

The Dual-Loyalty Model: How Children and Parents Decide Whether to Return to a Family Entertainment Park

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Abstract

Family entertainment parks face a distinctive loyalty problem because the person who experiences the attraction most intensely is often not the person who controls the purchase. This article proposes the Dual-Loyalty Model of Family Entertainment, in which repeat visitation depends on two related but non-equivalent outcomes: child enthusiasm and parent approval. Children may evaluate fun, novelty, autonomy, challenge, peer interaction, identity, and mastery, while parents may evaluate safety, cleanliness, convenience, developmental value, comfort, food, price fairness, and the child's happiness. The same visit can therefore produce four strategic states: durable dual loyalty, child-driven but parent-resistant loyalty, parent-approved but child-weak loyalty, and joint rejection. The paper argues that conventional household-level satisfaction measures can conceal these disagreements. It proposes separate measurement of parent and child experience, post-visit emotion, desire to return, and actual repeat behavior, and develops practical implications for activity design, communication, memberships, and whole-family value.

One Household, More Than One Customer

Family entertainment parks are unusual service environments because the consumer unit is often a small decision system rather than a single individual. A child may initiate the visit request and evaluate the park primarily through excitement and play. A parent may pay, transport the family, supervise, manage siblings, and decide whether the visit will happen again. Research on family decision making confirms that children can exert meaningful influence over purchases while the nature and strength of that influence vary by product, family structure, and decision stage (Flurry, 2007).

This creates a loyalty problem that is easy to miss when operators ask only one adult, 'How satisfied was your family?' An average household score can conceal disagreement. The child may be enthusiastic while the parent is frustrated. The parent may appreciate the concept while the child considers it boring. In either case, repeat visitation is unstable.

The idea is closely related to the parent-child expectation gap in the FEC Gap Taxonomy and to the practical observation in How to Build the Best Activity Park that successful parks serve two audiences simultaneously: children seek fun, challenge, novelty, and friendship, while parents seek safety, cleanliness, convenience, value, and confidence in the experience (Godovykh, 2026; Godovykh et al., 2026). The Dual-Loyalty Model formalizes this tension as a researchable framework.

Child Enthusiasm

Child enthusiasm is defined here as the child's positive motivational and emotional orientation toward the experience and toward returning. It is broader than immediate pleasure. A child may experience temporary frustration during a difficult challenge but still leave highly motivated because mastery was achieved. Relevant dimensions may include excitement, autonomy, perceived competence, novelty, social belonging, favorite activities, identity, anticipation, and a sense of unfinished progression.

Self-determination theory provides one useful foundation because autonomy, competence, and relatedness are strongly associated with higher-quality motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These dimensions translate naturally into FEC design. Autonomy can be supported through meaningful choices and multiple paths. Competence can be supported through levels, feedback, and adaptive difficulty. Relatedness can be supported through peers, teams, parent-child activities, clubs, and community.

Child enthusiasm also has an emotional-memory component. Customer experience is not simply what happens objectively; it includes subjective cognitive, emotional, sensory, social, and behavioral responses (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020a). The moments a child remembers and recounts after the visit may be more predictive of return requests than a generic satisfaction score collected immediately at the exit.

Parent Approval

Parent approval is defined as the adult's judgment that the family entertainment park is a worthwhile, trustworthy, and repeatable use of money and time. Parents may value the child's enjoyment, but their evaluation includes additional criteria: safety, cleanliness, staff competence, convenience, food, seating, sibling compatibility, price fairness, sensory comfort, developmental value, and whether the experience creates excessive effort.

This does not mean that parent evaluation is purely rational. Emotions, memories, expectations, and retrospective judgments affect adults as well. Godovykh and Tasci (2022) distinguish among emotions, feelings, and moods and emphasize the need for conceptual precision when measuring affective experience. Post-visit emotions can also influence destination loyalty (Godovykh & Tasci, 2021). In a family entertainment context, pride in a child's achievement, relief about safety, frustration with queues, or exhaustion from supervision can shape the willingness to return.

Parent approval may also depend on visible meaning. A parent can more easily justify frequent visits when the child is not only occupied but also becoming more capable, social, creative, active, or confident. This is one reason development-rich activity parks should make progress legible without turning play into formal instruction.

The Four Dual-Loyalty States

The first state is high child enthusiasm and high parent approval. This is the strongest form of loyalty because both the demand signal and the purchasing authority are aligned. The child asks to

return; the parent independently perceives value. Memberships, birthdays, referrals, and recurring programs are most likely to thrive when both sides are strong.

The second state is high child enthusiasm and low parent approval. This produces child-driven but parent-resistant loyalty. The child may ask repeatedly to return, but the parent delays, substitutes another venue, limits frequency, or visits only for birthdays. Common causes may include poor comfort, weak cleanliness, confusing pricing, excessive screen use, unsafe perceptions, or a sense that the visit provides little value beyond temporary stimulation.

