 2017). Although this is only one of over 100 lawsuits pending against Disneyland in the courts, most suits deal with minor injuries caused by the park's physical structure such as a bumpy ride mechanism or uneven sidewalk curb, and not Disney's failure to protect park visitors from each other. A judgment affirming Disneyland's liability in the case could lead Disney to use greater coercive power in the future concerning fan activities in the park.

Unlike the 1990s and early 2000s, fans in the 2010s have not successfully organized on online social platforms to urge Disney to fire a corporate executive or halt a change in the park. Disney's control of the discourse by co-opting fan site owners and influencers has produced an internalized resignation among fans that Disney not only has the authority but also knows better than fans what changes are needed in the park. In recent years, this sentiment has often been vocally shared by fans online whenever Disney proposes a change. However, fans have resisted the company in a new way by creating social and creative experiences with events, clubs, and meets that Disney has not offered in the park. The low transaction costs of social network platforms, particularly Facebook groups, enabled fans who previously felt socially excluded from the few existing in-park fan activities to shape a new online discourse supportive of the creation of many new fan events and clubs.

Disneyland has become perceived and embraced as a place to serve fan social and creative purposes often without the permission of Disney. A concerted attempt by Disney to use coercive power to dominate the many in-park fan activities is unlikely as it would lead to direct confrontation with potentially tens of thousands of annual passholders. Disney would

prefer park rules be normalized and internalized through disciplinary power. Therefore, as an alternative to coercive power, Disney in recent years has started to launch official ticketed events similar in theme to long-standing fan events as potential replacements discussed in the next section.

9.4.3 Disney power by co-opting fan-created media, practices, and events

Over the years, Disneyland fans have created an assortment of media, practices, and events focused on the park. In turn, Disney has not been bashful appropriating the creations for repackaging as new Disney incarnations that attempt to supplant the original fan source. The Usenet newsgroups and web discussion boards of the 1990s and early 2000s caught Disney off-guard by allowing fans to develop a new discourse online distinct from the one long established by the legacy marketing campaigns of the corporation. In response, the company produced three instruments comparable to previous fan creations to build its own cultural and social capital within a Disney media ecosystem to connect and influence fans directly, and also bypass fan created media, such as websites and apps, and legacy media, such as print and broadcast news. Disney also moved to co-opt the fan practices of Disneybounding and in-park themed events.

The introduction of D23: The Official Disney Fan Club in 2009 offered fans a quarterly publication, special events, exclusive online content and merchandise, and early access to the biennial D23 convention for a US\$74.95 annual membership fee. As the official Disney club, the company could attempt to leverage its status and authority to set the parameters of approved fan discourse. Media companies often use official fan organizations and approved convention speakers to regularize audiences (Jenkins, 2013). Regan saw D23 as an attempt

by Disney to compete with the services previously provided solely by online fan communities, such as MiceChat, by hosting events and conveying Disney history, but:

They will never be able to do what I do because they'll never be able to talk truthfully about themselves in a way I can, nor are they willing to let their individual people rise to stir it up. So at Disney an attraction just happens and it opens and it's magical and Disney did it, but on the MiceChat site, we'll tell you who built it, what company it was, it's not Disney that built that ride and that's something Disney, you know, isn't willing to do. So that's where we stay relevant. (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017).

The club fee was steep, especially for fans who did not live in Southern California and Central Florida where most D23 events were staged. Disney also used D23 clumsily as a blunt marketing tool to promote the latest studio releases (J. Hill, Interview, October 24, 2017). In response to fan complaints and declining membership, D23 relaunched in 2013 with a revamped website offering ample resources and content, including 7,000 articles from the Disney Archive, and a three-tier membership system with the lowest level being free of charge. Nevertheless, only 33% of survey respondents reported being a D23 member, and online discussion of the club has mostly concerned the biennial expo. However, the D23 social media accounts have been successful in attracting large numbers of subscribers and followers (Table 10).

Disney launched the Disney Parks Blog in 2009 with numerous categories covering all Disney parks in the world, including Disneyland, and park services such as weddings, honeymoons, special events, dining, vacation planning, art, cast member profiles, and more. Fans could find all the latest news about Disneyland directly from Disney, so the need for fan sites that simply echoed Disney's press releases diminished. Regan believes reporting with a

strong voice and point of view, such as MiceChat's commentaries, was crucial in retaining relevance with fans when the Parks Blog already provided straightforward and up-to-date news (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). In addition, while the Parks Blog allows commenting, Disney moderators bar most negative fan comments. To have a vigorous debate about an aspect of Disneyland, fans still need to go to discussion boards or social media groups not owned, governed, or influenced by Disney.

In 2015, Disney released the official Disneyland app. Some fans had already created their own Disneyland apps, including MouseWait in 2009 and Mouseaddict (affiliated with MiceChat) in 2010, that provided crowd-sourced wait times, show schedules, attraction closures, and dining menus. However, Disney provided the Disneyland app with all the functions of the fan apps, plus official wait times, Disney character locations, dining reservations, ticket sales, and PhotoPass records. In 2017, Disney added digital Fastpass to the app, while Mouseaddict, with a dwindling user base, shut down. In 2018, Disney allowed users to order counter service restaurant food and drinks in the app with a scheduled pick-up time, and thus avoid in-person wait lines. Also in 2018, Disney released a new entertainment app called Play Disney Parks with trivia, music, and games, including an in-park scavenger hunt, which has long been a popular fan organized activity. The Play app also features a game element for visitors upon entering Star Wars land to choose to belong to the Resistance, First Order, Citizen, or Scoundrel faction in a set-up similar to the wizarding schools from the cancelled, fan organized Harry Potter Day. MouseWait's popularity was already diminishing before 2015, but the release of the Disneyland app accelerated the decline as the official app offered features and functions that only Disney could furnish for Disneyland fans (Anonymous #3, Interview, October 29, 2017; Anonymous #8, Interview, October 29, 2017). Disneyland officials report 86% of park visitors in 2019 use the official app during visits

(Niles, 2019c). One fan app and site that Disney has not tried to co-opt is MouseMingle, which was founded in 2015 as a dating service to connect fans of Disney, *Star Wars*, Marvel, and Pixar. Thus far, Disney has not provided any functionality in its official apps for fans to connect socially in the park.

Although fan events are considered unofficial, Disney often takes the opportunity to derive economic value by selling niche food and merchandise themed to events, and marketing the company's products and services. For Gay Days, there are rainbow cakes and Mickey cookies in the bakeries, and prominent store displays of rainbow Mickey ears and tumblers, as well as red t-shirts that event participants are encouraged to wear for the event. At the Gay Days welcome center in the Grand Californian hotel, Disney markets the Aulani Hawaii resort, Adventures by Disney travel, the D23 fan club, and Disney Fairy Tale Weddings & Honeymoons. For Dapper Day, there are more pin-up style dresses for sale in the park stores. Unwilling to leave any money on the table for outside businesses, Disney in 2019 entered the customized t-shirt business with official graphics and typefaces that visitors with family reunions, anniversaries, or other special occasions can order bespoke from the company's retail website. After the popular success of Disneybounding and Dapper Day as fan creations, Disney started to place much greater emphasis on fashion merchandising beyond bland resort t-shirts. Disneybounding became a way for fans to embody Disney figuratively and literally into their everyday lives, thus creating a huge new market. In 2012, Disney partnered with Versace, Missoni, Oscar de la Renta, and other designers for a Harrod's window display featuring the iconic princesses dressed in haute couture (Karmali, 2012). Kate Spade, Gucci, Coach, Asics, Vans, Swarovski, and many more followed with Disney partnerships. Stefano Gabbana declared that the Fall 2016 Dolce & Gabbana collection was inspired by the Disney princesses (Gabbana, 2016). Disney also partnered with young designers such as Danielle

DiFerdinando on a co-branded handbag collection line known as ‘Disney x DN’ featuring the princesses and Tinker Bell (<https://danielle-nicole.myshopify.com/collections/disney-dn>).

MAC Cosmetics partnered with Disney to create a line inspired by the character Jasmine from the 2019 live-action film *Aladdin*. Also in 2019, Disney launched a new collection of Mickey and Minnie Mouse ears designed by celebrities, fashion houses, local artists, and Imagineers. Disneyland hosted a fashion show for the first time in 2018 with an evening event in Toontown highlighting a Mickey Mouse theme and the rapper Chance.

While Disney will probably shy away from ever running an official version of Lolita Day, the company has appropriated themes from existing fan organized events to create official new versions. Since 2006, Disney’s hard ticket nighttime Halloween parties have allowed the company to double dip on daily admission revenue as day visitors are corralled out of the park by early evening to make way for the paying nighttime visitors. In 2018, Disney started new hard ticket night events as a series called Disneyland After Dark. The first, Throwback Nite, was very similar in theme to Dapper Day with visitors encouraged to wear flashback fashion of the 1950s and 60s while the park provided period music, posters, food, and the original Disneyland fireworks show “Fantasy in the Sky”. Fan event organizer Marquez holds a small Star Wars event with a few dozen participants called Light vs. Dark every year in the park. However, after Disney announced the second After Dark event would be themed entirely to *Star Wars*, tickets sold out so quickly that an additional night had to be added. For 2019, Disney held new spring night events themed to the 1990s and Valentine’s Day. After Dark events in the future could be themed by decade (70s, 80s, etc.), popular Disney categories (princesses, pirates, Marvel, etc.), holidays, or adapted from existing fan events. In 2019, for the first time ever, Disneyland Paris took over the park’s unofficial LGBTQ event to launch an official version with a special parade called Magical Pride and a musical

performance by Boy George as the *Los Angeles Times* wondered whether the long-standing Gay Days fan event in Anaheim would be supplanted next (Martin, 2019).

The D23 biennial conventions are, in essence, massive iterations of the annual MiceChat and Laughing Place anniversary events that have showcased Disney animators, voice actors, authors, and historians. MiceChat sets up a booth at every D23 Expo at the Anaheim Convention Center where Regan is always surprised to meet fans who know nothing of online Disneyland fandom (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). Disney's co-option of fan created media, practices, and events has evidently started to obscure the online fan progenitors. Disney is likely to continue appropriating and commodifying fan originated activities. In the future, Disney could use coercive power, as seen with Harry Potter Day, to shut down popular fan organized events such as Gay Days and Dapper Day to launch their own hard-ticket versions, but that scenario is unlikely due to awful public relations optics. Instead, over time, Disney's official themed events could increasingly supplant the original fan organized ones just as the official club, convention, blog, and app have been doing to their fan progenitors. Fans used their social capital to establish an array of unofficial Disneyland media, practices, and events that have not only, in most cases, produced more economic value for Disney than for the fan progenitors but have also been gradually co-opted by the company.

9.5 Fluctuation of power

During the past three decades, the power of Disney or fans online and in the park has fluctuated depending in measure on the nature of the online social platforms of each time period (Table 19). The few fan events that emerged in the 1990s Usenet era were primarily marketed through print media and word of mouth. Many fans had not yet gone on social

platforms such as Usenet or even online. Disney maintained control in the park in the 2000s as the high transaction costs of starting and running a website to market an event kept the number of fan activities limited. Only in the 2010s did Disney begin to face hundreds of new fan organized social formations in the park enabled by the low transaction costs of online social network platforms, particularly Facebook. Fans currently organize in-park activities with an internalized collective belief that Disney will continue to accede to more fan events, meets, and clubs because the company has set few restrictions on fan activities in the past and, as annual passholders, the fans are paying customers with the right to use the park for their social activities and formations. However, Disney has recently started to become more proactive by creating official themed events that could eventually supplant many of the original fan organized versions.

	1990-2005 Usenet Web Discussion Boards M\leftrightarrowM	2006-2009 Web Discussion Boards Blogs 1\rightarrowM	2010-2019 Social Network Media 1\rightarrowM M\leftrightarrowM	
Online Discourse	Fan Power <i>Light Tragic</i> <i>Promote Pressler!</i> <i>Save Disney</i>	Disney Power <i>Co-opt Fan Owners</i> <i>Disney Parks Blog</i> <i>D23</i>	Disney Power <i>Co-opt Influencers</i> <i>CM Influencers</i> <i>Disneyland app</i> <i>Fragmented Fan Voice</i>	Fan Power <i>Facebook Groups</i>
In-park Activities	Disney Power <i>Few events and meets</i>	Disney Power <i>Few events and meets</i>	Fan Power <i>Hundreds of events, meets, and clubs</i>	

Table 19: Fluctuation of Disney and fan power online and in-park from 1990-2019.

