An analysis of children's play in resort mini-clubs: potential strategic implications for the hospitality and tourism industry

Hugues Seraphin and Anca Yallop

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An analysis of children's play in resort mini-clubs: potential strategic implications for the hospitality and tourism industry

Hugues Seraphin^a and Anca Yallop^b

Q2 Q1 ^aBusiness School, The University of Winchester, UK; ^bAuckland University of Technology

ABSTRACT

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Children are important stakeholders of the tourism and leisure industry because, similarly to their parents, they are consumers and active decision-makers. As children are important for the tourism and leisure industry, the way their needs of having fun are met, through play and children activities, becomes paramount. Using a multi-case and content analysis research approach, this paper examines the current practices used by resort mini clubs in terms of products and services offered to children and analyses the dimensions of fun used in creating a competitive advantage for mini-clubs and resorts. Drawing on ambidextrous approaches to management, this paper proposes a new dimension of fun, that of "advertainment fun play", which builds on the dimension widely used in the examined resort mini-clubs, namely "edutainment fun play". The study suggests that when managed in an ambidextrous way, the dimensions of play have the potential to create competitive advantage and can have impacts at both macro and micro levels.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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Children; play; resort miniclub; ambidextrous management

1. Introduction

Children are important customers for the hospitality, event and cruise sectors (Dowse, Powell, & Weed, 2018; Lugosi, Robinson, Golubovskaya, & Foley, 2016; Radic, 2017) because, similarly to their parents, they are consumers and active decision-makers. They are important also because meeting their needs can increase loyalty and positive word-of-mouth (Lugosi et al., 2016). Sometimes children are considered even more important than parents are, because their satisfaction affects the satisfaction of their parents and / or carers (Cullingford, 1995; Lugosi et al., 2016; Thornton, Shaw, & Williams, 1997). The importance of children for the tourism industry could be summarized by this quote: "children are the tourists of the future" (Cullingford, 1995, p. 126).

As children are important for the tourism industry as a whole, the way their needs of having fun are met (through play, activities, etc.) becomes paramount. For Poris (2006), fun is an important component in the life of children; therefore, it becomes important for practitioners aiming to meet the needs of this target to understand what constitutes fun for children. In other words, it is important for the hospitality and tourism sectors to provide fun to children in order to satisfy them and their families, as Johanson

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Q4 (2008, cited in Kazembe, Zimbabwe, Mwando, Nyarota, & Muyambo, 2015) suggests that here is a relationship between customer satisfaction and family friendly service.

In the early 1990s, Cullingford (1995) highlighted the fact that more importance should be given to children in the tourism industry by targeting them directly and not through their parents. Then ten years later, Gaines, Hubbard, Witte, and O'Neill (2004), emphasized the same problem. More recently, Lugosi et al. (2016), called for a better engagement with children's needs. The last twenty years have not showed any improvements in this area, and so, there is a need for further studies in this area (Gaines et al., 2004). This paper addresses this neglected research gap. For this reason, the study focuses on children's programmes within resorts. More specifically, the paper examines resort miniclubs and the types of activities they provide to children. This research is advancing the work of Gaines et al. (2004) and Lugosi et al. (2016) in the area of hospitality, but also the work of Poris (2006) in the area of young consumers.

This research focuses on holiday resorts for families, which offer tourism services designed for families (e.g. children's clubs / mini-clubs). Typically, resort mini-clubs offer children a wide range of activities according to children's age, and they are an important service component of the resorts' management strategy to meet the needs of their customers. As noted by Makens (1992, cited in Gaines et al., 2004), resort mini-clubs are "a natural service extension that contributes to the ultimate success of the hotel or resort property" (p. 86).

The key objective of this paper is to examine resort mini-clubs' activities for children and therefore the way children have fun in mini-clubs, and to identify ways in which these activities may generate competitive advantage for a resort and destination. Accordingly, two research questions are addressed in this paper:

- (a) What are the dimensions of fun for children in resort mini-clubs?
- (b) How can children's dimensions of fun be turned into a competitive advantage for resorts and destinations?

To address these research questions, this research paper examines and evaluates the actual children activities (play activities) provided by resort mini-clubs and proposes ways for resort mini-clubs to improve their offer, generate competitive advantage and satisfy stakeholders (Simao, 2013). More specifically, for the development of resort mini-clubs into a competitive advantage, an ambidextrous management approach, which involves a balance between exploration and exploitation, is explained and proposed. Indeed, organizations deeply anchored onto exploration suffer the costs of experimentation (R&D) with, sometimes, limited benefits. Organizations anchored onto exploitation, on the other hand, do not move forward and remain in a "status-quo" in terms of performance. Organizations that manage to find a balance between exploitation and exploration are likely to be prosperous (Nieto-Rodriguez, 2014).

