

Travel Agencies and Tour Operators at *KidZania*: A Proactive and Innovative Approach

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ABSTRACT

The role of Tour Operators (TO) and Travel Agent (TA) are putting together transport, events, attractions, accommodation and food / drink into a package and are then selling them to customers. The authors are introducing in this chapter a new marketing strategy for TO and TA, as there is a fierce competition in the retail environment. The approach offers an alternative to the existing marketing and distribution channel in the industry. The KidZania concept in itself is very strong from a marketing point of view due to its high capacity to convince customers. Also, with KidZania TO and TA have an opportunity to 'breed' ethical tourists, that is to say tourists that respect their host; their environment; culture. That said, the KidZania model could be said to be a form of manipulation of emotions, by pushing the children to behave and consume the way we would like them to.

Keywords: Travel agencies; Tour operators; KidZania; Innovation; children;

INTRODUCTION

In the tourism industry there are different ways to segment the market. Generation is one of them. This segmentation is important as it will help Destination Marketing Organisation to better tailor their products and services (Yolal, 2018). This strategy is all part of a wider movement of organisations toward retaining their customers (customer loyalty). 'Experience' and 'emotions' are keywords in the process of customer loyalty (Chi, 2018; Roy, 2018). 'Experience' and 'emotions' happen even before the customer consume the product or service. This is what Roy (2018) called the pre-consumption experience. As a result of the narrative presented so far in this introduction, this book chapter is going to focus on children, 'not only because of their purchasing power, but due to their influence on their parents' purchasing decision in any products (...). In addition, children are often viewed as potential future consumers' (Xu & Kahl, 2018: 354). We are also going to focus on the importance of providing them a pre-consumption experience of the industry. So doing, we are going to use KidZania, 'an experience design concept targeted at young people' (Beard & Russ, 2017: 366) as a tool, and Tour Operators (TO) and Travel Agencies (TA) as focus points or case studies. In this chapter we are innovating in terms of operation management and marketing management of TO and TA. This is important, as 'innovation is one of the key issues that affects business competitiveness' (Celtek & Ilham, 2018). That said, the KidZania model could be said to be a form of manipulation of emotions, by pushing the children to behave and consume the way we would like them to (Tagg & Wang, 2016). For Korstanje (2018) our emotions are constantly being manipulated either by dogma, the media, politics, etc.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF T.O AND T.A IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Talking about the role of TO and TA, is above talking about tourism products and even broadly, tourism market. Indeed, tourism product is defined 'as the total experience, the tourism product can be disaggregated into stages of the vacation from anticipation and planning, to booking, travel and evaluation' (Gilbert, 1990, cited in Cooper & Hall, 2008: 27). Another approach is to consider the tourism product as 'an amalgam of destination elements including attractions; supporting services such as accommodation and food and beverage; and transportation' (Cooper & Hall, 2008: 27). Both approaches of tourism product are implicitly referring to the role of TO and TA, which will be presented in the following paragraph. In a nutshell, TO and TA are putting together transport, events, attractions, accommodation and food / drink into a package and are then selling them to customers (figure 1).

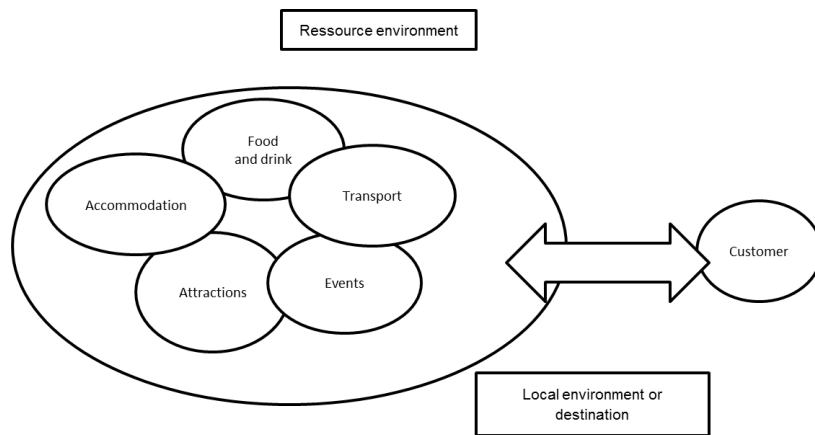


Figure 1: The tourism market
Source: Cooper & Hall (2008)

The topic of 'distribution channel', that we are defining as 'a system of intermediaries, or middlemen, that facilitates the sale and delivery of tourism services from suppliers to consumers' (Buhalis & Laws, 2001 cited in Diaz, Martin-Consuegra & Esteban, 2015: 330) is also key here.