Control online has often contrasted sharply with circumstances in the park. The nature of Usenet as an independent many-to-many (M \leftrightarrow M) social platform resilient to structural undermining enabled fans to set the discourse online with a unified voice to challenge Disney. Web discussion boards, on the other hand, were structurally susceptible to influence

by Disney since the sites were few in number and entailed high transaction costs to start up and keep running. As a mutually beneficial arrangement, Disney provided fan site owners with access to Disney press events in exchange for positive news stories about the park that generated revenue through increased traffic and advertising impressions for fan owners while enabling Disney to set discourse online through the one-to-many ($1 \rightarrow M$) nature of the sites. MiceChat's Regan had a full-time job so his fan site only comprised a minor secondary income at best, allowing him to resist for years the quid pro quo arrangement with Disney. However, in 2018, Regan succumbed to the arrangement so MiceChat would have access to content in the same manner as all other competitors including fan websites, influencers, and legacy media outlets. Acceding to Disney in the production of an approved discourse online became a *fait accompli* where park food and beverages are delicious, changes are necessary and expertly determined, positivity abounds, and price increases are necessary to maintain a quality park experience.

Social network platforms enabled Disney to control discourse online about the company, brand, and park by co-opting influencers to post only positive coverage in a one-to-many ($1 \rightarrow M$) practice of allocution (Bordewijk & van Kamm, 1986) to their numerous followers and subscribers. Resistant viewpoints from fans lacking the prodigious social capital of influencers have been overwhelmed and lost within the fragmented din of a deluge of many-to-many ($M \leftarrow \rightarrow M$) daily posts to a multitude of social media fan groups. However, the same fragmentation caused by social network platforms has enabled fans to produce a new online discourse facilitating the creation of events, meets, and clubs that continue to proliferate. Hence, in the social network platform era, Disney's control of the discourse online about the company and park has led to an internalized trust that Disney knows what is best for Disneyland, but fan control of the discourse on Facebook groups about in-park activities has

led to a belief among fans that they have a right to create social activities and formations at Disneyland that the company neglects to provide.

Chapter 10: Discussion

The fervent place attachment of fans in Southern California toward Disneyland, coupled with the concomitant emergence of the Internet and AP program 30 years ago, precipitated a new relationship between local fans and the Disney corporation. As outlined in chapters six through nine, the key findings of this study indicate that the contest between Disney and fans online and in-park has been predicated largely on the characteristics of the prevailing online social platform of each Internet era. During the emergence of the first online platforms, fans took advantage of a digitally dormant Disney corporation and the nature of Usenet to establish a discourse online about Disneyland. Disney struggled to respond to fan discourse online until realizing that the nature of post-Usenet social platforms could be used to co-opt fan website owners and social media influencers. Disney also benefited from the fragmentation of the fan voice due to the nature of social network platforms. However, this fragmentation also helped precipitate the formation of a multitude of fan organized social formations in the park during the 2010s. This evolving contest in the park and online over the past three decades between fans and Disney over the meaning and purpose of Disneyland has ebbed and flowed with technology and platforms, and strategies and practices. For a closer examination decade by decade, the next section sets up a model framework to analyze the intersection of the three domains of fans, corporation, and online social platforms over 30 years at Disneyland using Van Dijck's (2013) platform analysis and Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital.

10.1 The three domains

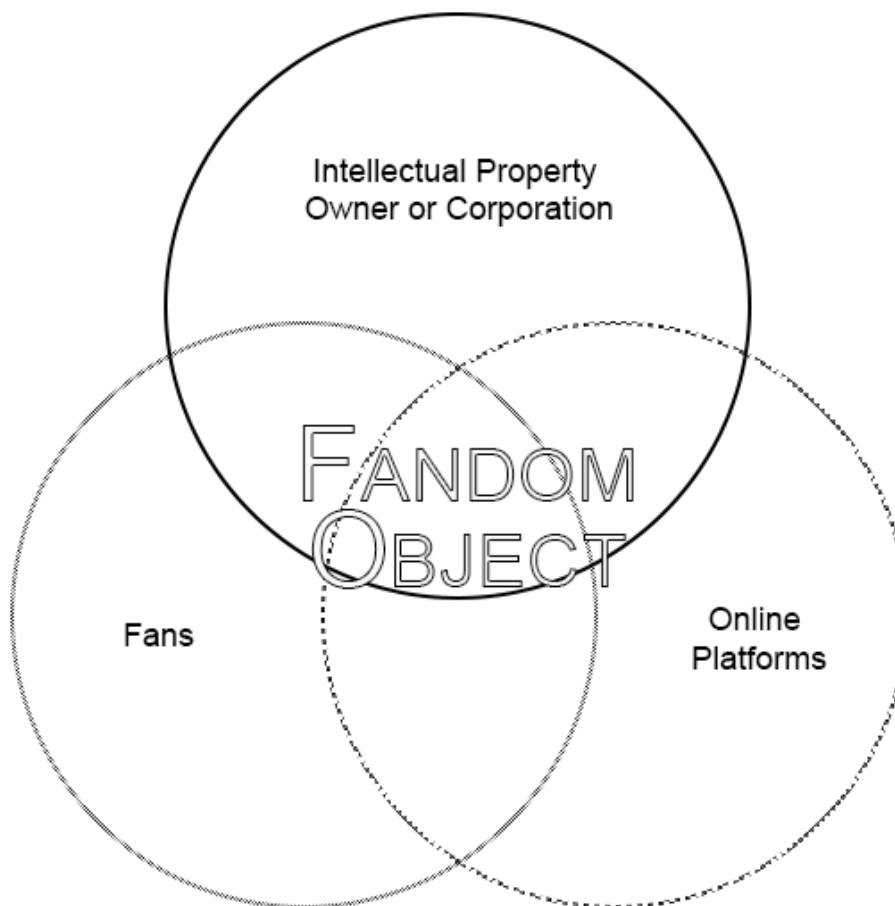


Figure 14: The three domains of fans, online platforms, and intellectual property owner or corporation intersecting around a fandom object.

Over the past three decades, the domains of corporate intellectual property owners and fans have intersected around fandom objects through a succession of online platforms. Figure 16 illustrates a new framework to study the intersection around the fandom object of the three domains with the examination of online platforms incorporating Van Dijck's (2013) platform analysis model. Malaby (2006, p. 144) terms a domain as "a semibounded arena for action where certain conventional expectations apply and certain resources may be available". Thus, the domain of fans includes the practices and presumptions that apply to the people within it, along with a particular set of affordances and constraints as well as market pressures and social conventions. The different forms of capital have been accrued, parlayed, and

transformed within and between corporations and fans often owing to the nature of the prevailing online social platforms of each decade.

Media fandoms generally do not have physical places for ongoing congregation because the milieu of their fan object is intangibly experienced through the mediation of film, television, books, audio, software, etc. By contrast, the tangibility of theme parks has afforded fans a regularly available physical place to congregate and interact directly with the fandom object and corporate owner. Disneyland is even further distinct in this regard due to being open every day of the year from morning to night unlike most regional parks such as the Six Flags chain (except for Magic Mountain in Southern California), Cedar Point, and Dollywood that shut down completely during the winter months and open only for weekends and holidays during the spring and fall. Parks in warmer climates, such as Knott's Berry Farm and LEGOLAND, generally close for Christmas, inclement weather, and/or one or two days per week during the off season. While Disney has needed to contend with fan discourse online similarly to corporate owners of other media fandom objects, the nature of Disneyland as a physical place constantly evolving and accessible daily by fans in-person has presented a distinct environment in the study of fans as reflected in the following sections.

10.2 Usenet newsgroups era

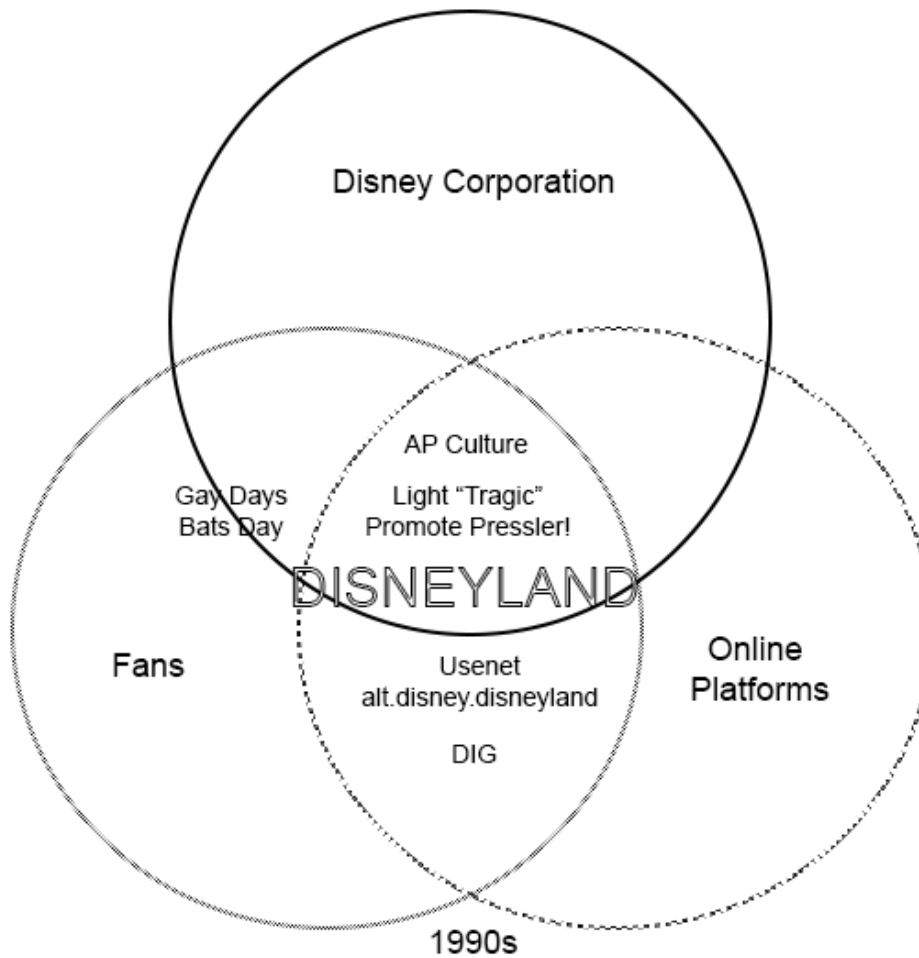


Figure 15: Intersection of the three domains during the Usenet era of the 1990s.

The advent of online social platforms in the 1990s afforded fans a way to interact more efficiently and economically than the print newsletters and zines of previous decades distributed through postal mail. Figure 15 illustrates the 1990s era before smartphones, when fan interaction online primarily occurred within homes and offices on personal computers, and not during time at Disneyland. The 1990s also saw AP culture take root at Disneyland with local fans regularly visiting on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. Passholders used the new online social platforms to build social capital with other passholders for knowledge and information, and to protest

Disney's management of Disneyland. However, fan social capital on early online platforms was used sparingly for organizing the few fan in-park activities, which operated generally outside of Disney's purview. The Usenet newsgroup alt.disney.disneyland provided a common gathering place for fan discussion while the Disney Information Guide (DIG) website of Al Lutz served as a persistent, structured, and curated focal point for information and campaigns. Early online social platforms enabled formerly anonymous fans in the park, such as Lutz, to accrue cultural capital online within Disneyland fandom as a prominent newsgroup poster, owner of the DIG website, and caretaker of the FAQ for alt.disney.disneyland. Fan leadership emerged democratically among posters who steadily built cultural capital through frequent postings that shared information and knowledge valuable to fans. However, popularly acclaimed leaders could not exercise control through the technology over other fans on Usenet. With the only prerequisite for access being an Internet connection, Usenet was free and equal for all users. A newsgroup was where all online fans could convene together as compared to the siloed ISP member-only forums on AOL or CompuServe. The underlying technology was built into the structure of the early Internet without a need for updates or ongoing funding for upkeep. User agency was unrestricted by moderation or ownership, and no metadata or processing algorithms undergirded Usenet technology to push advertising or marketing at users. Lutz parlayed his newfound status with Disneyland fans into social capital to campaign against Disney by establishing the norms of discourse online. Usenet was an ideal venue to attract and organize resistance against Disney since the alt.disney.disneyland group was unowned and unmoderated, and thus impervious to commercial concerns, and financial or legal pressure by the corporation. Fans such as Lutz that accrued cultural and social capital on Usenet often did not seek to benefit financially since participation on Usenet was free (and DIG utilized free web space provided to AOL members),

and the established norms of the platform discouraged blatant monetization. Table 20 summarizes the characteristics of alt.disney.disneyland using Van Dijck’s (2013) platform analysis model to illustrate the characteristics of Usenet as a democratic and exceptional online platform for fan leaders to build cultural and social capital unfettered by Disney and organize resistance against the corporation with the Light “Tragic” and Promote Pressler! campaigns.

