Determining the Impacts of COVID-19 on Children's Perception of Destinations: A Research Method

1. Introduction

Research, defined as a process of systematic and methodological enquiry and investigation in order to increase knowledge (Fox, Gouthro, Morakabati & Brackstone, 2014), can be segmented into two types: First, 'pure research' also referred as 'basic research', which has no other purpose than intellectual curiosity; support or refute existing theories; and produce new ways of thinking about a topic. Second, 'applied research', undertaken to offer a solution to a practical issue (Fox et al, 2014). This study is a mixture of both, as the research objective of this study is to provide a research method to collect data directly from children. The research question of this study is as follow: How to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on children's perception of destinations?

This study is important for two main reasons:

-First, there is a dearth of academic research in tourism with children (Canosa & Graham, 2016; Canosa, Graham & Wilson, 2018; Khoo-Lattimore, 2015; Poria & Timothy, 2014; Seraphin & Yallop, 2019). For Canosa et al (2018a: 520), 'the paucity of tourism and hospitality research involving children is rather disconcerting'. For instance, when some tourism studies are about consumers of the tourism industry, children are not systematically taken into consideration (Hertzman, Anderson & Rowley, 2008; Poria & Timothy, 2014; Seraphin & Yallop, 2019). Indeed, 'tourism and hospitality research to date has focused almost exclusively on adult perspectives, often overlooking, if not neglecting, the views of children and young people' (Canosa et al, 2018a: 519).

-Second, because current perception and practice of research with children in tourism need to be reviewed, and new approaches put forward, as many academics are supporting the fact that

children are equally important as adults for academic research in tourism (Canosa et al, 2018a; Khoo-Lattimore, 2015; Poria & Timothy, 2014; Radic, 2017).

From a methodological point of view, this conceptual study based on existing literature is adopting an inductive approach, using COVID-19 as an example to investigate potential research tools to survey children. COVID-19 is selected because it is a current issue that is affecting the world (Jamal & Budke, 2020), and as citizen of this world and customers of the tourism industry, children are directly impacted (BBC [Online]); Club Med [Online]); Seraphin & Yallop, 2019a, b). Indeed, issues challenging the world, are also impacting and challenging children (Canosa, Graham & Wilson, 2019). From a tourism perspective, it is worth highlighting that it is some 19 million children who are engaged in the tourism industry (Yang, Yang & Khoo-Lattimore, 2019). This lockdown situation due to COVID-19 is also impacting on their family planned holidays (Xu & Kahl, 2018; Jamal & Budke, 2020); and also on their perception of the world, and some destinations in particular might be affected because of what children are seeing on TV (Connell, 2005; Cullingford, 1995; Gartner, 1993). The focus of this study is on the USA.

2. Tourism, hospitality and events research with children: A typology

2.1. Topics and research method

Qualitative research is recommended by Poria and Timothy (2014) and Radic (2017) for research with children in tourism. In this line of thoughts, the following tools are used:

Drawing - Radic (2017) asked children to draw as a method to collect feedback on children's view on their cruise experience. Seraphin and Green (2019) also used drawing as a method to understand how children think their place of residence should be in the future to be appealing

to the young adults they will be. As for Khoo-Lattimore (2015), she also used drawings, but as a prop to stimulate discussion around the topic of preferences for accommodation attributes during family holidays. Her main method to collect data was focus-group interviews. In a research aiming at identify children's favourite holiday, she also used drawing, but as the main research tool (Khoo-Lattimore & Yang, 2020).

Interviews - Radic (2017) also interviewed the children (12 children). The duration of the face to face interviews varied according to the age of the children (10 min for the 4-8 years old; 20 min for the 9-14 years old). As for Khoo-Lattimore et al (2015), in order to have a clear understanding of whom are decision-makers in families, and how children influence the choice of family accommodation during their holidays (Khoo-Lattimore, delChiappa & Yang, 2017) they interviewed parents and children. Kerr and Price (2018) and Israfilova and Khoo-Lattimore (2018), used interview focus groups to collect data on children's experience of dark tourism. The same research method (interview), was used by Cullingford (1995) to evaluate children's (160 children) knowledge of other countries in order to understand their attitude and perception of tourism destinations in the world.