2. Literature review: a brief overview

2.1. Children and play

Play (or playing) is an integral part of children's life (Poris, 2006) and it occurs naturally in a variety of social and cultural contexts (Powell, Cory, & Datillo, 2004). Play is a

"dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon" (Holst, 2017, p. 85) and it may be defined as "the whimsical pastime of children or as children work" (Lewis, 2017, p. 10). With "social pretend play" defined as "play in which children begin to communicate their transformations and collectively transform objects, people and situations in order to create nonliteral 'as if situations" (Whitebread & O'Sullivan, 2012, p. 198), children are developing their meta-communication. In other words, they develop their ability to adapt their behaviour to the frame (within or outside the play frame) in which they place themselves. O'Sullivan (2012), explained that "social pretend play" contributes to children's knowledge about and understanding of their own mental processing (metacognition) and monitoring and control of emotion, social and motivation aspect (self-regulation). Play contributes to the literacy development of children (Lewis, 2017). At the same time, the games children play are telling, to some extent, the narrative of who they are as individuals, because when playing, they are performing particular social positions, they show their ability to imagine, to understand rules and to develop some expertise (Willett, Q6 2015). Interestingly, according to Smith (2010, cited in Lewis, 2017) "play begins with children as young as 3-4 and peaks around 7-11 years of age and then declines dramatically by 13-14 years of age" (p. 14). Play is also associated in the literature with concepts and terms such as childhood memory, nostalgia, tradition, communities, and social capital (Frost, 2015).

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Due to its complexity and the role it has in children's development and learning, play cannot be ignored or considered lightly (Lewis, 2017). Children, as much as adult consumers, have their own desires and wishes and they aspire to have their own experiences (Wood, 2018). Businesses need to be able to understand children's needs and behaviour and to take the opportunity to cater for these needs. Taking advantage of this opportunity by businesses is key. Lewis (2017) suggested that entertainment, in general, has the ability to teach children (and parents alike) how to play and think. For this reason, for example the toys, games and film industries are spending vast amounts of money attempting to understand children. Play is an opportunity to involve the entire family in an activity and not just the children (Lewis, 2017). This ability to involve and influence children and their families can provide competitive advantage to a resort against its competitors. One may argue that involving and influencing children and their families is a challenging task particularly in the context of holiday resorts, mainly because the term "play" is associated with "fun", where "fun" implies "casual leisure" instead of "serious leisure" and so, therefore, "play" is subsequently only perceived as a way to entertain children (Kerr & Moore, 2015). In addition, children and practitioners have differing views of the term "play". For children the term is associated with "fun" and they play simply because they enjoy it. For practitioners on the other hand, play has a more instrumental purpose that may be related to something lucrative like money, career, commercial media (Kerr & Moore, 2015; Lewis, 2017). Indeed, for Lewis (2017, p. 10), "children's play is being eroded across four distinct areas: commercial media; fear and safety concerns; school curriculum and policy that value and teach quieter forms of behaviour; and ideology". For resort mini-clubs to be successful in their strategy, "play" must be viewed and managed from a child's perspective. Nevertheless, the difficulty of escaping the rhetoric of play from a more practical and lucrative way makes it difficult (Lewis, 2017) and this challenge is something that resort mini-clubs will have to embrace in order to use and manage children's play activities to their advantage.

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2.2. Dimensions of fun for children

For Poris (2006), a product or service needs to be fun to appeal to children. When the type of fun they seek has been understood, it increases the chances of providing something (product and service) they want and understand (message). Poris (2006, p. 14), even claimed that: "fun is the essential cost of entry to effective marketing to children (...) kid fun is absolutely vital to success". At the same time, Poris (2006) argued that despite the importance of fun, little is understood about it and people working in this area rely upon subjective opinion.

Poris (2006) identified 10 dimensions of fun for children, which are presented in Table 1 below, along with some examples of activities related to each type of fun.