Travel Agent (TA) and Tour Operators (TO) are retailers and as such they selling a variety of products and services, among these are: tours; overseas package tours; short break holidays; flights; theatre booking; car hire; cruising holidays; rail tickets; coach holidays and tickets; travel insurance; foreign exchange and finally, visa and passport applications; making reservation; planning itineraries; calculating fares and charges; advising clients; dealing with customer complaints (Halpern & Graham, 2013; Page, 2013; Youell, 1998). The role of the TA changed throughout the years. When they first started TA were mainly independent agents and their main role was to sell tickets (rail, sea) and accommodation. From the 1960s they became more involved in the tour operation side of travel by putting together and then selling tours. In the 1980s/1990s, many TA merged with TO to be more competitive nationally and internationally (Page, 2013). In the UK, 90% of travel agencies are members of Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA). In the late 1990s, Lunn Poly, Going Places, Thomas Cook, AT Mays and Co-op Travelcare, were the leading travel agencies chains (Youell, 1998). The majority of TAs are either vertically or horizontally integrated in order to be able to compete on the national and international scene. Tour Operators, also known as principals are wholesalers (Page, 2013; Youell, 1998). The role of the TO is to put together package holidays (transport, accommodation and other services) and then sell to the public either through TA, internet, or call centres (Page, 2013). Most of them are selling their products through TA. A small number are selling directly to their customers. Overall, there are four main types of TOs: mass market operators; specialist operators; domestic operators and incoming tour operators (Page, 2013; Youell, 1998). TO, play an important role in the image that visitors have of a destination (Grosspietsch, 2006). Their role is therefore very important. As for the TO, some of them belong to Association of Independent Tour Operators (Youell, 1998).

Tour operating and travel retailing is a rather dynamic sector, that employ thousands of people; generate hundreds of billion. The UK and Germany are leading the market

(Page, 2013). The figure below models the connection between TO and TA (figure 2). TUI, Thomas Cook and Going Places are the leading TO (Page, 2013). However, throughout the time, the relation between TO and TA have changed. First, some TOs are now selling their product direct to customers and cutting out the travel agents. Second, the emergence of new technologies such as internet, has led to holidays being sold online through e-travel agents, once again bypassing TA (Page, 2013).