Questionnaire - As for Hixson (2014), she opted for questionnaires and focus groups to gather data to understand the impacts of events on young people.

Mix methods - As for Canosa, Wilson and Graham (2017), they used a variety of methods that include: secondary data analysis; ethnographic field work; interviews; focus groups; and participatory film project (as the main tool).

Seraphin and Yallop (2019a, b) who carried some research (conceptual) on children and resort mini-clubs opted for secondary qualitative research based on literature review to identify and analyse the type of plays in resort mini-clubs, and suggested a new approach of the management of resort mini-clubs (also known as kids' club). In terms of conceptual

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research, could also be mentioned research carried out by Canosa et al (2018a, b), who provided a framework for good practice when conducting research for children. As for research by Yang et al (2019), they highlighted the dual dimension of academic research on children in tourism, that should cover host-children and guest-children. The following quote from Poria and Timothy (2014: 93) epitomises the objective of this study:

'Children's voices ought to be heard if the aim of the scholarly inquiry is to conceptualise the tourist experience more comprehensively and responsibly'.

Age range. When it comes to age, the intervals are as follow (Poria & Timothy, 2014): Infancy (0-2); childhood (3-6); middle childhood (7-10); adolescence (11-18).

-Children between 5-12:

Seraphin and Green (2019) surveyed 30 children between the age of 6 and 10. Radic (2017) interviewed children between 4 and 14 years old, as within this age range, children are able to articulate their thoughts and use abstract thoughts. Khoo-Lattimore (2014), interviewed children between 5 and 6 years old. Her rationale was based on the fact that between the age of 3 and 6, children can: express their thoughts on many topics; provide extended and coherent description of past experiences. Still according to Khoo-Lattimore (2014), children from the age of 5, are better suited for the reasons previously listed, but also because their pronunciation is more precise; they can argue; and give their own opinions about things. Khoo-Lattimore et al (2015), and Khoo-Lattimore et al (2017), only considered children under the age of 12 as in the hospitality sector customers are considered as children providing they are under 12. Khoo-Lattimore and Yang (2020), opted for preschool children. Cullingford (1995) interviewed children between 7 and 11. Kerr and Price (2018); and Israfilova and Khoo-Lattimore (2018), considered secondary school children.

-Children above 12:

Hixson (2014) focused on 16-19 years old due to the fact because they are particular keen to interact with others; they are more intellectually developed; they can think in multi-dimensional manner; and finally, because they have the freedom to choose the types of events they want to attend. Canosa et al (2017) considered children 10 to 13.

2.2. Research in tourism overlooking children

Research carried by Thornton, Shaw and Williams (1997), evaluating the influence of children on family decision-making for the choice of holiday only took into consideration parents, while excluded children from the survey, despite the fact that Cullingford (1995) had already evidenced the fact that children are an important factor in the choice of tourist destination of families. In this particular case, it would have been relevant to survey children to see if they are fully aware of the role they play within the family, and particularly when it comes to the choice of holiday. As a result of this non-involvement of children, the conclusion provided by Thornton et al (1997) is not advancing knowledge regarding children in the tourism industry. Similarly, Gaines, Hubbard, Witte and O'Neill (2004), only surveyed resort mini club staff to understand how children's programs are perceived; and yet the programs are for children. As for Hertzman, Anderson and Rowley (2008), in their investigation of customer experience of visiting museums, they surveyed mothers (who were accompanied with their children), and totally ignored children, and yet they are also consumers of heritage tourism attractions. Backer and Schanzel (2013), when investigating reasons why people take holidays they only surveyed adults. The study reveals that getting rid of stress was the main reason. If children were also surveyed, it might have revealed additional reasons for taking holidays. The study carried by Lugosi, Robinson, Golubovskaya and Foley (2016) on the hospitality experiences of parents and carers with children, only surveyed adults, despite the fact children were part of the

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experience, and yet, the study acknowledge children to be 'sovereign consumers' (Lugosi et al, 2016: 84).