The third state is low child enthusiasm and high parent approval. This can occur when the adult respects the safety, educational value, price, or convenience but the child does not find the experience exciting enough. It is especially relevant to concepts that overcorrect toward instruction. A venue can be excellent according to adult criteria and still fail as family entertainment if children do not genuinely want to participate.

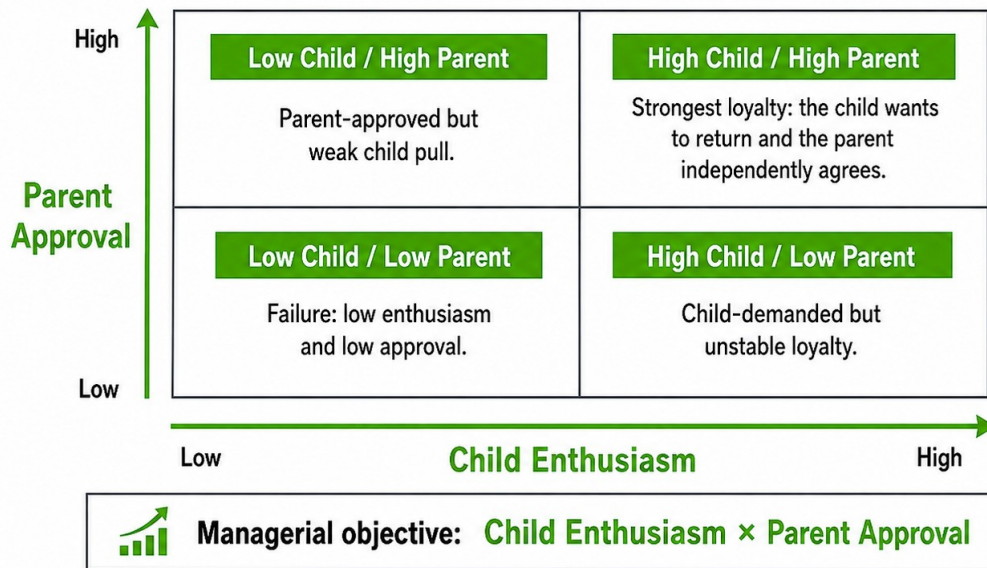
The fourth state is low child enthusiasm and low parent approval. Here both demand and purchasing motivation are weak. The strategic task is not loyalty optimization but fundamental product redesign.

The Multiplicative Logic of Dual Loyalty

The model is best interpreted as multiplicative rather than additive. Very high parent approval cannot fully compensate for near-zero child enthusiasm in a discretionary entertainment category. Similarly, very high child enthusiasm may not sustain frequent visits if the parent perceives the environment as unsafe, exhausting, overpriced, or low value. Conceptually, durable loyalty can therefore be expressed as a function of Child Enthusiasm $\times$ Parent Approval.

This formulation is not proposed as a literal equation with fixed coefficients. It is a hypothesis about interaction: the weakest side constrains the family relationship disproportionately. The empirical task is to test whether interaction terms between parent and child evaluations predict repeat visitation better than either score alone.

The model also suggests that the same intervention can affect both dimensions. A progressive ropes challenge can increase child competence and parent perceptions of meaningful activity. A parent-child creation station can increase child agency and parent involvement. Better food and seating primarily improve parent experience, but they may indirectly improve child experience by extending the amount of time the family is willing to stay. The system is dual but interdependent.



Measurement and Research Design

Testing the Dual-Loyalty Model requires separate data from children and parents. Children should not be treated simply as proxies through parent reports, although age-appropriate methods are essential. Kid-Friendly World proposes a broader methodological approach that combines adult and child perspectives through surveys, interviews, observation, drawings, mapping, and participatory methods depending on developmental level (Godovykh, 2025).

A practical FEC study could collect a short child measure of desire to return, favorite experience, boredom, challenge, autonomy, and social enjoyment; a parent measure of value, comfort, safety, developmental meaning, convenience, and willingness to repurchase; and behavioral outcomes such as actual revisit, membership renewal, or birthday purchase. These measures could be repeated after several visits to determine whether the loyalty relationship changes as novelty declines.

Industry Applications

The Dual-Loyalty Model encourages operators to design experiences that can be loved by children and independently endorsed by parents.

- Measure child enthusiasm and parent approval separately rather than reporting one family satisfaction score.
- Design attractions that combine excitement with visible mastery, agency, creativity, or social value.
- Make safety, cleanliness, progress, and developmental value easy for parents to understand.
- Avoid educational over-design that sacrifices fun; entertainment remains the child-facing requirement.

- Use parent comfort, food, Wi-Fi, sightlines, and optional participation to remove adult resistance to frequent visits.
- Track which loyalty quadrant members occupy over time and target interventions accordingly.

Conclusion

Family entertainment parks should not assume that one household produces one evaluation. Children and parents experience the same venue through partially different goals, emotions, and decision criteria. Durable repeat visitation is most plausible when the child genuinely wants to return and the parent independently approves the expenditure of time and money. The Dual-Loyalty Model makes this relationship explicit and creates a practical research agenda: measure both sides, identify disagreement, and design family entertainment that combines excitement with parent-recognizable value.

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