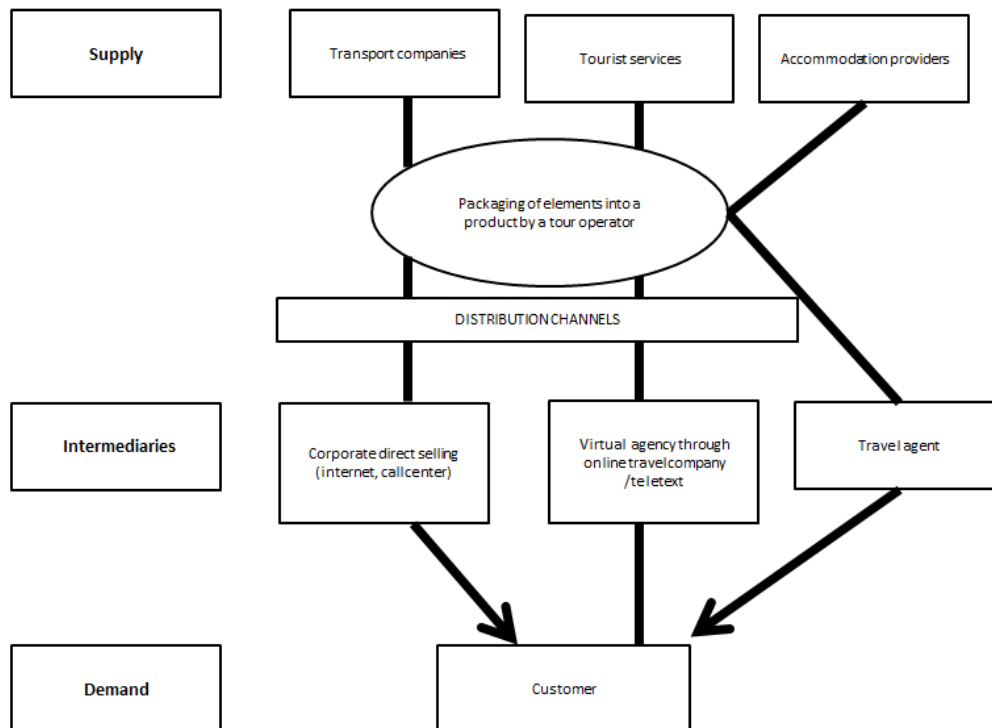


Figure 2: How tour operators link the elements of a holiday together to produce, assemble and distribute the package to the consumer
Source: Page (2013)

'Travel agents will have to evaluate constantly how to protect commission levels and how to reach a highly fragmented travel market, as ICT establishes more niches. The pressure on independent travel agents in a highly competitive environment is set to continue, but new promotional tools and modes of distribution will see agents use marketing and advertising to maintain a presence' (Page, 2013: 213). This is therefore going to impact of TO. In terms of marketing strategy and innovation, the following have been used: corporate rebranding; more products and services; use of technology to enhance experience and sales (Page, 2013). In this book chapter and more specifically, in the following section, we are suggesting an innovative and long term strategy based on young consumers, in other words, children. Has multi-channel distribution (online and off line) has become the norm in tourism retail (Diaz et al, 2015), we have therefore here opted for an offline approach. In other words, we are introducing in this chapter a new marketing strategy. Distribution systems and marketing strategy are related. Indeed, 'the structure of the tourism distribution system

affects not only the choices available to consumers, but also business models and marketing strategies' (Diaz et al, 2015: 330). As there is a fierce competition in the retail environment (Diaz et al, 2015), our approach offers an alternative to the existing marketing and distribution channel in the industry (figure 3).

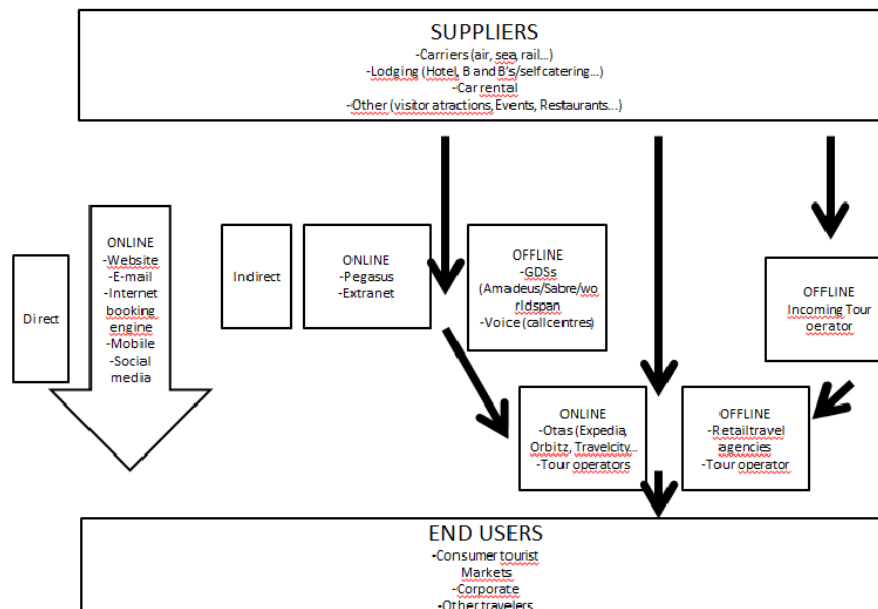


Figure 3: Tourism distribution channel
Source: Diaz et al (2015)

Because TO influence the long sustainability of destinations; the nature of tourism demand; instrumental in determining market trends and affect the demand levels for destinations (Carey, Gountas & Gilbert, 1997), adopting a marketing strategies and operation tactics based on children using the KidZania model should ensure the destination a long term sustainability, a major influence of tourism demand and determining market trends.