2.3. Theoretical foundation and theoretical framework of the study

Post-modernism and feminism - This study is also in line with: 'The popularity of the post-modernist paradigm, which highlights the need to capture individual experiences, and feminist research agendas, which aim in part to study those whose voices have long been muted' (Poria & Timothy, 2014: 94).

As for the conceptual framework of this study, it is also going to follow the approach adopted by (Abou-Shouk, 2018). So doing, the framework is going to be articulated around the fact that:

(a) Research methods, that is to say means used to gather data within a research study, are discussed as qualitative and quantitative (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). Research method also includes designing materials to collect the data (Fox et al, 2014). So doing, the User-Centred Design (UCD) approach is going to be used. This approach has the particularity to help to understand consumers' motivation; engage them from the early stage of the research process; and introduce alternatives to establish viewpoints (Font, English & Gkritzali, 2018). UCD as a tool is in line with the overall objective and ideology of this chapter.

As a tool, UCD is articulated around seven different phases (Font et al, 2018): *Phase 1 or Understand* (is about understanding the context of the study; *Phase 2 or Observe* (involves watching, listening and engaging with participants); the next phase, *phase 3 or Engage* (is about identifying the most suitable toolkit to collect data from participants); *Phase 4 or Define* (involves the analysis of the data collected); *Phase 5 or Ideate* (is about coming with interpretations of the results. No idea is excluded at this stage); *Phase 6 or Prototype* (specific

answers are provided at this stage); and finally, *Phase 7 or Implement* (is all about the application of the results of the study).

(b) Children have a metaphorical perception of the world, therefore, the methods used to collect data from them, as well as instruction given to them need to involve play and be fun (Seraphin & Green, 2019). Play which begins with children as young as 3-4 (Frost, 2015), is an integral part of their life (Pori, 2006), and as such enable them to communicate their understanding of the world and/or surrounding environment (Lewis, 2017; Whitebread & O' Sullivan, 2012). 'Play' is also associated with 'fun' (Kerr & Moore, 2015). Following an adaptation of the ten dimensions of fun established by Powell (2005), Seraphin and Yallop (2019b) established that in tourism context, children had six main type of fun, listed here in order of importance: sport-orientated fun (physical activities); fiend orientated fun (interaction and socialisation with others); empowering fun (learning while having fun); creative fun (arts and music related activities); competitive fun and relaxing fun (activities that both relaxing and enabling to show-off); family orientated fun and silly fun (light hearted fun enabling interaction with family).

3. Contextual framework of the study

3.1. COVID-19, tourism and children: Brief overview and connection

Tourism implies moving from one location to another, and then return to the starting point, all of that facilitated with the variety of methods of transport available, and their low cost (Butler, 2009). However, the current pandemic of COVID-19 (figure 1) has made what is at the basis of tourism, namely, moving from one point to another, impossible as destinations have locked their borders to limit the spread of the virus, since its outbreak in China in December 2019 (Jamal & Budke, 2020).

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Among the millions of people in quarantine (Jamal & Budke, 2020) are children. They are impacted by the situation as much as anyone else. Indeed, schools are closed (Ministere Education Nationale [Online]; The Telegraph [Online]); all playgrounds are closed (The Sun [Online]); some families are moving to their countryside or seaside second home. This is the case in France where many families are leaving main cities such as Paris (Lefigaro [Online]; LePoint [Online]).