It is important to highlight here the fact that, "while fun is a universally appealing concept to kids, what constitutes fun for an individual child varies according to their demographic characteristics" (Poris, 2006, p. 22). These differences in perceptions may

Table 1. Types of fun

Type of fun	Activities
Friend-orientated fun	Spending time with friends
(Interaction and socialization with friends)	Making new friends
	Going to parties
	Doing something that makes friends happy
	Going to the pool or beach
Empowering fun	Doing something they are proud of
(Learning, discovery, accomplishment feelings)	Doing something on their own
	Getting people to listen to their ideas
	Getting good at something
	Exploring and discovering new things
	Showing people how good they are
	Doing something they enjoy all by themselves
	Building things
Creative fun	Arts and crafts
(Arts and music-related activities)	Creating or making something new
	Playing a musical instrument or singing
Silly fun	Being silly
(Silly, light-hearted, playful fun)	Watching other people do silly things
	Making people laugh
	Running or chasing others
Sports-orientated fun	Playing sports
(Physical activities)	Outdoor playing
Competitive fun	Being able to do something better than anyone
(Being the best, showing off and having something to win)	else
	Buying things to gain personal status and individuality
	Showing their friends their possessions
Family-orientated fun	Spending time with family and parents
(Family interaction and activities and opportunities to display socially	Doing something that makes parents happy
responsible behaviours)	Doing something to help others
Surprising/ adventurous fun	Trying something they have never tried before
(New and surprising activities and experiences)	Being really surprised by something or someone
	Seeing something for the first time
Relaxing fun	Relaxing or hanging out
(Relaxing and break taking activities)	Deep breathing and meditation
	Listening to music
Rebellious fun	Going against the rules
(Breaking rules and risk-taking behaviours)	Testing boundaries and getting away with risk-
	taking behaviours
	Contradicting what others say

Source: The authors (adapted from Poris, 2006).

indicate that holiday resorts should adapt the activities (play) offered by mini-clubs. These activities should not be standardized across the different resorts operated by the chain. This is further supported by Powell et al. (2004) who argued that play is a contextual phenomenon. Some resorts like Hyatt Resort (with their Camp Hyatt) are tailoring their play, and more specifically their children's programme to match the local culture of the destination (Gaines et al., 2004). By doing so, resorts are not only contributing to the overall experience of children, but also starting to create a link between children, the resort and the destination's culture and heritage. Indeed, play presents itself as a good opportunity to engage, interact with children, and at the same time, to nurture the development of feelings and connections (Powell et al., 2004).

2.3. Framework

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Based on the literature reviewed, the remainder of this research paper is guided by the framework that, to obtain competitive advantage, the tourism industry should endeavour to understand how children play, because (fun) play, which is an important part of our lives, has the potential to influence every member of a family and can be turned into competitive advantage for an organization if used appropriately. By providing the right type of fun, resorts can not only achieve competitive advantage but can also fill a gap due to the erosion of play in many other areas.

Gaining competitive advantage is an integral part of destination tourism planning (Edgell & Swanson, 2013). It could be achieved, for instance, through: resources endowment; effective resource allocation; managerial effectiveness; collaboration between different stakeholders within clusters; development and use of new technologies; pioneering green innovation strategies; branding; good relationships between local residents and visitors (Chen, 2008; Elliot, Khazaei, & Durand, 2016; Jackson, 2006; Jackson & Murphy, 2006; Lin, 2010; Mason & Beaumont-Kerridge, 2009; Michel, 2000; Miller & McTavish, 2013; Novelli, Schmitz, & Spencer, 2006; Poon, 2015; Wang, Li, & Li, 2013). These strategies help firms to achieve greater efficiency as well as to establish and strengthen their core competencies enabling firms to reach superior performance and enhanced profitability (Chen, 2008; Elliot et al., 2016; Jackson, 2006; Jackson & Murphy, 2006; Lin, 2010; Mason & Beaumont-Kerridge, 2009; Michel, 2000; Miller & McTavish, 2013; Novelli et al., 2006; Poon, 2015; Wang et al., 2013).

2.4. Ambidextrous management as a tool for competitive advantage

Ambidextrous management approaches have the potential to create opportunities for competitive advantage for organizations. The ambidextrous approach calls for a balance between exploration and exploitation, i.e. exploitation of existing resources and competencies with a focus on the present, and exploring new opportunities, with a focus on the future (Filippini, Guttel, & Nosella, 2012; Mihalache & Mihalache, 2016). Despite the challenges of achieving ambidexterity due to the fact that exploitation and exploration innovation are contradictory activities, Mihalache and Mihalache (2016, p. 144) explain that "organisational ambidexterity is a key driver of sustained performance in the tourism industry, since it enables firms to make the most of their current capabilities while at the same time developing new ones to attract new customers".

Figure 1 below summarizes the framework used in the development and structure of the rest of this research paper.