THE INFLUENCERS OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

For Poria and Timothy (2014) as well as for Nickerson and Jurowski (2001), there is a scarcity of studies on children in tourism research despite the fact the industry and academics recognise the value and impact of children, and more specifically, their role in purchase decisions. As suggested by Poria and Timothy (2014) and Nickerson and Jurowski (2001), academics do not research in this area for two main reasons: First, the trend is to focus on husband and wife (i.e. parents) mainly because collecting primary data on children is difficult. Specific interviewing techniques are needed when interview children and there are stricter ethical guidelines involving informed consent from parents (or guardians), and permissions from government agencies and ethics committees. Second, children experiences are mainly researched based on

testimonies provided by parents or other adults (Radic, 2017). That said, research in this area discusses children's influence on parental decision-making (Small, 2008). Dowse, Powell and Weed (2018) highlighted the importance of children in sporting events and more generally in leisure by arguing that they are a stakeholder group with distinct needs and interests that need to be taken into account when planning events. Radic (2017) did the same but for the cruise sector, as he explained that children play a very important role in the choice of Cruise Company. For Lugosi, Robinson, Golubovskaya and Foley (2016), children are extremely important for the hospitality sector. They even refer to them as sovereign consumers and have to be seen as active decision-makers. For Lugosi et al (2016) it seems that children are even more important than adults (parents and carers) as their satisfaction influence the satisfaction of parents and carers. This view is also shared by Cullingford (1995: 121), who also claimed 23 years earlier that 'as future tourists, and as a potentially important influence, their view of their experiences are significant'. As for Thornton, Shaw and Williams (1997), children are active participants or negotiators when it comes to the choice of holidays. They also explained that the influence of children lies on the fact the satisfaction of parents is largely influenced by the satisfaction of children. The influence of children on family holiday choice is not something new. In other words, it is a well-established fact. As a consequence of the importance of this segment, Lugosi et al (2016) are explicitly claiming that it is extremely important to identify, acknowledge and meet their needs, as doing so contribute to create a positive emotion that encourage and increase loyalty and positive-word-of-mouth. By acknowledging the importance for the industry to consider the needs of children, Lugosi et al (2016) agrees with Cullingford (1995) who claimed that the tourism industry is still not targeting directly children. Thornton, Shaw and Williams (1997: 287) shared the same thought as they also added that 'the role of children has been under-researched and under-valued'. Some sectors of the hospitality industry are doing well in terms of meeting the needs of the children. Among these are food service chains (restaurants, café, pubs and bars) and theme parks (such as Legoland) which are providing family-friendly servicescape by adapting the design of the venue (colour of the venue; type of food; staff attitude; facilities for children to play) to meet the needs of this segment (Johns & Gyimothy, 2002; Lugosi et al, 2016; Nickerson & Jurowski, 2001). Indeed, customers' satisfaction is a results of the products and services offered to them (Albayrak & Caber, 2015).

KIDZANIA: PRESENTATION AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF A MODEL

Presentation

The concept KidZania was founded in 1996. The founders wanted to offer something different for Mexican children and their families (Di Pietro, L., Edvardson, B., Reynoso, J., Renzi, M.F., Toni, M Mugion, R.G, 2018; Lonsway, 2016). The scale-sized representation of a city was originally called 'The city of children'. It is a hybrid concept that put together on one side day care centre and entertainment for 1 to 16 years old. On the other side, it offers a new marketing media for brands. Children can earn kidzos (local currency) by 'working' at various venues (Castorena & Prado, 2013; Di Pietro et

al, 2018; Lonsway, 2016). This concept has been developed in partnership with national and international brands. Among these are Coca-Cola. At KidZania, children can for instance work at Coca-Cola bottling plant and learn the process of manufacturing their own bottle of Coca-Cola (Di Pietro et al, 2018; Lonsway, 2016). In KidZania London, the partners are: Alder Hey children’s hospital; Aljazeera Media Network; Bank of England; The big yellow self-storage company; British Airways; Cadbury; Dorset hospitality international; eat natural; Golden Tours; Gourmet Burger Kitchen; Global; H&M; H&M Conscious; Hamptons international; Highbrow; Innocent; Lily’s Kitchen; Metro; Middlesex cricket; Mission deli; pdsa; Pokemon, Renault, Scouts; Snazaroo; Team Margot; vitabiotics; Wolwagen (KidZania London [Online]). In a nutshell, the concept empowers, inspires and educates children through real life role-play activities in a safe and conducive environment (Tagg & Wang, 2016), where ‘kids could play to be grownups in a wide space in which they had the tools for it’ (Lopez, 2006 cited in Castorena & Prado, 2013: 1). In addition, Castorena and Prado (2013: 4) added: ‘Kids are expected to acquire real life abilities and get familiar with the work environment. They learn and practice cooperation and interaction, build creativity, independence, decision-making and community-involvement’. The KidZania concept is a win-win situation: ‘Marketing partners win because they can get their brand, products or services closer to kids and their families; children win because they have fun and educational place to play, learn and have a good tie and parents win because they see their kids having fun and also learning important life lessons’ (Lonsway, 2016: 246). Kidzania has also been presented as ‘an experience design concept targeted at young people’ (Beard & Russ, 2017: 366). The concept has now been deployed across the world and operates 20 parks in 17 countries (Di Pietro et al, 2018). Different actors are involved in the KidZania concept (figure 4).