Application of Van Dijck’s (2013) platform analysis model to: Usenet: alt.disney.disneyland	
Ownership	Unowned
Governance	Unmoderated
Business models	None
Content	Distinct posts with text only as uniform ASCII formatting
Users/usage	Open with no registration requirement Can lurk undetected Can self-represent by real name or handle, and signature files Can start new threads or reply to existing ones User agency is unrestricted Users are co-equal (no central authority or hierarchy)
Technology	Data is public, no metadata collection No processing algorithms Limited protocols (post, reply, killfile, group cross-post) Transparent interface Minimal defaults

Table 20: The application of Van Dijck’s (2013) platform analysis model to the Usenet newsgroup alt.disney.disneyland.

10.3 Web discussion boards era

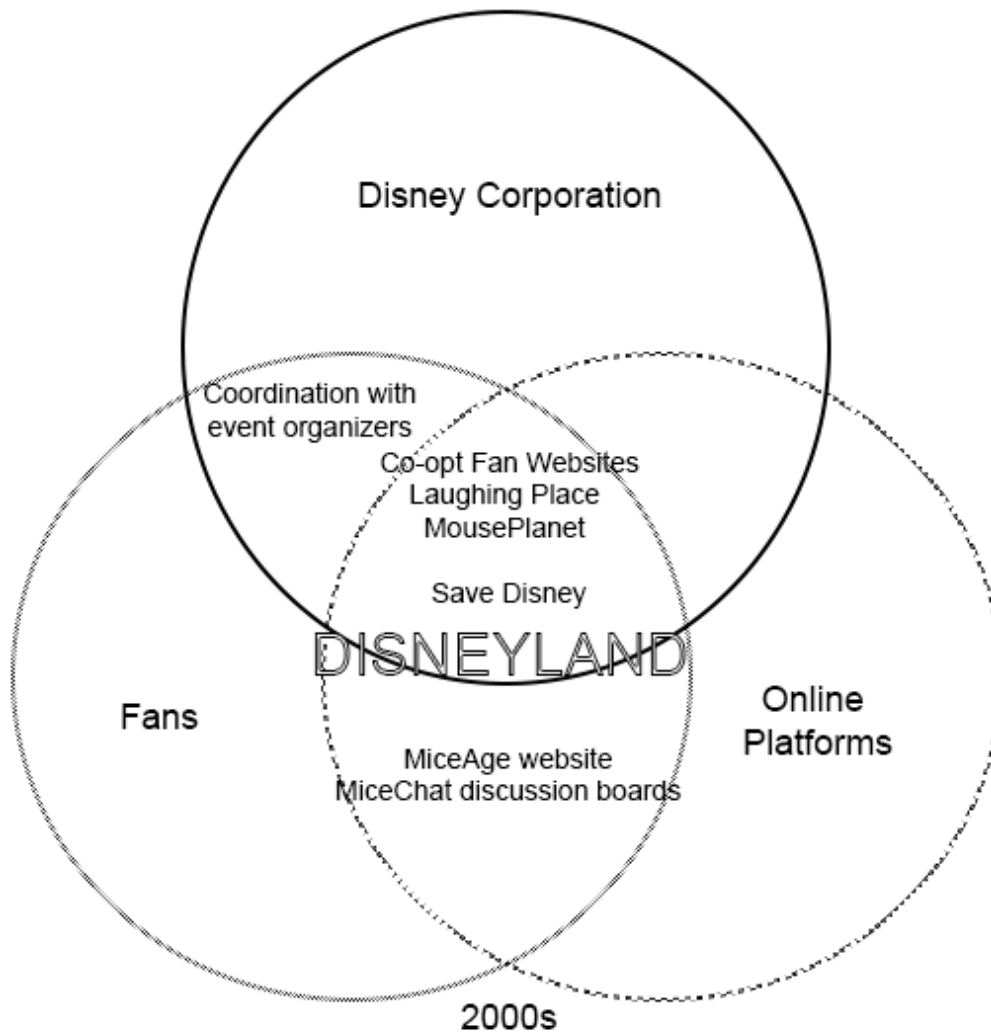


Figure 16: Intersection of the three domains during the web discussion board era of the 2000s.

Figure 16 illustrates the 2000s era of web discussion boards before the mass diffusion of smartphones, when fan interaction online still primarily occurred within homes and offices on personal computers, and not while visiting Disneyland. Web boards replaced newsgroups as hubs of fan interaction. Unlike Usenet, the web boards were owned by an individual fan or small coterie, and susceptible to financial pressure due to the need to generate sufficient revenue to cover domain and hosting fees, in addition to the considerable time spent on site administration.

Site owners without a web programming background had to hire technology specialists to do site coding and/or pay for third party WYSIWYG design software. Needing to derive economic value from their websites to cover high transaction costs, fan owners enlisted third party marketing firms to generate site advertising and opened affiliate accounts with Amazon for a small percentage of site-related product sales. Cross-site technology allowed multiple third party firms to gather and collate metadata on site users across the Internet to establish profiles for targeted marketing. While Usenet allowed for the democratic emergence of leaders with cultural capital earned through the posting of useful knowledge and information, website owners could distinguish themselves from everyday fans with cultural capital accrued by spending money to build and market a website with discussion boards. Fan owners of web boards could act as autocrats with a handpicked inner circle of moderators to enforce norms and boot anyone for perceived transgressions. Unlike the ungoverned co-equal denizens of Usenet newsgroups, some members became more equal than others on web boards governed by the personalities and predilections of owners and moderators. The small handful of site owners with popular web discussion boards were able to establish cultural and social capital from their position at the top of the fan hierarchy and became powerful gatekeepers not only of information and knowledge for fans, but also the means to participate within online fan discussions itself.

After the conclusion of the Save Disney campaign, Disney's new management under CEO Iger rebooted the company's relationship with fans. Due to pressure from website overhead costs, fan site owners needed to amass a large audience to serve to advertisers and affiliate marketers. The financial constraint of the web discussion board platform had prodded fan owners since site inception to consider monetization, and eventually made owners susceptible to entreaties by

Disney for mutually beneficial cooperation. Disney was able to leverage the financial privation of fan site owners (except MiceChat) who needed their websites to produce economic value by posting a regular stream of new content that would attract the recurring clicks, and concomitant advertising revenue, of site visitors. Disney's co-option strategy benefited site owners by cementing their cultural capital at the top of the fan hierarchy with exclusive access and perks that ordinary fans could only gaze through screens in awe and envy. Disney, in turn, benefited from the established social capital of fan board owners who reported favorably and enthusiastically with an "authentic" fan voice on the corporate brand and Disneyland. This symbiotic relationship also generated economic value for Disney in terms of increased ticket, food, beverage, and merchandise sales. Disney also started to coordinate with event organizers to ensure park operations would be informed and prepared in advance of fan activities at Disneyland. Table 21 summarizes the nature of fan web discussion boards using Van Dijck's (2013) model to illustrate their characteristics as undemocratic, restrictive of fan agency, vulnerable to financial pressure, and susceptible to co-option by Disney for exclusively favorable coverage. In this era, fan cultural and social capital largely came to serve and benefit Disney.

Application of Van Dijck's (2013) platform analysis model to: Fan website discussion boards	
Ownership	Individual or small group of fans
Governance	Moderated by owner and handpicked moderators
Business models	Advertising and affiliate marketing (Amazon, etc.) coordinated by site owners
Content	Distinct posts with text and images within the structure of a web forum software package (e.g. phpBB, vBulletin, etc.) implemented by the site owner or externally hired developers
Users/usage	Registration required to post Can lurk but IP address recorded and cookie stashed Can self-represent by real name or handle, avatar, and signature file Can start new threads or reply to existing ones User agency is restricted User is peripheral to network center (site owner)
Technology	Data is public, metadata is collected Processing algorithms used for third-party marketing Limited protocols (post, reply, and message) Interface is opaque, hidden by third-party software package Minimal defaults

Table 21: The application of Van Dijck's (2013) platform analysis model to fan website discussion boards.

10.4 Facebook and social networks era

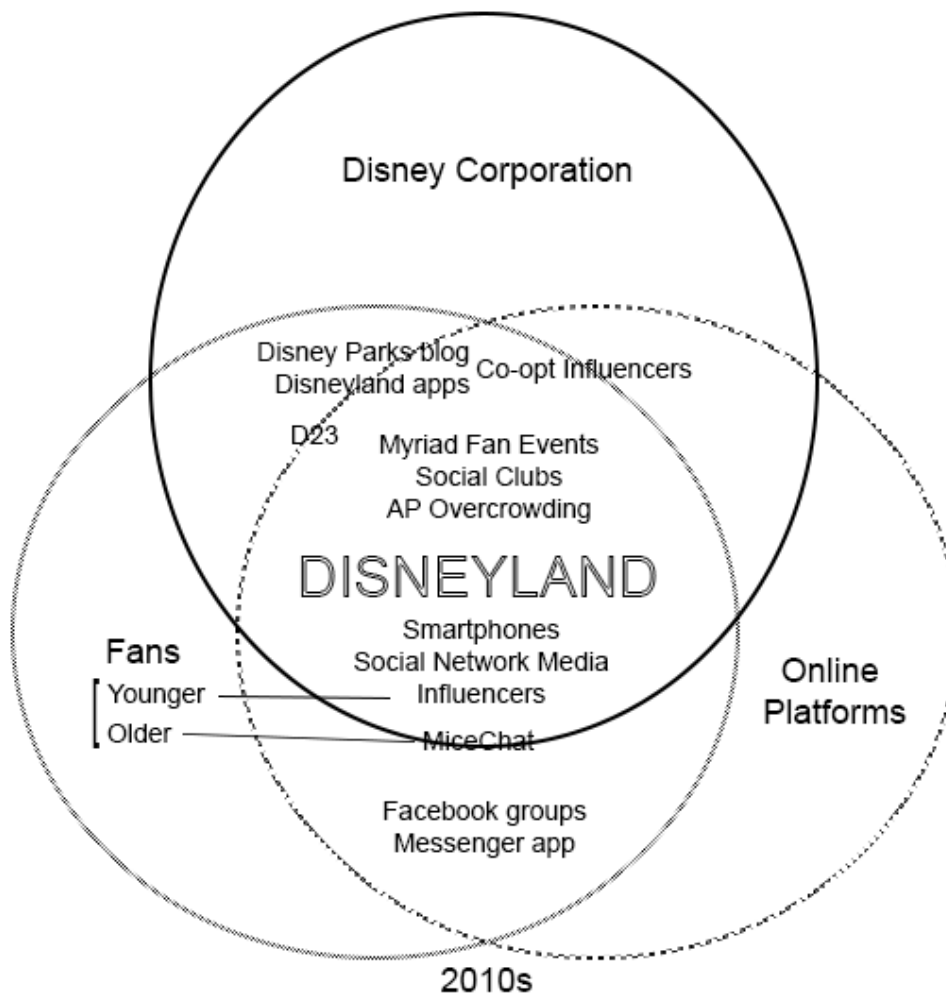


Figure 17: Intersection of the three domains during the Facebook and social network platforms era of the 2010s.

Figure 17 illustrates the impact of social network platforms, and the mass diffusion of smartphones, on the converged intersection of the three domains during the 2010s era. Fan interaction online no longer needed to occur primarily within homes and offices on personal computers, but instead moved physically into Disneyland itself through smartphones that carried popular social network apps such as Facebook and Messenger with the personal contacts of fans. Disney aggressively moved into the space of fan smartphones with two Disneyland apps, the Disney Parks blog, the co-opting of social media influencers, and

official Disneyland social media accounts that all helped enable the corporation to further cement a positive discourse online about the park. Facebook groups and Messenger fragmented the fandom online and in-park into a multitude of events, meets, and clubs, but the segmentation also prevented the formation of a fan focal point to gather and rally resistance whenever Disney proposed an unpopular change. Disneyland continued to increase in popularity, with concomitant overcrowding, as the AP population, primarily comprised of locals, has topped one million members who often use the park as a backdrop for photos and videos posted to Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and other social media platforms.