Fully aware of the impacts (stress and anxiety) of the current context on children (Independent [Online]), the Norway Prime Minister held a special news conference to answer questions from children (BBC [Online]). Some of the questions were events/tourism related:

- 'How can we celebrate national day?' (Festivals and cultural events)
- 'Why can't I celebrate my birthday?' (Family events)

4. Methodology

4.1. Background of this study

This study is a follow up of Cullingford (1995) research, who did some research on children's perception of other countries and people. More specifically he (Cullingford, 1995: 122) investigated 'children's attitudes to a range of issues, from their own homes and families to concepts of nationality and the politics of the developed and developing world' (…) 'The children were not specifically being asked about tourism, or even about holidays' (…) 'The starting point was simply their knowledge of other countries'. So doing, Cullingford (1995) interviewed 160 children aged 7-11. The research revealed that children:

(1) Are knowledgeable about a range of countries

(2) Always compare other countries with their own

(3) Divide the world between rich/developed countries and poor/developing countries

(4) Distinguished the world between destinations that are unattractive for holidays and those which are

(5) Knowledge of the world is based on the television (media), and the images received become permanent in their mind

(6) Ultimate tourist destination is The United States of America (USA), due to the fact that the destination epitomises the centre of modern entrainment industry; good beaches; and also good weather (Cullingford, 1995). Now that the USA (figure 2), is leading the world in confirmed Coronavirus cases (The New York Time [Online]), it would be relevant to investigate the impact on children's perception of the destination. The following section is providing an 'edutainment research approach' to do so.

<div align="center">**[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]**</div>

4.2. Research design

The framework presented in 2.3, is overarching the methodology adopted in this study. As a result:

Phase 1 (Understand) is covered in the literature review (section 2), that provides thorough information in terms of the state of research on children in tourism; the key characteristics of the respondents, namely children; the most suitable way to collect data from them with a rationale. As for the contextual framework (section 3), it introduces the lockdown context in which the world and the tourism industry is deepened in due to the spread of Coronavirus worldwide; and the impacts on children (Jamal & Budke, 2020).

Phase 2 (Observation). As this study is a conceptual research, this phase was covered indirectly through the literature review (section 2), and contextual framework (section 3).

Phase 3 (Engage). As play is very important for children (Kerr & Moore, 2015; Lewis, 2017; Seraphin & Yallop, 2019b), the activities listed in figure 3 (below), are going to be adapted into tools to collect from them. The topic chosen for this study is how to potentially investigate the impacts of COVID-19 on children's perception of the USA.

<p style="text-align:center; color:red; font-weight:bold;">[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]</p>

Phase 4 (Define). Depending of the activity or activities selected, a range of approach could be used to analyse the data. Seraphin and Green (2019), used thematic analysis to analyse the drawing of children. As for Fox et al (2014), they explained that visual analysis could also be used if data are visual material produced or collected by the children; etc.

Phase 5 (Ideate). The findings of this study are going to be placed in a context; the implication evaluated and discussed using existing literature (Brunt et al, 2017).

Phase 6 (Prototype). The results of such a study could be useful to academics, as offering them strategies to carry out research with children, what would contribute to the development of research in tourism with children. As for practitioners, they might perceive the importance of targeting directly children, and not their parents to get information about them.

Phase 7 (Implement). With the emergence of COVID-19, tourism journals encouraging research in the area. For instance, a call for papers by *Journal of Tourism Futures*, entitled 'Tourism in crisis: Global threats to sustainable tourism futures' (etfi [Online]), have identified the following key themes (although not exclusively) as important: Crises planning, management and policy development in tourism; Tourism and pandemics; Tourism and natural disasters; Disaster recovery in tourism; etc. Topics that could be of interest to children could

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be identified, and future empirical research using 'edutainment research tools' could investigate them from children perspectives.

5. Results

As this study is conceptual (as opposed to empirical), not all the phases of the UCD framework could be applied. Seraphin and Vo-Thanh (2020), also only applied some of the phases on the UCD framework in their conceptual analysis of the role that children and mini-clubs could potentially play in the sustainability of the tourism industry. Only empirical studies like the one carried by Font et al (2018) can implement all stages. As a result, this section is only going to cover *Phase 3 (Engage)* and *Phase 4 (Define).*

Following Cullingford (1995) approach, children are not to be asked tourism related questions, or even holidays. Lugosi (2008) refers to this approach as covert research. In this type of research, the identity of the researcher and its intentions are hidden partially of fully from those involved in the study.