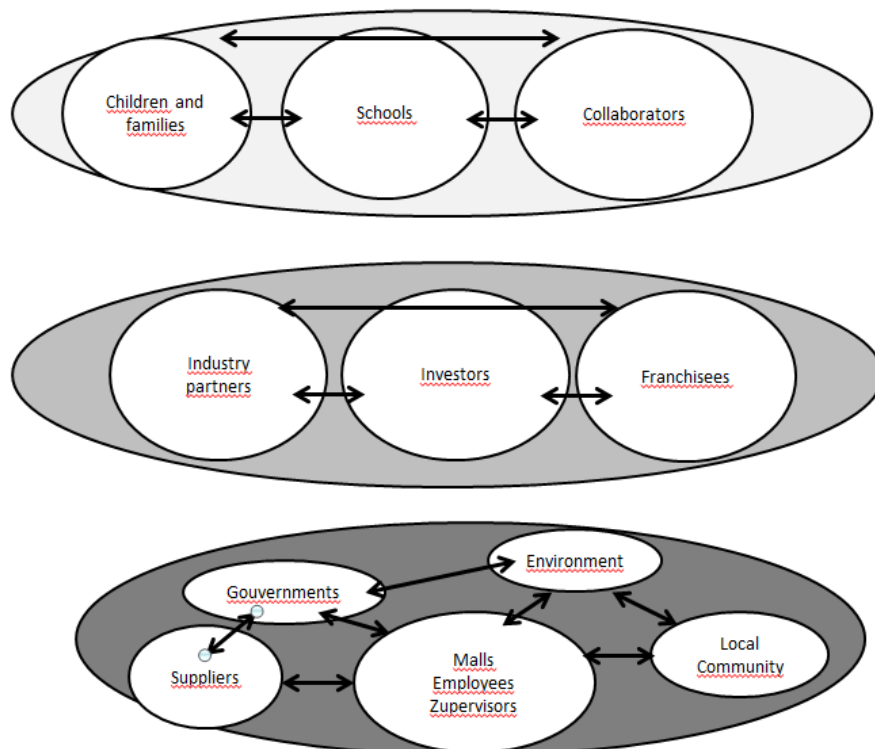


Figure 4: KidZania’s service ecosystem

The concept could be summarised as follow:

- Involvement of a variety of stakeholders.
- Win-win partnership between stakeholders.
- Adaptation of the concept to the context (local and international brand).
- Balance between edutainment and advertainment.

That said, it is also important to highlight the fact that ‘while KidZania is marketed as a perfect world ruled by a government of children, the evidence suggest that children are merely following adults’ instructions’ (Tagg & Wang, 2016: 154). This is due to the fact that the activities are highly structured (Tagg & Wang, 2016).

VRIO analysis

The management of resources is extremely important for the sustainability of any tourism organisation. The VRIO model (Value, Rarity, Imitability of resources and capabilities, and Organisation - ability to exploit the resource or capability) is a useful ‘Resource-based View’ strategic management tool for resources analysis (table 1).