3. Methodology and case studies overview

3.1. Approach

From a methodological point of view, this research employs a multiple case approach in order to identify and examine the dimensions of fun within the play (activities) offered by resort mini-clubs to their customers, namely children and their families. The analysis framework uses Poris's model of dimensions of fun for children as a preliminary step in modelling the dimensions of fun in play (activities) that may be provided by resort mini-clubs to children (and their families). The findings are then compared to those of Gaines et al. (2004) and other previous research in support of propositions made based on secondary data from previous research and literature, and qualitative data resulting from the content analysis of the cases analysed.

Single or multiple case studies have been previously used in research aimed to explore the topic of fun and more specifically, entertainment (advertainment and edutainment), and represent a prevalent approach within the tourism, hospitality and event industry (Brunt, Horner, & Semley, 2017). For instance, Tagg and Wang (2016) used Kidzania as a case study. Pietro, et al. (2018) used the cases of Eataly and Kidzania. Similarly, Poris (2006) used a variety of case studies (M&M, Lego, etc.) to develop its framework for the dimensions of fun for kids. This study adopts a similar research approach.

3.2. The sample of the study

For the purpose of this study, since generalisability of findings is not intended within case research approaches, a sample of convenience consisting of six resort mini-clubs from four different resorts (and companies) were selected:

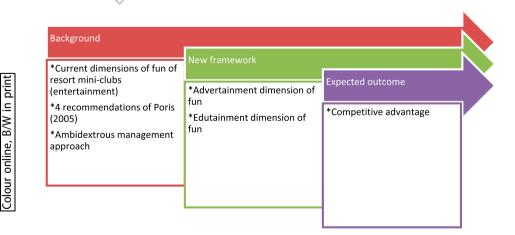


Figure 1. Framework – two dimensions of fun in resort mini-clubs. Source: The authors.

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- (1) Look Voyages (Looky Club)
- (2) Club Med (no specific name for their mini club)
- (3) Sandal Resorts (no specific name for their mini club)
- (4) Pierre & Vacances (no specific name for their mini club)
- (5) Hyatt Resort (Camp Hyatt Maui)
- (6) Phoenician Resort (Funicians Club)

A brief overview of the selected resort mini-clubs and the activities offered to children is provided next.

(1) Look Voyages (Looky Club)

Look Voyages is a Tour Operator (T.O) and Travel Agent (T.A) part of the TUI group. As part of their activities, Look Voyages operates 35 Clubs Lookea (all over the world), which are all-inclusive family resort holidays. As part of the services offered to children by the resorts, "Looky Club" is the resort mini-club for children between 4 and 17 years of age (https://www.look-voyages.fr/look/club-vacances/club-vacances-enfant-looky-club.aspx). Table 2 summarizes the type of fun play (activities) available for children (Look Voyages [Online]).

(2) Club Med

The success of Club Med is based on the location of the resorts, activities, all-inclusive packages, and the interaction between customers and staff (Kandampully, 2000). But the key success of Club Med has been its ability to maintain the loyalty of their customers who were kids in the 1970s/1980s and are adults now. They managed to do so by extending their services (Kandampully, 2000). The family package incorporates access to miniclubs (Kandampully, 2000). Table 3 below summarizes the type of fun play (activities) available for children (https://www.clubmed.fr/l/club-enfant).

(3) Sandal Resorts

Sandals Resort International operates under a variety of brands (Sandals, Beaches, etc.) in the Caribbean. The company includes 24 resorts in 7 different islands. Beaches Resort is a family-friendly all-inclusive resort (http://www.beachesresorts.co.uk/holiday/kids/). This

Table 2. Looky Club activities.

G	Groups (based on age)	Activities
L	ooky Club Mini (4–6)	Sports; treasure hunt; face painting workshops; swimming pool; performing art workshops; mini disco; talent show
L	ooky Club Junior (7– 10)	Water polo; volley polo; mini foot; volley; tennis balloon; Mini Olympic games; performing art workshops; mini disco; talent show
L	ooky Challenger (11– 13)	Volley; ping-pong; gym; learning local language and culture workshops; performing art workshops; show; beach volley; football; swimming pool
L	ooky Jeun's (14–17)	How to DJ; DJ competitions; dancing and singing workshop; performing art workshops; show; movie making

Source: The authors.

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Table 3. Club Med mini-club activities.

Groups (based on age)	Activities
Baby Club Med (4–23 months)	Walk; baby gym; music games; story telling
Petit Club Med (2-3)	Sport; handicraft workshops; talent show
Mini Club Med (4–10)	Sport; discovery activities; art; mini disco; shows; gymnastics; water ski; horse riding; cooking lessons; handicraft; music; dancing; nature discovery
Junior Club Med (11-17)	How to DJ; movie making; water ski; tennis; golf; volley ball
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Source: The authors.

brand offers a variety of activities for children (Beachresorts [Online]) as presented in Table 4 below.