The 2010s saw the rapid decline of fan website discussion boards in favor of social network platforms. The low transaction costs of social network platforms enabled anyone, especially younger fans, to attempt to cultivate cultural capital by creating groups devoted to any aspect of Disneyland and thus compete on a new level playing field with the social media outposts of longstanding fan websites. The shift of the audience away from web discussion boards to social media platforms also greatly diminished the economic value of fan websites by steadily reducing site traffic, and attendant revenue from advertising impressions and clickthroughs. Fan site owners had no choice but to follow their audience to the newly popular social network platforms thereby surrendering the economic value, and well established cultural and social capital, previously derived from their websites. As the beneficiary of free content created by both transplanted fan sites and newly established groups, Facebook became the hub that attracted and bound fans to a platform perceived to be the easiest to use and the place everyone seemed to have an account. By requiring real names Facebook collected copious user metadata to establish accurate profiles for sale to advertisers and marketers, and generate enormous revenue for the giant social media corporation. The popularity and financial success of Facebook came at the cost of a withering audience and

revenue base for long-time fan websites. Disney attempted to adapt to the social networks era by purchasing Maker Studios, later rebranded the Disney Digital Network, to coach young social media influencers. In addition to appropriating the social capital of influencers, Disney also began to generate its own cultural and social capital by co-opting fan created practices, such as starting an official blog, club, convention, and two park apps, partnering with fashion brands for Disneybound-style merchandise, and launching themed night events at Disneyland. Whereas early online social platforms such as Usenet enabled fans to produce their own cultural and social capital with little attendant commercial benefit, the nature of online social network platforms enabled Disney to co-opt well established fan social and cultural capital for its own corporate economic value.

Table 22 summarizes the characteristics of Facebook using Van Dijck's (2013) model to illustrate the largest social network's characteristics as driven by a corporate need to commodify users as data, undemocratic due to opaque management, a lack of user privacy, and a facility for the creation of unlimited groups that has fragmented fandom.

Application of Van Dijck's (2013) disassembling platforms as microsystems to: Facebook Fan Groups	
Ownership	Owned by Facebook Inc.
Governance	Facebook retains ultimate authority in an opaque manner, though user administrators have power within their groups to approve and boot members, and delete posts.
Business models	Advertising and sale of user data to third parties
Content	Text, images, audio, video, live streaming, and likes in a reverse chronological timeline within Facebook API structure
Users/usage	Registration required Limited lurking Must self-represent by real name. Encouraged to post personal information, photos, and friend network Can start and reply to posts User agency is restricted User is center of friend network, but peripheral within groups
Technology	Data is semi-public Extensive metadata collection by Facebook Extensive processing algorithms Numerous protocols (post, reply, start groups, like, share, friend, message) Transparent interface Defaults favor personal disclosure Unique user ID enables personal information and preferences to appear on connected external sites

Table 22: The application of Van Dijck's (2013) platform analysis model to Facebook groups.

Since corporate inception in Southern California in 1923, Disney has now become a colossal, global mass media and entertainment conglomerate. However, similar to other companies in

the venerable media entertainment industry of Southern California, Disney now depends a great deal on the Northern California technology companies that own the popular social network platforms that Disney uses to interact with fans. The Disneyland apps, D23 fan club, and Disney Parks blog were tools not just to co-opt fan created media, but also attempts to circumvent Silicon Valley social media companies to communicate directly with fans. The acquisition of the 21st Century Fox film and television studios not only granted Disney ownership of a vast array of intellectual property to add to an already formidable library, but also, after buying out Comcast's share, gave Disney full ownership of over-the-top media service company Hulu, that along with Disney + as a new video on demand service, can compete directly with Netflix, Apple, and Amazon in the delivery of online television streaming. To compete directly with the Northern California technology firms, Disney could set out to buy or start a social network platform to bypass and compete with Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube for not only Disney fans but the global public. However, Disney has shown no interest in co-opting the social functionality of MouseMingle, the fan created dating app, or the member lounge in the MouseWait app within either of the official park apps. At official Disneyland themed night events such as Halloween or 90s Nite, Disney does not organize huge group photos in front of the castle, ride takeovers, or other activities that fan events have long used as icebreakers for participants to meet one another. Unlike Steeplechase at Coney Island, Disneyland has always eschewed anti-alienation rides and attractions that bring strangers into close proximity for sociability. Furthermore, Disney previously shied away from the delicately thorny task of day-to-day community management by selling off the town of Celebration, Florida. Disney is apparently satisfied engaging with fans at a safe distance as evidenced by the lower degree of social commitment required by peripatetic D23 club gatherings, ten-day ship cruises, and one-off themed night events at Disneyland. Unless someone is well-connected at Disney and willing to spend thousands of

dollars for an overnight stay at the exclusive Dream Suite above the Pirates of the Caribbean attraction in New Orleans Square, one cannot spend the night in Disneyland. Visitors are only welcome for the day and must return to their home or hotel room every night. Considering the media and political opprobrium being directed at Northern California technology companies in the late 2010s, Disney probably prefers to leave the knotty online social management business, as it already did in offline life at Celebration, to others.

Fan resistance to Disney was strongest from 1995 to 2005 during the peak popularity of Usenet and advent of fan owned web discussion boards. Usenet's ungoverned, unowned, and non-commercial structure facilitated a popular democratic movement among fans that pushed back against senior Disney executives and new offerings such as the Light Magic parade and DCA park. Would the same level of fan dissent and success have occurred if social network media such as Facebook had been the popular platform of that earlier era? With only one newsgroup, alt.disney.disneyland, exclusively devoted to Disneyland in Southern California, and only one website, Lutz's Disneyland Information Guide, dedicated to general news, information, and gossip from the park, fans had conspicuous focal points for both interaction and knowledge during that time. In the 2010s, the fragmentation of the fandom among a multitude of Facebook groups and social network platforms, not to mention a growing generational divide, has made the formation of a unified fan voice that could agree on a stance and subscribe to collective action a practical impossibility. At the same time, fan use of the same social network platforms, in addition to smartphones for mobile communication and organization, facilitated the creation of such an array of fan organized events, meets, and clubs that almost any fan can now find a complementary social group in the park. By contrast, during the Usenet period, fan organized activities were a comparative in-park rarity. Disneyland today has become so overcrowded with locals due to the popularity of the AP

program, and the many fan groups and activities in the park enabled by social network platforms and smartphones, that the place attachment of local fans to the park may be in peril.

10.5 Challenges to Disneyland as local place of attachment

While Chapter 5 discussed how Disneyland has become a place of attachment for fans in Southern California, current and future developments could be perceived by locals as a threat to the place's physical and social fabric, and disrupt current positive sentiments (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). Since the rise of the AP program and online social platforms three decades ago, total annual attendance at Disneyland (including DCA since 2001) has increased from 11.6 million in 1992 to 28.6 million in 2018 (TEA, 2019). Unsurprisingly, 82% of survey respondents agreed that the huge crowds in the narrow walkways of the 1955 designed park were having a negative impact on Disneyland as a social place (Figure 18).



Figure 18: Crowds in front of the Pirates of the Caribbean attraction in New Orleans Square on a non-holiday weekday afternoon, Disneyland, November 2017, Photo: Author

The pathways became so congested that Disney in late 2017 converted lucrative retail space in Adventureland to free stroller parking. In 2018 and 2019, Disney removed grass and flower planters, and benches, to widen walkways throughout the park. However, the 2017 launch of a fee-based digital Fastpass system on the Disneyland app for attractions that were previously unavailable under the old paper-based Fastpass led to even more visitors crowding the park's narrow walkways instead of the purpose-built attraction queues. The overcrowding has made poor behavior by other visitors even less tolerable since everyone is packed tightly together. Guest misbehavior was cited by 74% of survey respondents as having a negative impact on Disneyland as a social place. When asked for favorite social areas in Disneyland, respondents most often cited the comparatively extensive walkways and roomy environs of New Orleans Square, Main Street, and Tomorrowland, and rarely cited the narrow corridors and cramped spaces of Fantasyland and Adventureland. Although Disney has raised the price of admission every year, and sometimes twice a year, crowd levels have not decreased. The price of one-day admission to Disneyland has risen from US\$43 in 2000 to a price in 2019 that varies by date of use from US\$104 to US\$149. A premium AP for everyday admission to Disneyland cost US\$199 in 2000, while the 2019 equivalent signature plus AP costs US\$1,399. Fearing MiceChat members were being priced out of the park, Regan, in March 2018, modified his two-decade tradition of regular Sunday noon meets in the Disneyland hub to be only the first Sunday of every month, with remaining Sundays for possible excursions to other Southern California destinations. When announcing the May 2018 Bats Day would be the last full weekend event after nearly 20 years, founder and organizer Noah Korda cited the increasing cost to participate as a factor.

Some fans, however, will pay any price for their AP since their social lives and emotional connections have become intrinsically connected to physically being in the park (K. Pellman, interview, October 21, 2017; T. Regan, interview, November 28, 2017). Other fans have become cast members with the express purpose of affording their families regular access to the park (K. Pellman, interview, October 21, 2017). On discussion boards and Facebook groups, some fans say they will simply visit the park more often to justify paying the increased cost of their APs. Jenkins (2013) sees the fan experience as necessarily social, and not in isolation with a media fandom object such as a television show. The object is the conversational currency to participate in the fandom. Since Disneyland as fandom object is a physical place, to participate entails a need to show up regularly in the park. Unlike other media fandoms, vicarious enjoyment through the many fan podcasts, vlogs, videos, and photos readily available online feels insufficient when one can be a local passholder within driving distance of the physical place experience. Fan produced online media about Disneyland convinces locals to visit even more often for fear of missing out on new fan activities and Disney offerings that appear on an almost weekly basis at the park.

The aggregate population of Southern California's ten counties measures over 23 million people. Though there are over one million passholders, not all of them presumably reside in Southern California (Disney does not release a demographic breakdown), and not everyone in the region is enamored with the park. Disneyland is not a democratic place that allows votes on which attractions get bulldozed for new ones or where to draw the fine line between cosplay (banned) and Disneybounding (allowed). There are no public meetings on Main Street for annual passholders to assemble and air grievances, though there is a City Hall where one can chat with the guest relations department. People need to believe they have a say in the direction of a place for attachment to endure (Manzo & Perkins, 2006; Shumaker &

Taylor, 1983). Disneyland fans can experience profound emotional distress when Disney makes changes to the park (Dickerson, 1996). Citing Disney's penchant for making updates and changes in the park, Regan warns, "don't fall in love with Disneyland, it'll break your heart" (T. Regan, Interview, November 28, 2017). Unlike longtime media fandoms devoted to Star Wars, Doctor Who, or Star Trek where a fan can simply ignore disliked new texts to still enjoy old, immutable originals, Disneyland fans cannot return to the park of Walt Disney's time of the 1950s and 60s, or the early Eisner era of the late 1980s and early 90s. When parts of Disneyland are changed or removed, fans can never again personally experience those treasured places. Alterations to favorite rides and attractions, such as the replacement of the Hollywood Tower of Terror with a Guardians of the Galaxy attraction, were cited by 44% of survey respondents as having a negative impact on Disneyland as a social place. Nearly 30% disapproved of the Disney corporation's handling of Walt Disney's legacy and vision. One of the most profound departures by current management away from Walt Disney's legacy is the 2018 decision to allow the public sale of alcoholic beverages in Disneyland.

Since Disneyland's 1955 opening, Walt Disney famously dictated that alcohol would not be sold publicly in the park in order to preserve a family atmosphere and keep out the rowdy element associated with seaside amusement parks. Nevertheless, in 2018, the company subtly announced on the Disney Parks blog that "libations for adults" would be available at Oga's Cantina in the then under construction Star Wars land. After Disney confirmed the euphemism meant alcoholic beverages, some fans strongly opposed the new policy in posts across social media but the fragmented voice of fandom, as well as support for the policy change among other fans, induced resignation to Disney reversing a notable part of Walt Disney's legacy. Fans assume the initial offering of alcohol in the new Star Wars land is only

a prelude to the sale of “adult libations” throughout the park similar to the Trojan Horse introduction of highly profitable alcohol sales at the new, in 2012, Beauty and the Beast restaurant at the Magic Kingdom park at Walt Disney World that spread in a few short years to all table-service restaurants in the formerly alcohol-free park. At Disneyland, for now, the new bar in Star Wars land opens with the park at 8AM.