Table 1: The VRIO framework

Valuable?	Rare?	Costly to imitate?	Costly to imitate?	Competitive implication
No	----	----	----	Competitive disadvantage
Yes	No	----	----	Competitive parity
Yes	Yes	No	----	Temporary competitive advantage
Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Unexploited competitive advantage
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sustained competitive advantage

Source: Barney, 1997 cited in Quattrocchi et al, 2017

It allows an organisation to implement strategies that will improve its efficiency, effectiveness, and ability to exploit opportunities and to neutralise threats (Quattrocchi, Mercuri, Perano & Calabrese, 2017; Simao, 2013). The most desirable scenario for an organisation is to have resources that are valuable but rare, non-substitutable, and hard to imitate. In this case, sustainable competitive advantage exists and, in terms of performance, the organisation achieves above-average returns (Simao, 2013; Hanson, Hitt, Ireland & Hoskisson, 2017). In this research, we use the VRIO model to evaluate the KidZania model (table 2).

Table 2: VRIO evaluation of KidZania model

	Valuable?	Rare?	Costly to imitate?	Exploited by organisation?	Competitive implication
Children and families	YES	YES	YES	YES	Competitive Advantage
Schools	↑	↑	↑	↑	
Collaborators					
Industry partners					
Investors					
Franchises					
Suppliers	↓	↓	↓	↓	
Governments					
Environment					
Local community					
Employees					

Table 2 shows that the KidZania can provide competitive advantage to any organisation that decides to be partner. The above table also provides evidence that the concept in itself is very strong from a marketing point of view due to its high capacity to convince customers. The KidZania model to some extent follow the DRA model (Dale, Robinson and Anderson) developed by Seraphin, Ambaye, Capatina and Dosquet (2018). This model (figure 5) is the combination of two existing and complementary frameworks (Seraphin, Ambaye, Capatina & Dosquet, 2018). On the one hand, the Dale and Robinson (2001) framework, and on the other hand, the framework developed by Anderson (2001, cited in Walters & Mair, 2012).

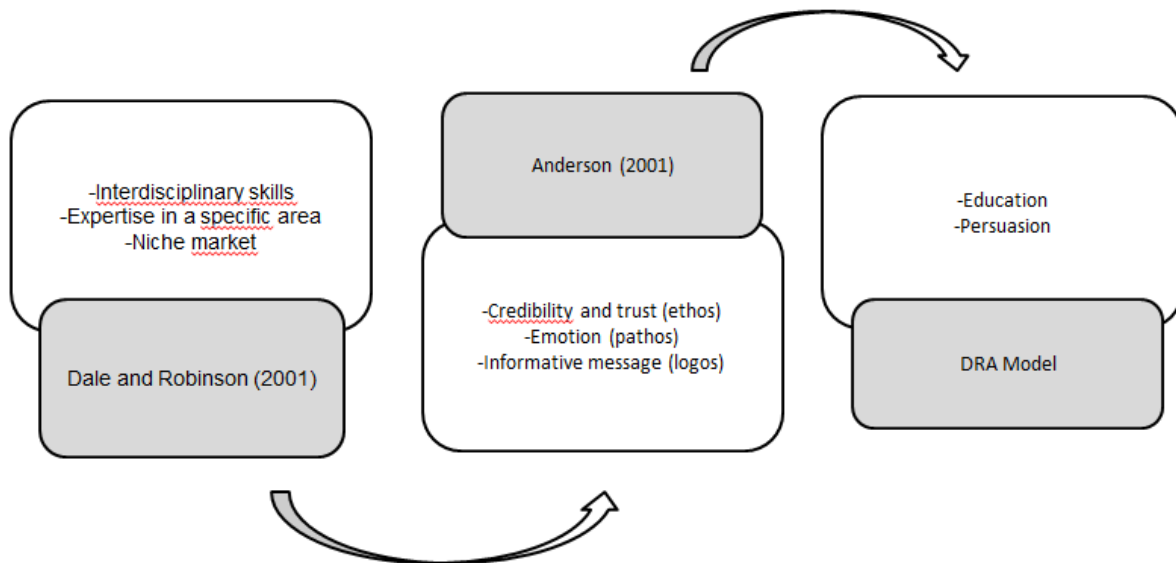


Figure 5: The Dale Robinson Anderson Model (DRA Model)
Source: Seraphin et al (2018)

APPLICATION OF THE KIDZANIA MODEL TO THE TOURISM INDUSTRY: THE CASE OF T.O AND T.A

The Travel and Tourism City for children

The travel and tourism industry have already identified the potential of edutainment and advertainment as many organisations of the sector are already partnering with KidZania. Among these are organisations in transport like *Nippon Airways*, *Air Asia*; *British Airways* (KidZania London [Online]); worldwide travel agencies (Tagg & Wang, 2016: 154); tour operators like *Golden Tours* (KidZania London [Online]); Hospitality providers such as *Dorset Hospitality International* (KidZania London [Online]).