(4) Pierre & Vacances

330 Pierre & Vacances is part of the Center Parcs group. 16 of the resorts within the group (located in France) have mini-clubs (https://www.pierreetvacances.com/fr-fr/clubsenfants_om). The table below (Table 5) summarizes the type of fun play (activities) offered by the mini club.

(5) Hvatt Resort (Camp Hvatt Maui)

Hyatt launched their children programme back in 1989. They operate in 17 locations throughout the USA. Each resort has its own programme for children that enable them Q7 to discover the local culture (Gaines et al., 2008). Table 6 below presents the type of activities offered by Camp Hyatt Maui (https://travelmamas.com/hyatt-regency-maui-review/).

(6) Phoenician Resort (Funician Club)

The resort mini-clubs at the Phoenician resort offer activities for children aged 5–12. Their daily schedule includes age-group related activities such as games, crafts, sports activities. Equipment in the mini-club includes: 180 gallon salt water fish tank; 60" flat screen with surround sound; Three 50" Flat Screen for video games; Sulcata Tortoise; Bearded Dragon; Touch Table with interactive games; Lake house play home; Full size Lego and magnetic wall (https://www.thephoenician.com/funicians-kids-club/). The play (activities) offered by Funician Clubs are showed in the table below (Table 7).

Table 4. Sandals mini-club activities.

355	Groups (based on age)	Activities	
	Infant programme	Not provided	
	Toddler programme	Toddler pools, shell collecting, face painting, treasure hunts, puppets, costume time, magic shows, sand castle building	
	Pre-teens (8–10)	Sailing, snorkelling, swimming, beach volleyball, beach soccer, scavenger hunts, glass bottom boat rides, pizza making, reggae jam sessions	
360	Teens	Watersports, boat cruises, pool Olympics, tennis clinics, karaoke, discos, dance parties, talent shows	

Source: The authors.

Table 5. Pierre & Vacances mini-club activities.

Groups (based on age)	Activities
Clubs baby (3–35 months)	Music
Club mini (3–5)	Treasure hunt
Club kids (6-8)	Adventure and art activities
Club junior (9–12)	Adventure and art activities
Club Ados (13–17)	How to DJ, performing art workshops

Source: The authors.

Table 6. Camp Hyatt Maui mini-club activities.

Groups (based on age)	Activities
5–12	Fantasy pools Rope bridge Keiki Lagoon water fountains Lei making Hula lessons Crat Swimming lesson

Source: The authors.

4. Findings and discussion

The content analysis of the services provided to children in resorts reveals that:

- (a) The breakdown of children according to their age is a common practice and follows more or less the same pattern;
- (b) Activities provided by resort mini-clubs are fairly similar from one resort to another;
- (c) In most cases, the mini-clubs do not have a specific name, and when they do, the name is commonly the name of the resort or a derivation; and
- (d) The online information about mini-clubs is, in most cases, limited.

4.1. The dimension of activities for children in resort mini-clubs

Resort mini-clubs offer fun activities to children. Table 8 presents the breadth and variety of these activities. Nevertheless, the type of fun activities offered are not well balanced. Some types of fun are more represented than others. Contrasting with Poris (2006) list of types of fun, Table 8 below provides the list of activities offered by mini-clubs at the six clubs examined, from the most represented type of fun to the least represented type of fun:

Table 7. Funician Club mini-club activities.

Groups (based on age)	Activities
5–12	Outdoor sports, Cactus Garden tour Arts & crafts projects Playground activity Video games Charades Bingo Other board games

Source: The authors.

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Table 8. Types of fun in resort mini-clubs.

Type of fun	Activities
Sports-orientated fun	Sports
	Water polo
	(Beach) volley / Soccer
	Football
	Pool Olympics
	Tennis clinics
	Sailing
	Snorkelling
	Gym
	Water ski
	Glass bottom boat rides
	Golf
	Tennis
	Mini Olympic games
	Tennis balloon
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	Ping-pong
	Volley (polo)
	Mini foot
	Swimming pool
	Submarine rides
	Hiking
riend-orientated fun	Treasure hunt
	Face painting workshops
	Mini disco
	Sand castle building
	Karaoke
	_
	Discos
	Dance parties
	Scavenger hunts
	Hula lessons
	Fish and duck feeding
	Parachute play
Empowering fun	Learning local language and culture workshop
	How to DJ
	Dancing and singing workshop
	Movie making workshop
	Handicraft workshops
	Pizza making
()) \	Reggae jam sessions
	Lei making
	Creating petroglyphs
Creative fun	Face painting workshops
	Performing art workshops
	Puppets
	Indian bead crafts
illy fun	Costume time
illy fun	
	Water balloon fun
Competitive fun	Talent show
	DJ competitions
	Computer games
	Potato sack races
Relaxing fun	Shell collecting
·-····································	Magic shows
- amily-orientated fun	Boat cruises
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army orientated run	
·	Sugar cane tours
Surprising/adventurous fun	No activities No activities