Along with the introduction of alcoholic beverages, Disney’s California parks have started to pivot away from child-centric lands and attractions targeted to young families. In 2018, Disney took the rare step of closing down and bulldozing an entire park land, ‘a bug’s land’, to create room for a full-fledged Marvel superhero land to open in phases starting in 2020. Dedicated to the Pixar film *A Bug’s Life*, the now shuttered land was the most kid-friendly area of DCA featuring four attractions and a water play area all designed for small children to enjoy with their entire family. The Marvel land will also feature a microbrewery that, according to the concept art, appears to be a giant beer can themed to Ant-Man. The only two rides in the new Star Wars land have minimum height requirements barring young children. In the pier section of DCA, a building next to the lagoon that previously housed a small bar on the top floor and a large princess meet and greet dining experience with Ariel from *The Little Mermaid* on the ground level became a massive bar on both levels in 2018 with the princesses evicted. In the Downtown Disney district, Build-a-Bear workshop and Ridermakerz (customizable toy car construction) were both closed down by Disney in 2018 to make way for two new restaurants featuring craft beers and cocktails. Disney’s Grand Californian hotel started featuring a poolside bar for the first time in 2019. Toontown, the most child-friendly land in Disneyland that literally houses Mickey and Minnie Mouse, has been the subject of fan rumors on discussion boards and social media to be demolished for an expansion of Star Wars land or Fantasyland in the next decade. In the meantime, Toontown

suffers from peeling paint, roped off areas that were previously accessible, and chronically broken interactive elements. Giving the rumor some credence, Disney, in 2011, demolished the Toontown at the Magic Kingdom in Walt Disney World in Florida.

In Disneyland's hub in front of Sleeping Beauty Castle stands the Partners statue featuring Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse holding hands (see Figure 4, p.133). At the base rests an inlaid plaque quoting the park's founder on the *raison d'être* for the park, "I think most of all what I want Disneyland to be is a happy place... where parents and children can have fun, together". Perhaps bowing to a declining birth rate in the US that hit a record low in 2017 (Tavernise, 2018), the increasingly prohibitive high cost of a set of APs for families with children, and the allure of high profit margin alcohol sales, Disneyland is gradually, and tacitly, being positioned as a playground for adults, much like the seaside amusement parks of the first half of the 20th century that Walt Disney disdained and held as an anti-model for Disneyland. Outside the theme parks, the ongoing Disneyization of the US film industry (Pixar, Marvel, Lucasfilm, and Fox) will potentially allow Disney to seize nearly half the US domestic box office receipts in 2019. In response, Manohla Dargis (2019), co-chief film critic of *The New York Times*, commented that "Disney conquered childhood and has now managed to conquer adulthood".

Fandoms often demonstrate a mix of fascination and frustration with their favorite texts (Jenkins, 2013), and are noted for being subversive in producing meaning and challenging power structures in a manner similar to Bakhtin's carnivalesque space (Sandvoss, 2005). Though fan communities are more dispersed, divided, and fragmented, especially with the emergence of social network platforms, than the corporations with which they seek to assert their interests (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013), media fandoms have a history of organizing

groups to form a base of consumer activism to speak back to producers (Jenkins, 2013). As individuals, passholders are relatively powerless, but, at times, they have been able to use their collective strength online to have a voice with Disney. The MiceChat website publishes a Disneyland Update column every Monday morning read not only by a large audience of fans, but also by Disney management. When the column highlighted photographs of a small bridge with peeling paint next to the castle, Disneyland maintenance was on location a couple days later with print-outs of the MiceChat photographs to pinpoint the trouble spots, and brushes and paint to do the repairs. Social network platforms have fragmented the fan voice into an ever-increasing array of groups comprising ever thinner slices of the fandom. While Disney may continue to glance through MiceChat's Monday morning columns for park maintenance tips, the days of a unified fan voice online resisting Disney are long gone, having diminished with the nature of each succeeding social platform. Place attachment for Disneyland by Southern Californians may wane in the future if local fans believe they have no meaningful voice online or in the park.

10.6 Interplay of fans, Disney, and online social platforms

Of all fans, the event organizers possess some leverage with Disney since they bring economic value to the company in the form of visitors and commerce into the park. When Disney gave a hard time about the scheduling and assignment of ballrooms at the Disneyland hotel to the organizer of a large annual fan event, he shared spreadsheets with Disney management as a reminder of the large amount of revenue the event generates for the company. Disney promptly backed down. When the lead ride operator at the Mad Tea Party was initially uncooperative with Lolita Day participants doing a ride takeover for a group photo (Figure 19), the organizers went to City Hall to voice their concerns. Guest relations proposed better cooperation and coordination with the event in the future. Just as in electoral

politics, organized groups can apply pressure to make their voice heard, though the greater the amount of economic value brought to bear by fan organizers likely determines the response from Disney. Since the concerns of fan organizers are usually limited to the event itself, not extending to general park policies, plans, and management, and rarely voiced online, Disney can discreetly deal with their issues on a case-by-case basis.



Figure 19: Takeover of the Mad Tea Cups by Lolita Day participants, Disneyland, October 2017, Photo: Author

The nature of the relationship that event organizers, social club leaders, web board owners, and social media influencers form with Disney depends in large measure on the characteristics of the online social platforms, and the circulation of cultural, social, and economic capital. Outside of Gay Days and Dapper Day, fan organizers of in-park events, meets, and social clubs derive no economic value from their labor, and instead pride themselves on the social value derived from establishing and sustaining a new group of

friends with shared interests at Disneyland. This characteristic profile of fan organizers resonates with Benkler's (2006) observation that the enabling of individuals to interact and share information through online networking outside previous institutional constraints was not for material gain, but rather for a diverse set of motivations including self-gratification, well-being, and social connections. Benkler believed the new decentralized, non-market transactional framework resulted in social sharing and exchange. Interaction was no longer just for market production, but rather a new kind of social production that could challenge incumbent industrial models. For example, Skype, peer-to-peer file sharing, and Wikipedia could threaten, and be threatened by, the telecommunication companies, the recording industry, and Encarta respectively. While fan organizers fulfill Benkler's rule, the web discussion board owners of the 2000s and social media influencers of the 2010s have been motivated to engage in information, knowledge, and social production to attract the cultural value of status bestowal by Disney that in turn steadily builds social capital with fans. The social capital is then parlayed into economic value that chiefly benefits Disney, and, to a lesser extent, web board owners and influencers. Rather than challenging the incumbent industrial model as Benkler maintained, web board owners and influencers have worked together with Disney for mutual benefit in accruing all forms of capital.

Unlike Benkler who wrote optimistically in 2006 of a then flourishing non-market sector of social production to challenge incumbents, Van Dijck's 2013 (p. 158) analysis of Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, and Wikipedia as the popular sociotechnical constructs of that time illustrated that all, except for Wikipedia, were consumed by a profit-driven connectivity that became a normalized infrastructure affecting user values since "platform owners surreptitiously preempted the rhetoric of collaboration and gradually endowed concepts like sharing and friending with a different meaning". Since status on Instagram derives in part

from showcasing a much greater number of followers than the following of others, social media influencers generally do not risk their cultural capital by reciprocating the likes, comments, follows, and subscribes from everyday fans unless there is an evident self-interested benefit. On the other hand, fan organizers predominantly use the reciprocating platforms of Facebook groups and Messenger for their events and clubs, and generally embrace a socially productive motivation with no interest in financial benefit. The divergent outlook is tied into their online platform of choice. For web board owners, high transaction costs required a consistent revenue stream to pay the bills, and hence a close relationship with Disney to access exclusive content to build site popularity and social capital with fans. The nature of being a social media influencer entails a persistent obligation to upload compelling photos and videos to followers and subscribers. This predicament leads influencers, similar to web board owners before, to form a close relationship with Disney for access to exclusive content in order to accrue nonreciprocal social capital with followers and subscribers. By contrast, fan organizers need not form a relationship with Disney for their events and clubs to be popular. In addition, events such as Galliday, Lolita Day, and Steam Day are unconnected to Disney texts, so the company has comparatively little cultural capital to offer as leverage to those fan event organizers. Most fan organizers measure success in social capital, not economic. Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) observed that the commercial motivations of companies clashed with the social motivations of fans, but the case of Disneyland reveals prominent segments of the park's fandom, principally web board owners and social media influencers, have embraced commercial values that not only align and liaise with Disney but have also been shaped by their choice of online social platforms.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

11.1 Intersection of platforms and place

A common thread connecting the development of playful places from Saturnalia to Disneyland and Internet platforms from Usenet to social network media is the gradual commodification of both leisure places and online social communication over their respective histories. Of course, online social network platforms did not exist during the time of Saturnalia, festivals, pleasure gardens, amusement parks, and during the first few decades after Disneyland's opening with the literature providing no mention of locals creating regular social formations in these playful places. While Saturnalia, festivals, and carnivals saw participants partake in spontaneous activities among the crowd, the ephemeral nature, in terms of time and space, of early playful places seemingly precluded the formation of regular social groups among strangers. Pleasure gardens and amusement parks had longer operating seasons in fixed locations with large crowds of visitors paying for admission, but no historical record exists of locals creating regular social formations with strangers. Even though the AP program began in 1984, only the print-based fan clubs Disneyana and Mouse Club organized annual meets for members in the park through their print publications. There were no other fan events, meets, or clubs at Disneyland until the popular emergence in the 1990s of early online social platforms. The Disney company and Disneyland are both firmly rooted in Southern California culture. From almost the beginning, there were locals who developed an attachment to Disneyland and visited the park regularly for Disney organized events such as swing dancing or Date Nite. Today, the technology, business model, ownership, and architecture of both online social network platforms and Disneyland are designed to extract as much as economic value as possible from users and visitors. However, local fans use online social platforms to discover fan organized social activities in the park, and then go and connect with strangers in-person at events, meets, and clubs.

Early online social platforms combined with the AP program to supercharge the relationship between local fans and Disneyland. Fans who were heretofore strangers in the park, logged into their computer at the office or home to connect, interact, and organize together. In addition to exchanging information and knowledge, fans resisted the plans of the corporation, and organized activities in the park without the permission or supervision of Disney. Fans began to substitute Disney's rules-bound ludus rides of constraining lap bars and routinized narratives for the paidia of custom-designed apparel, Disneybounding, ride takeovers, socializing, staging photos and videos, and simply having fun together. The sharing of text-based trip reports on Usenet (and with photos and videos on later platforms) encouraged other local fans to engage in similar forms of paidia. Disney saw its control of the discourse, commerce, and social formations related to Disneyland challenged by fans in the 1990s until the early 2000s due to corporate technological myopia and the nature of early online social platforms. However, the characteristics of later online social platforms allowed Disney to wrest control over discourse and commerce by co-opting web discussion board owners and social media influencers, as well as fan created media and practices.

The web board owners and influencers of Disneyland fandom were perhaps easier to co-opt than their counterparts in other media fandoms since Disney could leverage the powerful reward of insider access to the place of Disneyland in exchange for positive coverage. By contrast, the settings of the X-Files, Star Trek, and other popular media properties are filmed at studio soundstages and temporarily staged locations that do not provide the long-standing, fixed, emotionally resonant, physical place of Disneyland that a corporate owner can easily leverage as a habitual reward to fan site owners and influencers for ongoing positive coverage. The Warner Bros. studio tour in Hollywood takes visitors by tram to visit the

exterior of soundstages with commemorative plaques indicating the films and television shows that have been shot within the structure for almost 100 years (Figure 20).