At the moment, the edutainment and advertainment partners of KidZania cover a range of industry sector like tourism, hospitality, travel, catering; retails (clothing); car manufacturer; etc. (KidZania London [Online]). In this book chapter we are suggesting that KidZania (instead of having random partners), could refine its concepts by having for each sector representatives at each level of the supply chain and/or distribution channel. For instance, for the tourism industry, the partners could be chosen from the sectors indicated in figure 1. TO and TA, would fall for instance under 'transaction'. This approach would give the children an overall understanding of how the tourism industry is structured. Children will perceive that way the central role that TO and TA play in the industry. Having TO and TA developing, promoting and selling responsible travel and holidays would contribute to the sustainability of the tourism industry, as the current children will be the tourists of the future. With KidZania TO and TA agents have

an opportunity to 'breed' ethical tourists, that is to say tourists that respect their host; their environment; culture (Hindley & Font, 2017). This concept is also an opportunity for Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) of destinations with a negative image to promote a positive image of their destinations and turn them (and their family) when older into future customers. Indeed, according to Gartner (2000), the destination image can be defined as 'the attitude, perception, beliefs and ideas one hold about a particular geographic area formed by the cognitive image of a particular destination' (Gartner, 2000, p. 295). The image tourists have of a destination is based upon information acquired either by induced agents (generally controlled by sources external to the individual such as advertisements); organic agents (that are acquired through personal experience and are normally the most trusted source of information); and autonomous agents (are media sources or popular culture such as films or documentaries). They are considered as the most powerful because they can quickly alter a tourist's image of a destination (Gartner, 1993). The KidZania model that we are suggesting could be assimilated to an organic agent. In the same line of thought, Seraphin, Butcher and Korstanje (2016) are claiming that it is important to educate at pre-visit stage potential visitors to destinations with a negative image. Our suggested approach addresses this point.

Toward an ambidextrous management of T.O and T.A

Ambidexterity is a concept developed by Dr Robert Duncan in 1976. This concept calls for a balance between exploration and exploitation. Indeed, organisations deeply anchored onto exploration suffer the costs of experimentation (R&D) with, sometimes, limited benefits. Organisations anchored onto exploitation, on the other hand, do not move forward and remain in a 'status-quo' in terms of performance. Organisations who manage to find a balance between exploitation and exploration are likely to be prosperous (Nieto-Rodriguez, 2014 [Online]). The same can be said about mastering a balance between adaptability (in other words the ability of the organisation to innovate to adapt changes in the market) and alignment (daily management of operations). This approach is about balancing exploitation of existing resources and competencies with a focus on the present, and exploring new opportunities, with a focus on the future (Mihalache & Mihalache, 2016). Despite the challenges of achieving ambidexterity because exploitation and exploration innovation are contradictory activities, Mihalache and Mihalache (2016:144) 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'.

Still, according to Nieto-Rodriguez (2014), organisational ambidexterity requires many changes: leadership and culture; people and skills; structure and governance; enterprise performance management; and systems and tools. For Visser (2015), changes will only happen after: unlocking change through transformational leadership; changes through enterprise; technology innovation; corporate transparency; stakeholders engagement; social responsibility integrated value; and change through integrated value. In this research we focused on systems and tools; future fitness; and stakeholder engagement.