- (1) Sports-orientated fun
- (2) Friend orientated fun
- (3) Empowering fun
- (4) Creative fun

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- (5) Competitive fun /relaxing fun
- (6) Family orientated fun / silly fun

As noted earlier, the detailed content analysis of activities offered by resort mini-seems to suggest that clubs do not contribute to the competitive advantage of mini-clubs and/or resorts. In today's dynamic business environments, gaining competitive advantage is Crucial for survival (Lashley, 2015; Richard, 2017). This requires the organization to adjust its internal business environment accordingly (Jolliffe, 2006) and to personalize the products and services offered (Lashley, 2015). Tables 2–7 provide evidence that, overall, resort mini-clubs offer more or less the same activities to children when on holidays. The products and services offered are standardized rather than personalized. Within this line of thought, to trigger brand growth and new products development that resonate with kids, Poris (2006), suggested to: (a) tap into each of the ten types of fun with a focus on the type of fun that is most essential and relevant to the target; (b) develop promotions Q9 and licensed tie-ins that tap into a target group's key fun dimension (this approach is good for brands as it allows kids to associate the brand with that particular type of fun; (c) maximize the emotional relevance of the type of fun; and finally, (d) develop new product ideas or messaging campaigns.

The detailed analysis of type of activities provided to children at the six resort miniclubs examined in this study shows that, in addition to the above list of initiatives suggested by Poris (2006), an ambidextrous management approach, hence a new dimension of activities for mini-clubs, is needed for the management of resort mini-clubs in their quest for competitive advantage within the sector. Indeed, based on the data collected in this study, it appears that mini-clubs are not used by resorts as tools in generating competitive advantages against their competitors. They are used exploitatively (and not exploratively). It could therefore be argued that understanding what fun means, and how to manage fun, may certainly provide an edge to organizations who offer products and services for children. This view is supported by Poris (2006), whilst, furthermore, Gaines et al. (2004) argued that the provision of first-class children's programmes ultimately results in customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, word-of-mouth advertising, etc. Kandampully (2000) argued that this service helped Club Med to successfully maintain the loyalty of their customers who were children in the 1970s and 1980s and are now adults, are married and have children.

4.2. Towards new ways of conceptualizing play (activities) in resort mini-clubs

Based on the analysis conducted in this study it appears that, currently, resort miniclubs are leveraging only eight out of ten dimensions of fun. "Surprising/adventurous fun" and "rebellious fun" do not seem to be used (Table 8). The analysis also shows that the activities offered by resort mini-clubs are exclusively the "edutainment fun play" type.

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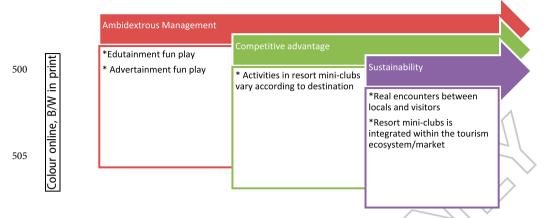


Figure 2. Resorts mini-clubs within the tourism ecosystem / market. Source: The authors.

(1) Edutainment fun play:

The term "edutainment" derives from the merger of "education" and "entertainment". The term "playful learning" could also be used (Resnick, 2004). Indeed, some people learn better when they are engaging actively into an activity they enjoy and care about. They