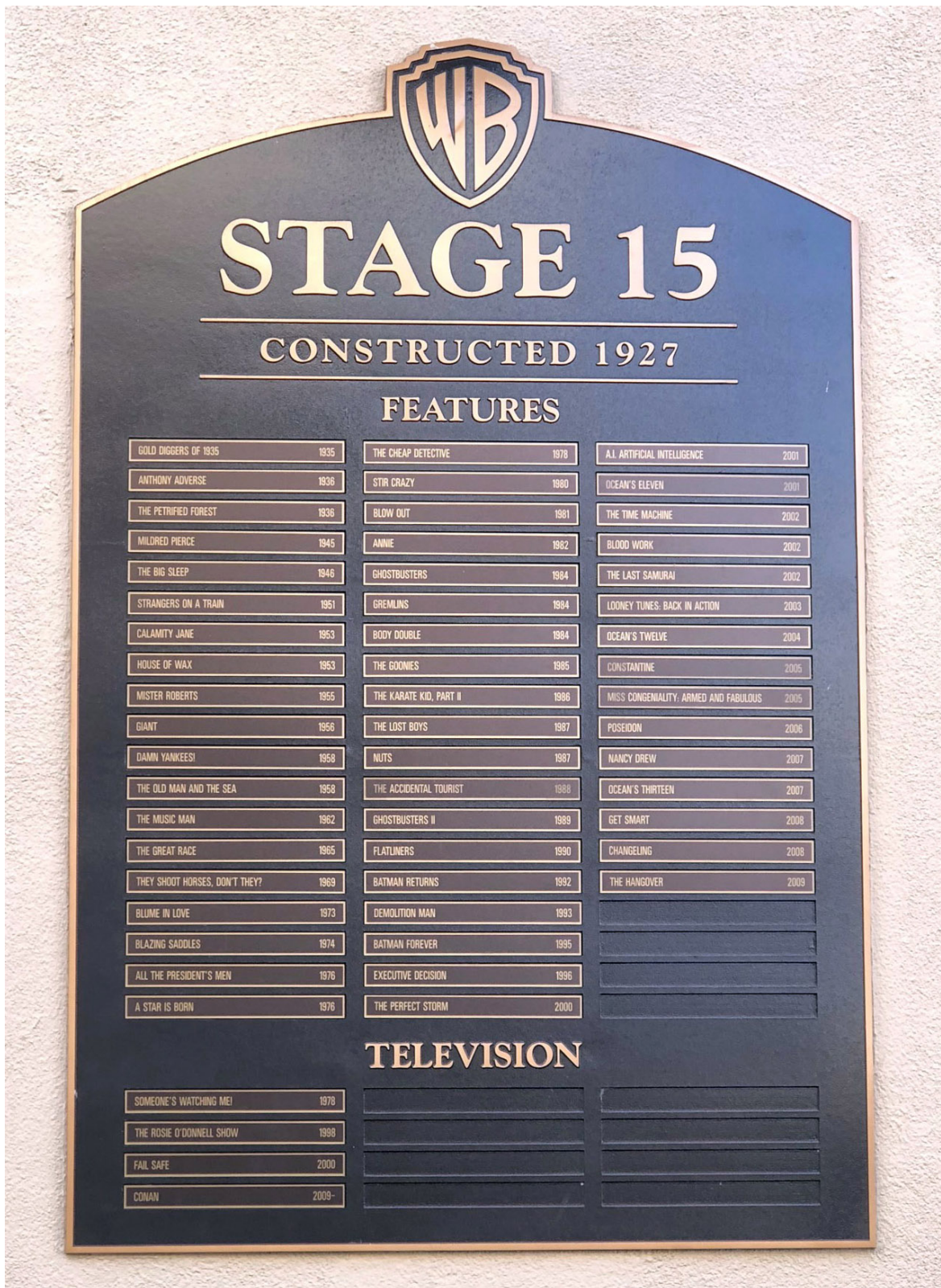


Figure 20: Commemorative plaque at Stage 15 on the Warner Bros. studio lot in Hollywood, California, November, 2018; Photo: Author

Although many of the films and shows named on the plaque are recognizable to visitors, there is little, if any, emotional resonance since there are no physical artefacts of the productions remaining inside or outside the soundstages to provide sensory modality. Other corporate owners simply do not have the leverage of a fandom object with the enduring power of a physical place such as Disneyland.

Contrary to admonitions by academics such as Turkle (2011) that digital screens are reducing human contact, and warnings by major news organizations such as *The New York Times* (Bowles, 2019) that human face-to-face contact is becoming a privilege for elites as the masses must make do with screens, the intersection of online platforms, smartphones, fans, and Disneyland has facilitated a continuous upward growth in fan organized in-park social activities. The original fan organized events are still in the park after 20 years, as Gay Days continues to grow in days, activities, and participants, but Bats Day has contracted. The continued sustainability of any fan organized activity at Disneyland can be imperiled by three factors. First is the competition for participants from so many events, meets, and clubs in the park, though the proliferation has afforded a much wider choice of social association for fans. Second is the increasing cost of APs and one-day tickets potentially restricting access for some fans to the park. Bats Day has been truncated from a weekend of activities to one day in the park due, in part, to the first two factors, though the following final factor is probably not applicable to the goth themed event. Third is the threat of being supplanted by Disney offering official park events substantially similar to already existing fan events such as a vintage fashion night comparable to Dapper Day. Fan organizers will not have the capital to compete with Disney at Disneyland with a similarly themed event, though fans might feel the more the merrier and attend both the official Disney event and fan version. However, a key persistent difference is that Disney organized themed events do not provide the ample

opportunity for social mixing that fan organized events offer with group photos, ride takeovers, and contests. Ultimately, the focus of Disney is on economic capital while most fan event organizers and participants prioritize social capital.

Disneyland fans still critique the park online, but their views are fragmented across numerous social network platforms and eclipsed in reach and prominence by fan website owners and influencers with cultural capital courtesy of cooperation with Disney. Only the fan organized in-park social formations enabled by Facebook groups, Messenger, and smartphones have remained outside Disney's purview for now, though a co-option strategy for this practice is underway with official themed night events. Disney was slow adapting to the fan challenge of the 1990s and early 2000s, but the nature of online social platforms since the mid-2000s has enabled Disney, for the most part, to prevail over fans in the contest over discourse and commerce regarding the kingdom. This 30-year arc of initial fan agency succumbing to corporate control mirrors the trajectory of the platforms themselves as noted in Chapter 3. Instagram, Flickr, and YouTube started as self-regulating communities ultimately bought out by large media corporations that transformed initial public social values into corporate commercial ones. The film and television review aggregation site Rotten Tomatoes was launched in 1998 by three students at University of California: Berkeley. Acquired first by News Corp.'s Fox Interactive Media division in 2005, the site today is jointly held by Warner Media and NBC Universal with 25% and 75% stakes respectively. Rotten Tomatoes allowed any fan who signed up for an account to post reviews until 2019 when a verification system was implemented to check first that a reviewer had purchased a ticket through Fandango (with other sites to come later) for the film review being submitted. Conveniently, Fandango has the same corporate owners as Rotten Tomatoes so fan reviewers essentially pay to post a critique within an integrated commercial ecosystem. In 2017, Rotten Tomatoes was accused

of withholding early reviews for the DC film *Justice League* on the site until the Thursday night release to shield the movie from criticism and protect its corporate parent, Warner Bros., as the studio behind the film (Raftery, 2017). Maxwell and Miller (2011, p. 594) see the evolutionary arc of the Internet as predictable since “the lesson of newer media technologies is the same as print, radio and television: each one is quickly dominated by centralized and centralizing corporations, regardless of its multi-dimensional potential”. As seen in the case of Disney and fans, the early democratic promise of many-to-many communication online has gradually subsided in favor of the corporate controlled model endemic to legacy media technologies. In the new digital one-to-many model, corporations are able to not only speak through their official social media presences, apps, blogs, and websites, but also through fan influencers and website owners with “authentic” voices uniformly touting the approved corporate branded message. Participation in the online discourse regarding a fandom object is now constructed within an Internet architecture that foregrounds and supports corporate commercial values over a public fan voice and critique.

11.2 Fans outside Southern California and theme parks besides the original Disneyland

Southern California annual passholders use Disneyland in a manner similar to a neighborhood park by regularly visiting to be social, active, and joyful. However, unlike playful places through history that were accessible through inexpensive admission fees, and located in or near city centers with affordable public transportation, Disneyland is generally inaccessible to Southern Californians without the socioeconomic means for expedient transportation and admissions with an AP or even single-day ticket. Future research could be done on fans, local and remote, who rarely, if ever, visit Disneyland, but still engage with local park regulars through online social platforms in a manner similar to conventional media fandoms. Although the scope of this study was restricted to residents of Southern California,

for periodic park fan visitors who reside outside the region in the US or around the world, research could be done to ascertain their sense of Disneyland as a place in comparison to locals. In particular, during the course of fieldwork in the park and research online, I encountered a number of annual passholders hailing from Northern California, Nevada, and Arizona who made monthly visits and proclaimed a strong attachment to the park. In addition, I also met fans who were born and raised in Southern California but moved elsewhere in the US for work or family reasons, but visit the region as often as possible to go to Disneyland. To stay connected to Disneyland while living away from the region, some consume fan produced YouTube vlogs, such as FreshBaked (111,963 subscribers), that feature a group of local fans who upload their park adventures on a daily basis. While at work or in the car, some listen to podcasts such as A Window to the Magic (currently in season 14) that simply consists of a silent podcaster walking around Disneyland for the day going on rides while only recording environmental audio. Other research could also plumb the quality and depth of the social relationships formed by locals at Disneyland using Oldenburg's (1999) concept of the third place, social network theory, or other community frameworks. Or, since the study's survey was delimited to participants 18 years of age and older, research could examine how local teenage fans navigate the intersection of online social platforms and Disneyland. The study can also be examined for generalizability to the experience of other media fandoms and corporate intellectual property owners over the past three decades with online social platforms. Furthermore, citing Hill's (2005) call for more studies of cyclical fandom and Harrington and Bielby's (2014) appeal to examine fandoms over the course of lifetimes, Click's (2017) longitudinal analysis of Martha Stewart fans could be a framework to study the engagement of Disneyland fans with their fandom object as they periodically allow their APs to expire to take a break and save money before repurchasing passes. Local fans post on Facebook groups and web discussion boards to announce their nonrenewal of

APs, but intent to remain within online fandom to follow park news and activities, and participate in the conversations. While this study looks at a number of popular Disneyland fan practices online and in the park, a further in-depth examination could discuss many others such as the depositing of loved one's ashes within favorite attractions, particularly the Haunted Mansion.

The study not only illustrates that Disneyland is a meaningful place for many locals, but also raises the question whether locals near other Disney parks in Orlando, Tokyo, Paris, Hong Kong, and Shanghai exhibit the same cognitive, affective, and behavioral affinity as Southern California fans. Besides Disney, theme parks by Universal Studios, LEGOLAND, Dollywood, Busch Gardens, Sea World, and other themed entertainment venues can also be examined for the confluence of platforms and place. The growth of the industry continues apace as US domestic theme and amusement parks generate more than US\$50 billion in economic activity every year (Johnson, 2016). Six Flags in 2019 launched a new type of theme park rewards system for its annual passholders similar to airline loyalty programs with points earned for checking in to rides and shows, taking surveys, the tally of park visits, and every dollar spent at in-park restaurants and shops in return for perks including free tickets for friends, line-skip passes, and special experiences. The program is purpose-built to develop a base of local annual passholders, similar to Disneyland. While Disney has already co-opted the functions of fan created park apps, the company's new Play app is designed to augment the theme park experience to a new level of interactivity for visitors within the environment of Star Wars land. The Play app allows interaction with droids and light panels, scanning inside of crates, translation of signs and audio from Aurebesh (a Star Wars language) to English, tuning into antenna arrays to eavesdrop, and an overarching game where visitors can join a faction upon entering the land. Whereas locals have customarily used smartphones to

facilitate fan organized social activities in the park, Disney presumably hopes the interactive app with storytelling features focuses fan attention back on Disney organized and controlled activities.

In every formal interview and informal conversation with fans, all agreed that Disneyland possessed an incomparable magic with Disney stories, themes, and characters a cut above in emotional resonance compared to almost anything at competing theme park chains (Harry Potter at Universal Studios being the notable exception). All Universal Studios parks around the world have an area dedicated to the Jurassic Park/World franchise with a flume or rapids ride that features a close escape from a raging T-Rex, and a meet and greet with a velociraptor. The original Disneyland beckons visitors with the reassuring architecture of an idyllic Main Street, a fairy tale Fantasyland of Tudor style structures, and the tranquil Northwestern US atmosphere of Critter Country. At Universal Studios Hollywood, dinosaurs want to eat you, a real-life actor playing Norman Bates from *Psycho* is chasing your studio tour tram wielding a large knife, the largest set of the studio tour features a huge and realistic plane crash site from *War of the Worlds*, and the first attraction upon entering the park is a walkthrough with zombies from *The Walking Dead* shambling after you and your brains. Therefore, it was unsurprising to have locals often tell me that Universal was a great park to visit once every year or two, but Disneyland was their regular social place of choice. Scibelli (2011, p. 216) believes the Disney theme park:

...provides a reassuring dose of vicarious Prozac for stressed-out modern Americans. The original Disneyland Park in Anaheim illustrates this point. Within the attractions at the original Disneyland Park, one “theme” surfaces again and again, the desire for visitors to temporarily escape their everyday lives in the modern world.