In tourism research, ambidexterity is rather new and therefore scarcely used by scholars. There are two streams of research in tourism regarding ambidextrous management. A first stream of research names and defines the concept, whereas a second stream of research applies the concept without referring to its name. Among those who actually name ambidexterity are, for instance, Brooker and Joppe (2014) who used the concept to conceptualise the different type of innovators in the tourism industry (i.e. painters, artisans and artists). Using the example of hurricane Irma's impact on the tourism industry of the Caribbean, Seraphin (2018) explained that an ambidextrous management of the industry could lead to a sustainable reconstruction of the Caribbean. He indeed explained that an ambidextrous approach would consist in using the hurricane season to develop a new tourism product like hurricane and thunderstorms chasing. This approach would also consist in developing resorts under domes to counter the threat of adverse weather that affects hotel plants, tourist attractions and demands. Other scholars do not always refer to the term although they apply an ambidextrous management approach. For instance, Seraphin, Ambaye, Gowreesunkar and Bonnardel (2016) explain that a good logo for a tourism destination should simultaneously maintain the essence of the destination whilst contributing to change the image of the destination, but at no point refer to the term 'ambidexterity'. The same could be said about Sanchez and Adams (2008) who refer to tourism as a Janus-faced industry (the positive impacts of the industry also come with negative impacts) instead of referring to the ambidextrous nature of the industry. It would seem that the tourism industry is ambidextrous by nature. The concept of ambidexterity has always been present in the industry but never referred as such. Finally, this strategic management approach would seem as a natural and relevant approach for the industry, a systematic way of managing a destination or an organisation (private or public tourism organisations) at macro and micro levels of the business environment. As a model or concept, KidZania is to some extent ambidextrous. It exploits existing activities of organisations (partners) and also turn those activities into a learning tool, the final outcome being an edutainment and advertainment tool. By adopting the KidZania model, TO and TA would as a result adopt an ambidextrous management approach. Their daily activity would be the exploitation aspect of Ambidexterity and turning them into a learning tool, the exploration aspect. The long term results would be brand loyalty. Equally important, partnering with KidZania would give TO and TA an opportunity to shape the interests and desires of future customers. Instead of having to adapt to trends, TO and TA have the opportunity to be the one shaping the trends. Instead of reacting, they would be an influencing position.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overall this chapter was about innovation in the tourism industry. For Krizaj, Brodnik and Bukovec (2014) and Brooker and Joppe (2014), innovation is all about introducing new concepts, products, services, process, marketing technique, organisational structure to meet the needs of existing and new customers with the overall purpose to stimulate and increase spending and growth. Innovation also relates to the capacity of an organisation or destination to cope and adapt to changes. Exploratory innovation is associated with new knowledge, and a potential for long term growth, and exploitative innovation / growth in turn focuses on the refinement of knowledge, production, execution and implementation (Camison, & Villar-Lopez, 2012). Brooker

and Joppe (2014), categorise innovation in a slightly different way. First, *incremental* innovation is most of the time in reaction to a situation and is implemented with a short term vision, and managers need to be customer centred. Second, *radical* innovation is proactive and subsequently disrupts current conventions. Radical innovators may be outsiders able to read the Zeitgeist and think creatively. They will be *new* customer centred. Krizaj et al (2014), claim that the tourism industry has often lacked an innovative, radical approach, and instead have tended to rely upon incremental innovation. Brooker and Joppe (2014) further acknowledge barriers to innovation relating to: capital; skills; training; knowledge; technical support, and; the ability to implement strategy. Pre-requisites for the success of innovation include an inclusive strategy and offering value to its multiple stakeholders. Innovation is associated with ambidextrous management (Seraphin, Smith, Scott & Stoakes, 2018; Seraphin, 2018). Effectively the category *incremental innovation* aligns closely with the exploitative side of ambidexterity, and *radical innovation* aligns with exploration. Applying the KidZania model to the tourism industry would be a radical innovation. The KidZania model based on visitors' experience is not the only one based on this model. In the agri-food sector, we can mention Eataly. The intention of the chain 'is not only to sell quality food but also to offer unique, rich customer experience' (Di Pietro et al, 2018: 153).

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KEY TERMS

Travel agent (TA) and Tour operator (TO):

Travel Agents (TA) and Tour Operators (TO) are retailers and as such they selling a variety of products and services, among these are: tours; overseas package tours; short break holidays; flights; theatre booking; car hire; cruising holidays; rail tickets; coach holidays and tickets; travel insurance; foreign exchange and finally, visa and passport applications; making reservation; planning itineraries; calculating fares and charges; advising clients; dealing with customer complaints

KidZania:

KidZania is an experience design concept targeted at young people. The KidZania model could be said to be a form of manipulation of emotions, by pushing the children to behave and consume the way we would like them to.

Innovation:

Innovation is all about introducing new concepts, products, services, process, marketing technique, organisational structure to meet the needs of existing and new customers with the overall purpose to stimulate and increase spending and growth.

Children:

Children have a purchasing power due to their influence on their parents' purchasing decision in any products. In addition, children are often viewed as potential future consumers.