- Q10 basically learn as they play and/or play as they learn (Resnick, 2004). Hannigan (1998
 - → cited in Hertzman, Anderson, & Rowley, 2008, p. 155) offered a formal definition of the neologism as "the joining together of educational and cultural activities with the commerce and technology of the entertainment world". Edutainment is now popular because it provides visitors/customers/users "structured experiences that are high in entertainment value and experiences which are culturally and historically significant, meaningful and
- Q11 informative" (Janiskee, 1996, cited in Hertzman et al., 2008, p. 155). Edutainment is used in diverse sectors: tourism, education, media and entertainment industry (Hertzman et al., 2008). Many organizations are adopting this approach (Resnick, 2004). *Kidzania* (a successful chain of indoor family entertainment centres currently operating in 24 locations worldwide) and *Eataly* (high-end Italian food chain) use this approach (Di Pietro et al.,
- Q12 2018; Mendoza, 2010, cited in Castorena & Prado, 2013).
 - Some resort mini-clubs (like Camp Hyatt) are offering some interesting and innovative edutainment fun play like, for instance, learning about the local language and culture. This is more important for destinations with a negative image, as this can contribute to educate visitors and change the perception of the destination. Taking the example of Haiti, a post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destination, with a negative image, Séraphin and
- Q13 Butcher (2018), Séraphin, Butcher, and Korstanje (2017), and Séraphin, Yallop, Capatana, and Gowreesunkar (2018), explain that the education of visitors can contribute to the improvement of the perception of the destination.

Reinforcing the edutainment fun play dimension of activities in resort mini-club could be part of the repositioning strategy not only of the resort (micro level), but the repositioning of the entire destination (macro level), as repositioning is all about reinforcing positive images already held by the target audience, correcting negative images, or creating a new image (Chacko & Marcell, 2008). As Figure 2 shows, the new approach proposed in this



paper has the potential to integrate resort mini-clubs within the tourism ecosystem or Q14 market (Cooper & Hall, 2008).

(2) Advertainment fun play:

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To offer competitive advantage, the activities offered by resort mini-clubs should be ambidextrous. In other words, mini-clubs should offer activities that offer both "edutainment fun play" and "advertainment fun play" types of fun. As a technique to attract an audience, advertainment is the merging of advertising and entertainment with the purpose of influencing customers toward a brand. Thus, a demographic target is first selected; second, a brand-friendly environment is created (Deery, 2004; Kumanyika, 2011). This marketing strategy is presented rather negatively by Deery (2004), who views this approach as a commodification of experience. It is "a tendency we witness today in everything from education to tourism" (Deery, 2004, p. 5). This form of marketing is also viewed as a form of subliminal persuasion (Deery, 2004). Advertainment is also presented as a form of product placement (Kretchmer, 2004; Nelson, Keum, & Yaros, 2004).

Advertainment does not seem to be used by the resort mini-clubs considered as part of this study, and it has not been highlighted within the ten dimensions of fun play proposed by Poris (2006). Because "advertainment is currently working in two directions, with entertainment becoming a form of advertainment and advertising a form of entertainment" (Deery, 2004, p. 18), in the case of resort mini-clubs, advertainment fun play may be used in a positive manner at macro level. Advertainment should be used in a subtle way, so that entertainment becomes a form of subtle advertainment. This happens when an activity is used to promote a brand. The level of immersion is either associative, illustrative or demonstrative (Kretchmer, 2004). Similarly, Séraphin et al. (2017) explain that subtle marketing strategies are more effective than direct and aggressive ones. For instance, taking the example of the resort mini club at Royal Decameron Indigo Resort and Spa located in Haiti (Kids Club at the Royal Decameron Indigo Beach Resort and Spa [Online]), a post-conflict and post-disaster destination with a negative image (Séraphin, Ambaye, Gowreesunkar, & Bonnardel, 2016), the management of the mini-club could organize painting and/or drawing workshops (around the theme of Haitian culture and artefacts exhibited at the museum), facilitated by the curator of the Haitian National Museum (Haitian National Museum [Online]). For an effective product placement through advertainment, the curator could wear clothing with the logo of the museum and headed paper with the museum's logo may be provided to the children to draw and/or paint on. A mini exhibition open to parents and other customers could also be organized to showcase the children's work. This strategy may encourage families and other tourists to visit the museum located in Port-au-Prince. This is important for destinations with a negative image because, when tourists visit such destinations, they tend to stay contained within tourist areas, while a wider spread of tourist activities is more beneficial for the local economy of the destination (Séraphin & Paul, 2015).

(3) Events in resort mini-clubs: At the crossroad of advertainment and edutainment fun play:

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Events in resort mini-clubs could be organized as follows. First, workshops (facilitated by local instructors and/or suppliers) may enable children to learn about the visited destination. The following activities are likely to provide edutainment fun when doing something they are proud of:

- Creating or making something new (e.g. designing and creating local crafts/artefacts; etc.)
- Playing a musical instrument or singing (e.g. playing the drum or any local instrument; etc.)

Second, events (e.g. talent shows) could be organized for children to show their parents what they have learnt.