Walt Disney’s overriding emphasis on joy and laughter within an architecture of reassurance would seem to be a well established formula in theme park design to attract a large local fan base, but many theme parks around the world have not abided this winning precedent. The new Warner Bros. theme park that opened in 2018 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, features DC comic book heroes such as Batman with a land dedicated to Gotham City that includes the following attractions: The Joker Funhouse, Scarecrow Scare Raid, Riddler Revolution, meet and greets with the Joker and Harley Quinn, and the Hall of Doom restaurant. Gotham City is well themed to the source material by being dark, garish, eerie, and sinister, but hardly a place to visit on a regular basis to feel relaxed and reassured. The entrance to the Joker Funhouse recalls the “happy face” entrance of the early 20th century Coney Island parks but comprises a maze of scare-inducing mental and physical challenges themed to the rogues’ gallery of the Batman setting (Figure 21).



Figure 21: The Joker Funhouse in Gotham City land of the Warner Bros. World theme park in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, August 2018; Photo: Author

By contrast, the currently small Marvel area of DCA features meet and greets only with heroes such as Captain America, Spiderman, and Captain Marvel, and a Guardians of the Galaxy ride filled with humor and an upbeat soundtrack. To be sure, the emphasis on joy and laughter did not originate with Walt Disney and Disneyland but has been a key characteristic of playful places throughout history.

Compared to other iterations of Disneyland around the world, the original in Anaheim might be uniquely designed and situated as a preternatural match to the fantasy penchant of the Southern Californian character (Andersen, 2017; B. Gurr, Interview, October 8, 2017), and perhaps not replicable elsewhere to the same cognitive, affective, and behavioral effect. Matt Ouimet who worked at Disney for 17 years, including three as Disneyland president, said:

The reality of it is that there is a disproportionate amount of passionate guests here compared to any other park in the world. There is an emotional attachment, and Disneyland—because it is the original—has a heritage. I don't think you'll find people that passionate about Walt Disney World. These people grew up with it... this is the fabric of these people's lives. The intensity of it sometimes surprises me.

(Gardetta, 2005)

As the only Disney park conceived and built by Walt Disney with his personal touch, élan, and discernment, Disneyland offers an intimate experience of interwoven attractions and architecture not found in later Disney parks that incorporated greater distance between attractions and a larger scale to spread out crowds. Walt Disney's apartment above the Main Street fire station is still extant over 50 years after his death with a lit lantern in the window to signify his continuing presence to the tens of thousands who walk by every day on their way in and out of his eponymous park (Figure 22). No other Disney park contains such a personal and puissant semiotic overlooking the Town Square where Walt Disney delivered

his July 17, 1955, dedication speech welcoming visitors, “To all who come to this happy *place*. Welcome. Disneyland is your land”. On a few nights during my fieldwork, I stood next to the fire station observing visitors head for the park exit gate as some acknowledged the second floor window lantern by looking up to make eye contact or waving a hand.



Figure 22: Main Street fire station in Disneyland with lit lantern in the second floor apartment window to signify the continuing spirit of Walt Disney in the park, November 2017; Photo: Author

11.3 Disneyland in 2155

This study began with a personal reflection on approaching Disneyland for the first time as an adult expecting to be overwhelmed by commercialism and inauthenticity. Those elements are certainly manifest in the park as many critics and observers have previously noted. However, while studying local fans, a deeper layer emerged where the intersection of Disneyland and online social platforms combined to create an extraordinarily meaningful shared social place in their lives. For example, fan discussion boards and groups sometimes contain threads about locals who are commonly observed in the park. One local cherished by fans is Peter Tu, an 88-year-old Asian-American senior citizen who was initially dubbed “the clapper” because he repeatedly claps his hands and performs a special handshake with cast members and visitors during his daily morning trips. Tu’s granddaughter discovered the online fan chatter and uploaded a YouTube video in 2015 of his typical Disneyland day since 1999 (<https://youtu.be/BjvmAjQNuPs>). The subsequent sharing of the video on online social platforms made Tu even more renowned among fans who then looked for him in the park to do the handshake, or follow along and clap with him. Two years after the video was originally posted to YouTube, his granddaughter, Jade Tu, posted the following comment:

He really does appreciate the love y'all have for him. He loves when people go up to talk or take pictures with him. He was telling me the other day that this video made him so happy. He was saying that usually old people feel really sad because nobody ever talks to them or pays attention to them, but he doesn't feel that way at all. So, really, thank you all for the kindness you show him. I think the interactions he has with you guys is a major part of why he still goes there everyday. (Tu, 2015).

Commenters replied how much they loved seeing him in the park as he brings joy to everyone he meets. After meeting Tu in Disneyland, fans upload photos and videos to

YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, which in turn further establishes him as a fan celebrity. Tu almost certainly did not initiate his park practice in 1999 considering fame as a Disneyland visitor. He reached this level of prominence through a continuous feedback loop of fans taking photos and videos with Tu in the park, and sharing the media to online social platforms, therein increasing Tu's fame and motivating more fans to seek him out in the park. Shirky (2010) highlighted the feedback loop of personal and social motivations as a notable characteristic of social media that indulges a desire for more connectedness. Tu's carefree somatic expression of joy by just being in Disneyland is a kind of paidia relatable to many fans. I can attest to meeting Tu one morning during my fieldwork at Disneyland, doing the special handshake while other visitors gathered around, and having a big smile on my face afterward. Unbridled joy is contagious within a shared interest social group, so it is certainly understandable that locals search for fan events, meets, and clubs on online social platforms to offer every fan a multitude of different options almost every week to find a playful encounter or a steady social group. As Tu himself relates in an April, 2019, video (<https://youtu.be/hKHItoyh65M>), "I like Disneyland, because I make a lot of friends at Disneyland".

Social platforms on the Internet have enabled disparate strangers with a shared interest to discover each other online through groups dedicated to that interest and then meet in-person at a proximate shared place. However, Disneyland is a very particular social place that park goers told me repeatedly was not transferrable on a cognitive, affective, and behavioral sense to any other locale in Southern California. When asked where they would be on a given Sunday if Disneyland did not exist, many simply replied "home". Online social platforms helped fans find each other at Disneyland as the great social mixer, otherwise, they might not have found each other at all. When the former head of Imagineering, Marty Sklar, was asked

whether Disneyland would still be around on the 200th anniversary in 2155, or replaced by some virtual reality format, he said people would still seek out the physical experience of being in the park with other people (Mannheim, 2002). Playful places throughout history have witnessed people enjoying the communion of being part of a festive crowd while seeing and being seen. New online platforms and technologies could conceivably continue to foster and complement, and not replace, the social experience of fans in the park as it has since the 1990s. Fandom has long served as an alternative form of social community even before the Internet (Jenkins, 2013), and will probably continue with whatever new mediums or platforms emerge in the future. This hitherto obscured level of fan organization, creativity, sociality, and play at the park as exemplified by the many events, meets, and clubs afforded by online social platforms is what previous observers of Disneyland did not note as they fixated on the mercantilist aspects foregrounded by Disney. Although prognosticating to the year 2155 is dubious, Southern California fans are likely to use any future online social platforms and technology to continue to create new in-person groups and activities at Disneyland for social pursuits even as the Disney corporation persistently attempts to co-opt fan ingenuity and activities for commercial objectives.

Appendix 1: Online Survey Questionnaire

- 1) Do you consent to take the questionnaire? Yes / No
- 2) Are you 18 years old or over, have visited Disneyland in Anaheim, California, and your primary residence (where you spend most of the year) is in Southern California?
Yes / No
- 3) In which Southern California county do you reside (where you spend most of the year)? Imperial / Kern / Los Angeles / Orange / Riverside / San Bernardino / San Diego / San Luis Obispo / Santa Barbara / Ventura / I do not live in Southern California
- 4) How old were you on your first visit to Disneyland? 0-5 years old / 6-12 / 13-17 / 18-21 / 22-29 / 30-39 / 40-49 / 50-59 / 60+
- 5) How many times have you visited Disneyland in your life (estimate if you do not remember exactly)? 1-10 times / 11-49 / 50-99 / 100-199 / 200-499 / 500-999 / 1000+
- 6) On average how often do you visit Disneyland? 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) What type of Disneyland annual pass do you have? Signature Plus / Signature / Deluxe / Southern California / Southern California Select / Premier Passport / I do not own an annual pass
- 8) Do you have an annual pass to the following non-Disney theme parks in Southern California? Knott's Berry Farm / LEGOLAND / Sea World / Six Flags Magic Mountain / Universal Studios
- 9) Do you typically spend a day at Disneyland with (1 Never - 7 Very often): Family / Friend(s) from school, work, neighborhood, etc. (not from Disneyland online boards)

or social media groups) / Friend(s) met through Disneyland online boards and social media groups / By myself

- 10) On a typical visit to Disneyland, how likely are you to do the following (1 Never - 7 Very often)? Buy and/or trade Disney pins / DisneyBound (dress in Disney character inspired clothing) / Just enjoy walking around and being in the park, and going on few, if any, rides / Post to my social media account(s) about my Disneyland visit
- 11) Is Disneyland your favorite place (outside of home) to socialize with family and/or friends? Yes / No
- 12) When participating in online forums and social media with other Disneyland enthusiasts, how important is each of the following factors (1 Important - 7 Very important)? Information and knowledge exchange / Being social and making friends / Relaxation and entertainment / Creative outlet / Giving my opinion and influencing debates
- 13) What was the FIRST online platform you used to connect with other Disneyland enthusiasts? Internet Service Provider message boards (AOL, Prodigy, Compuserv, etc.) / Listserve email list / Usenet newsgroup (e.g. alt.disney.disneyland) / Web-based discussion board (e.g. MousePlanet, MiceChat, LaughingPlace, etc.) / LiveJournal / Blog (e.g. Blogger, WordPress, etc.) / Podcast / MySpace / Facebook / Twitter / YouTube / Instagram / Tumblr / Meetup.com / Other (specify)
- 14) Check any of the following you have EVER used to connect with Disneyland enthusiasts online (you can check more than one): Internet Service Provider message boards (AOL, Prodigy, Compuserv, etc.) / Listserve email list / Usenet newsgroup (e.g. alt.disney.disneyland) / Web-based discussion board (e.g. MousePlanet, MiceChat, LaughingPlace, etc.) / LiveJournal / Blog (e.g. Blogger, WordPress, etc.) /

Podcast / MySpace / Facebook / Twitter / YouTube / Instagram / Tumblr /

Meetup.com

15) Which is currently your favorite platform for connecting with other Disneyland enthusiasts online? Web-based discussion board (e.g. MousePlanet, MiceChat, LaughingPlace, etc.) / Facebook / Twitter / YouTube / Instagram / Tumblr / Meetup.com / Other (specify)

16) Based on your answer to the previous question, why did you choose that platform as your current favorite compared to the others? (specify)

17) Have you ever posted and shared online the following related to Disneyland? Video / Photography / Music or Song / Handmade painting and/or illustration / Computer graphic (e.g. Illustrator, Photoshop, etc.) / Arts, crafts and jewelry / Clothing design and creation / Story or fiction

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

19) Have you gone swing dancing at the Royal Theater (next to Sleeping Beauty Castle)?
Yes / No

20) Have you ever attended a fan-organized event in Disneyland (e.g. Gay Days, Dapper Day, Galliday, MiceChat meet, Gumball Rally, meetup .com, etc.)? Yes / No

21) Check the events you have ever attended (you can check more than one): Gay Days / Bats Day / Dapper Day / Galliday / Steam Day / Lolita Day (harajuku) / It's a Ska World / Harry Potter Day / MiceChat anniversary weekend / MiceChat Gumball Rally / MiceChat Sunday hub meetup / Meetup.com Disneyland fan club / Other (specify)

22) Check how you learned of the events you attended (you can check more than one):
Web-based discussion board (MousePlanet, MiceChat, LaughingPlace, etc.) / Event website / Blog (Blogger, WordPress, etc.) / Podcast / Facebook / Twitter / YouTube /

Instagram / Tumblr / Television, radio, newspaper or magazine / Word of mouth from a friend, family member, co-worker, etc. / Other (specify)

- 23) Did you ever make friends with another visitor (not in your group) while at Disneyland? Yes / No
- 24) Have you ever met up with someone in Disneyland that you first got to know in a Disneyland online discussion board or social media site? Yes / No
- 25) Are you a member of a Disneyland social club? Yes / No
- 26) What year did you join your social club? 2017 / 2016 / 2015 / 2014 / 2013 / 2012 / 2011 / 2010 or before
- 27) Which online platform does your social club primarily use to recruit and communicate with members, and plan activities? Website dedicated to the club / Meetup.com / Facebook / Tumblr / Twitter / Blog (Blogger, WordPress, etc.) / Other (specify)
- 28) What are the two things you enjoy most about being a member of a Disneyland social club? (specify)
- 29) What location is your favorite for being social with family and/or friends at the Disneyland resort (e.g. an entire land, a ride, a restaurant, a seating area, etc.)? (specify)
- 30) For the social atmosphere at Disneyland, how important are each of the following (1 Unimportant - 7 Very important)? Themed environment / Disneyland food and beverages / Shopping / Rides / Shows / Character meet and greets, and walkabouts / Cast members
- 31) While you are in line for an attraction at Disneyland, how likely are you to do the following (1 Never - 7 Very often)? Chat with members of my group / Chat with other visitors (not part of my group) / Use social media (SnapChat, Twitter, Instagram,

YouTube, etc.) and text messaging (SMS, WhatsApp, etc.) 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)

32) Have you ever done the following while at Disneyland? Helped another visitor (not in my group) with park directions, information or take a photo. / Picked up trash (not mine) and put it in the trash bin. / Found lost property and returned it to a cast member. / Assisted a cast member in the park. / Tipped or bought a gift for a cast member (that was not a friend or relative) / Given a valid FastPass ticket to another park visitor not in your group (pre-June 2017 FP system change)

33) Have the following had a negative impact on Disneyland as a social place for you? Removal or changes to attractions and shows / High crowd levels / Behavior of other visitors / Premium up-charge experiences / The handling of Walt Disney's park vision and legacy by the Disney corporation / Neglectful and/or poor management of online fan websites and social media groups by owners/moderators / Fan websites, social media, and in-park events have become too commercial

34) Do you agree or disagree with the following statements (1 Strongly disagree - 7 Strongly agree)? It would be very hard for me to move out of Southern California because of Disneyland. / Even if I visit Disneyland frequently, I do not get tired of the park. / Disneyland is a home away from home. / I feel trust and camaraderie with other visitors and cast members at Disneyland. / Disneyland is a force for good in American society.

35) Age: 18-25 years old / 26 - 35 / 36 - 45 / 46 - 55 / 56 - 65 / 66+

36) Gender: (specify)

37) Race / ethnicity: (specify)

38) Have you ever been a Disneyland cast member? Yes, I am currently Disneyland cast member. / Yes, I was a Disneyland cast member in the past. / No, I have never been a Disneyland cast member.

39) Are you a member of the official Disney fan club d23? Yes / No

Appendix 2: Open-Ended Interview Questions

- 1) Please describe your personal history with Disneyland. What is so persuasive and appealing about Disneyland to devote a great deal of your time and energy? How does Disneyland tie in to who you are as a person?
- 2) Please describe over time the Disneyland (online and offline) communities, groups, events and/or clubs in which you have participated. When did you start? How and why did you participate?
- 3) Which Disneyland communities, groups, clubs, and/or events have you taken on a more significant role than participant? Please describe your role. What motivated you to take a role beyond participant to become a founder, manager, moderator, or organizer of that community, group, club and/or event? What have been the challenges? How do you deal with haters, trolls and/or others disruptive to community?
- 4) What is your community, group, event and/or club's relationship with the Disney corporation? What do you think of the Disney corporation's relationship with Disneyland communities, groups, events and clubs?
- 5) For your community, group, event, and/or club's online social presence, which of the following do you use: website, listserve, blog, discussion board, podcast, vlog, social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, etc.), apps, etc.? Describe how have you changed tools and platforms over time. Why? How do you see their differences in content (design and presentation), participation, governance and management?
- 6) How do you use online tools and platforms for creating sociability and community online? And offline? Which do you prefer to use the most and least? Most and least effective in communicating with community and organizing? Why?

- 7) How often do you meet your community, group, club and/or event members at Disneyland? Are meetups usually planned well in advance or somewhat spontaneous? What is your favorite place at Disneyland for socializing with your group? Why?
- 8) What does community mean to you? Do you feel a sense of community at Disneyland? If so, how would you describe the community? Do you feel your group contributes to a sense of community at Disneyland?
- 9) What market pressures (site hosting, advertising, event organizing) are faced by the community, group, club and/or event you manage or own? How do you reconcile tackling monetary pressures versus fostering sociability and community?
- 10) Why is Disneyland preferred to other theme parks or places in Southern California for your community, group, club and/or event to meet?

Appendix 3: Field Notes Template

Date:

Site:

Activity:

Participants:

Length of observation:

Summary:

Appendix 4: Online Survey Participation Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE: Disneyland Online and Offline Sociality

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL NUMBER: H-2017-008

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Sal Humphreys

STUDENT RESEARCHER: William McCarthy

STUDENT'S DEGREE: PhD

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

The project explores Disneyland online and offline sociality. Online sociality includes using web discussion boards and social media platforms concerning the park. Offline sociality includes meets, events and just being at the park.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Dr. Sal Humphreys and William McCarthy.

This research will form the basis for the degree of PhD at the University of Adelaide under the supervision of Dr. Sal Humphreys.

Why am I being invited to participate? You have been asked to respond to a questionnaire because you use a Disneyland online discussion board or social media platform, have visited Disneyland, live in Southern California, and are 18 years old or over.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to complete an online questionnaire. There are no follow-up requirements.

How much time will the project take?

The questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete and requires only one session.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

There are no foreseeable risks, side effects, emotional distress, discomforts, inconveniences or restrictions, both immediate and later, anticipated by your involvement in this research. You may be inconvenienced for your time.

What are the benefits of the research project?

There are no direct benefits to the participant, but participation may benefit human knowledge by exploring the potential of community at theme parks.

Can I withdraw from the project?

Participation in this project is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the questionnaire at any time before final submission.

What will happen to my information?

The survey results will be confidentially stored at the University of Adelaide on a university server with access only by the project researchers. This will be kept for five years on the university server. The research results will be used for academic journal articles, presentations and as a PhD dissertation. A

summary of results upon submission of the dissertation can be provided to you, the participant, upon request.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

Please contact Dr. Sal Humphreys, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Media at the University of Adelaide by email (sal.humphreys@adelaide.edu.au) or phone (+61 8 83135227), or William McCarthy, PhD student in the Department of Media at the University of Adelaide by email (william.mccarthy@adelaide.edu.au) or phone (+61 4 78815049).

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Adelaide (approval number H-2017-008). If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the Principal Investigator. If you wish to speak with an independent person regarding a concern or complaint, the University's policy on research involving human participants, or your rights as a participant, please contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretariat on:

Phone: +61 8 8313 6028

Email: hrec@adelaide.edu.au

Post: Level 4, Rundle Mall Plaza, 50 Rundle Mall, ADELAIDE SA 5000

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If I want to participate, what do I do?

Please read the following consent preamble and click yes to begin the questionnaire.

Consent Preamble

1. I have read the information above and agree to take part in the following research project:
Title: Disneyland Online and Offline Sociality
Ethics Approval Number: H-2017-0082.
2. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. My consent is given freely.
3. Although I understand the purpose of the research project it has also been explained that involvement may not be of any benefit to me.
4. I have been informed that, while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will not be divulged.
5. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the questionnaire at any time before final submission.
6. I am aware that I can screenshot, save or print a copy of this consent preamble, when completed, and the above information section.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Sal Humphreys, Senior Lecturer, Department of Media, University of Adelaide, Australia
William McCarthy, PhD Student, Department of Media, University of Adelaide, Australia

Appendix 5: Interview Consent Forms and Participant Information Sheets (Identified and Anonymous)

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

CONSENT FORM

1. I have read the attached Information Sheet and agree to take part in the following research project:

Title:	Disneyland Online and Offline Sociality
Ethics Approval Number:	H-2017-008

2. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. My consent is given freely.
3. I have been given the opportunity to have a member of my family or a friend present while the project was explained to me.
4. Although I understand the purpose of the research project it has also been explained that involvement may not be of any benefit to me.
5. I have been informed that, while information gained during the study may be published in the form of book, journal article and/or conference presentation, I will not be identified and my personal results will not be divulged.
6. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time until submission of the dissertation.
7. I agree to the interview being audio recorded. Yes No
8. I am aware that I should keep a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

Participant to complete:

Name: _____ Signature: _____
Date: _____

Researcher/Witness to complete:

I have described the nature of the research
to

(print name of participant)

and in my opinion she/he understood the explanation.

Signature: _____ Position: _____
Date: _____

CONSENT FORM

1. I have read the attached Information Sheet and agree to take part in the following research project:

Title:	Disneyland Online and Offline Sociality
Ethics Approval Number:	H-2017-008

2. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. My consent is given freely.
3. I have been given the opportunity to have a member of my family or a friend present while the project was explained to me.
4. Although I understand the purpose of the research project it has also been explained that involvement may not be of any benefit to me.
5. I have been informed that information gained during the study may be published in the form of book, journal article and/or conference presentation and I will be identified with my personal answers reported.
6. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time until submission of the dissertation.
7. I agree to the interview being audio recorded. Yes No
8. I am aware that I should keep a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

Participant to complete:

Name: _____ Signature: _____
Date: _____

Researcher/Witness to complete:

I have described the nature of the research
to

(print name of participant)

and in my opinion she/he understood the explanation.

Signature: _____ Position: _____ Date

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE: Disneyland Online and Offline Sociality

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL NUMBER: H-2017-008

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Sal Humphreys

STUDENT RESEARCHER: William McCarthy

STUDENT'S DEGREE: PhD

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

The project explores Disneyland online and offline sociality. Online sociality includes using web discussion boards and social media platforms concerning the park. Offline sociality includes meets, events and just being at the park.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Dr. Sal Humphreys and William McCarthy.

This research will form the basis for the degree of PhD at the University of Adelaide under the supervision of Dr. Sal Humphreys.

Why am I being invited to participate?

You have been asked to be interviewed because you have been identified as being involved in online and/or offline sociality at Disneyland as an influencer, local fan, discussion board owner, social media group or club facilitator and/or event organizer on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Tumblr, Meetup, and/or Twitter.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to do an interview at a place of your choosing in the Downtown Disney area (Starbucks, Disneyland hotel lobby, outdoor public seating area, etc.). The interview will be digitally recorded only to ensure a reliable record and accurate quotation. There are no follow-up requirements unless there is something you would like to add, subtract or modify later.

How much time will the project take?

The interview will take approximately 45 minutes and requires only one session.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

There are no foreseeable risks, side effects, emotional distress, discomforts, inconveniences or restrictions, both immediate and later, anticipated by your involvement in this research. You may be inconvenienced for your time.

What are the benefits of the research project?

There are no direct benefits to the participant, but participation may benefit human knowledge by exploring the potential of community at theme parks.

Can I withdraw from the project?

Participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time, including any information provided. Withdrawal of interview content is possible up to submission of the thesis.

What will happen to my information?

The audio portion of your interview will be confidentially stored at the University of Adelaide on a university server with access only by the project researchers. This will be kept for five years on the university server. You will not be identified by name or organization in any of the published research. Instead, you will be quoted as a “influencer,” “owner of an online discussion board,” “head of a social group,” “local fan”, etc. The research results will be used for academic journal articles, presentations and as a PhD dissertation. A summary of results upon submission of the dissertation can be provided to you, the participant, upon request.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

Please contact Dr. Sal Humphreys, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Media at the University of Adelaide by email (sal.humphreys@adelaide.edu.au) or phone (+61 8 83135227), or William McCarthy, PhD student in the Department of Media at the University of Adelaide by email (william.mccarthy@adelaide.edu.au) or phone (+61 4 78815049).

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Adelaide (approval number H-2017-008). If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the Principal Investigator. If you wish to speak with an independent person regarding a concern or complaint, the University’s policy on research involving human participants, or your rights as a participant, please contact the Human Research Ethics Committee’s Secretariat on:

Phone: +61 8 8313 6028

Email: hrec@adelaide.edu.au

Post: Level 4, Rundle Mall Plaza, 50 Rundle Mall, ADELAIDE SA 5000

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If I want to participate, what do I do?

Please contact the researchers to arrange a suitable time and place for an interview. At the meeting, you will be asked to review and sign the attached consent form in order to participate.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Sal Humphreys, Senior Lecturer, Department of Media, University of Adelaide, Australia
William McCarthy, PhD Student, Department of Media, University of Adelaide, Australia

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William McCarthy, PhD Student, Department of Media, University of Adelaide, Australia

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