Events are important because they have the capacity to develop feelings of belongingness and national identity associated with places / destinations. At the same time, events in resort mini-clubs have the potential to develop real encounters between locals and visitors, i.e. an encounter that contributes to the development of social capital defined as "collective action, cooperation, networks, relationships, shared norms and values, social interaction and trust" (Moscardo, Konovalov, Murphy, & McGehee, 2017, p. 2) between locals and visitors. This proves important in the current tourism climate due to emerging issues related to overtourism, namely tourismphobia and antitourism movements, which appeared due to an absence of real encounter between visitors and locals, but also a lack of cooperation between service providers (Séraphin, Gowreesunkar, Zaman, & Bourliataux, 2019).

Events are also an opportunity for local suppliers to convey a positive image of the destinations. For instance, when running the workshops with children and taking part in the events, local suppliers/instructors could wear branded uniforms / clothing and or sponsor various workshops in order to promote their businesses (advertainment).

4.3. Resort mini-clubs within the tourism ecosystem / market

"Aligning multiple partners to a common purpose contributes to maximizing the benefits of strategic planning" (Guiver & Stanford, 2014, cited in Seraphin, Sheeran, & Pilato, 2018, p. 3). The new dimensions of fun play (edutainment and advertainment fun play dimensions) proposed in this study may be utilized in effective strategic planning. In addition, adopting an ambidextrous management approach may lead to organizational success and sustainability as the new ambidextrous management approach is embedding resorts within the local community, in other words, within an existing service ecosystem or market (Figure 2).

As service innovation "is a primary source of competitive advantage and a research priQ16 ority" (Ordanini et al., 2014, cited in Di Pietro et al., 2018, p. 148), the proposed approach
may contribute to the competitive advantage of the resort and the destination. Equally, the
newly developed service ecosystem in which resort mini-clubs are now embedded
(Figure 2), has a strong potential in terms of developing social capital, i.e. the inclusion
of an individual in a range of networks, structures or groups that allow them to develop
and gain social capital (Bladen, Kennel, Abson, & Wilde, 2012; Foley, McGillivray, &
McPherson, 2012; Miller & McTavish, 2013).



5. Conclusion

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Children and their families are important stakeholders of the tourism and hospitality sectors, and their needs must be met by organizations and practitioners within these sectors. Distinctive to children and their needs is the ability to offer services that provide them with fun, play activities. Drawing on ambidextrous approaches to management, this paper highlighted the fact that such a management approach could be the way forward to improve the services provided by mini-clubs in holiday resorts, generate competitive advantage and satisfy stakeholders.

The paper examined the current play activities offered by key resort mini-clubs and evaluated the dimensions of fun for children in mini-clubs. The content analysis of the activities offered to children by holiday resort mini-clubs has suggested that, currently, mini-clubs do not contribute to the competitive advantage of the resort(s) as they offer standardized rather than personalized products and services. This study proposes a new dimension of activities for mini-clubs that could turn resort mini-clubs and their respective children activities into a competitive advantage for a resort and a destination, more generally, if imbedded within the tourism ecosystem / market. This could be achieved by adopting an ambidextrous management of resort mini-clubs, and more specifically, it can be achieved by expanding the currently largely used "edutainment fun play" to "advertainment fun play" dimensions of play, with the purpose of influencing customers towards the brand and creating competitive advantage.

The contribution of this research lies in the analysis of children's play in resort miniclubs, an under-researched area in the tourism and hospitality sector. In addition, this paper has also contributed to research in the study of "play" and has innovated in terms of the context used to discuss "play". Indeed, "play" is mainly researched academi-Q17 cally when related to playground, classroom and workplace (Chadsey-Rusch, 1992; Q19 Q18 Greener & Crick, 1999; Guralnick, 1990; all cited in Powell et al., 2004). This research has extended the concept of "play" to the hospitality and tourism contexts.

> The management approach proposed in this paper may enhance customers experience (i.e. children and their families) and may also benefit the destination more broadly. Private and public organizations in the tourism industry need to identify the services that are currently used exploitatively in order to re-evaluate and manage them exploratively. This is more so important, useful and applicable for destinations with limited financial resources. Therefore, practitioners in the tourism and hospitality industry may find this research useful, by providing them with information that enables them to review the management of resort mini-clubs in order to maximize their contributions to the performance of the resort (at micro level) and destination (at macro level).

> Future research efforts into the study of children's play and ambidextrous management approaches to managing resort mini-clubs, should focus on the application of such ambidextrous approaches and on empirical studies designed to provide further in-depth understandings about effective ways of generating competitive advantage in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Disclosure statement

Q20 No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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