The 'edutainment research approach' suggested here is going a step further as no questions will be asked to children regarding their view on the USA as a destination. As a result, this study is also following the ethnographic approach (observation, videos and photographs taken) adopted by Willett (2015) when examining the relationship between playground games and children's media cultures. Ethnography is the study of people using a variety of techniques, that gives an in depth understanding of the targeted people, as this method enable the targeted people to share their thoughts with a minimum of guidelines (Brunt et al, 2017). The ethnographer's role is to present voices which has not previously been heard (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). This research method is totally suitable to this study as children's voice is under represented in tourism (Seraphin & Yallop, 2019a). However, despite

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the fact participants' observation is central to ethnographic approach, it is worth indicating that this approach has some limitations (Lugosi, 2009), as it is sometimes considered as patronising and suspicious due to its strong colonial tradition; as a result, technology, and more specifically, video cameras into consumer households is sometimes used, meaning that the research participation is lighter (Hammond & Wellington, 2013; Silver, Stevens, Wrenn & Loudon, 2013). This approach is referred as unobstrusive observation (Quinlan, 2011).

As a result of this review of ethnographic approach, this study is suggesting school and/or home as sites for the collection of data. The study also suggests that for all of them, camera to be used to record the plays (table 1). Finally, the researcher should not be involved (covert method) in the setting up of the activities/play, etc. In fieldwork research sometimes concealment is sometimes necessary (Lugosi, 2006). Clear guideline will be provided to parents and/or school teachers, and materials/equipment provided.

<p style="text-align:center;color:red;font-weight:bold;">[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]</p>

As indicated in table 1, the evaluation will be done using indices, in other words, metrics that capture frequency counts of certain events or other occurrences (Banasiewicz, 2013). To capture the indices of this study, different types of analysis could be applied:

-First, discourse analysis, that 'seeks to make sense of patterns of communication, the information shared' (Fox et al, 2014: 181). This analysis looks at free factors: grammar; language; rhetoric (Fox et al, 2014).

-Second, conversation analysis, which is the study of speech interchange between people including intonation, vowels, gestures and body language, as well as filter (Fox et al, 2014).

-Third, analysis of images, and videos, which are symbolic representations of subjects in the world. Visual data analysis could be applied (Fox et al, 2014).

6. Discussion and conclusion

COVID-19 has provided this study an opportunity to develop some toolkits to collect data directly from children, and subsequently to empower them. Empowerment happens when a group or an individual attempt to gain control of its destiny and/or affairs by the mean of development of competency that is the outcome of a learning process (Joo, Woosnam, Strzelecka and Boley, 2020), hence the reason the term 'empowerment' is associated with other terms such as: 'enabling'; 'to make responsible'; 'reengineering'; 'mastery' and 'control' (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2020; Boley & Gard McGehee, 2014).

There are three types of empowerment in tourism (Boley & Gard McGehee, 2014; Strzelecka, Boley & Woosman, 2017): Psychological empowerment (sense of pride); social empowerment (development of social capital, and equilibrium within a group); political empowerment (involvement in decision-making). These different forms of empowerment come to fruition if the right practical strategies are put in place. Adams (2008) identified the following approach of empowerment as the most effective: Cathartic and facilitative (enable people to express their feelings); catalytic (enabling people to engage in self-discovery, self-directed living; problem-solving); supportive and catalytic (enabling people to build self-confidence); and finally, self-advocacy (enabling people to speak for themselves).

Conceptual research in tourism focusing on children could be said to contribute to their social empowerment. As for empirical research, such as the one suggested in table 1, they could contribute not only to the social empowerment of children, but also to their psychological and

political empowerment, as this form of research involves first-hand data collection (Hammond & Wellington, 2013), used to make practical recommendations (Fox et al, 2014).

For Sanchez and Adams (2008), tourism is a Janus-faced character due to the fact for every positive impact, the tourism industry generates a negative one. Due to the nature of the tourism industry, and due to the benefits of Janusian-thinking, this approach has been used to turn negative situations into positive one. For instance, in Switzerland (Lucerne) a destination victim of overtourism, turned this negative situation into a positive one. Indeed, a small independent theatre company developed a special show on tourism issues in the local community (Weber, Eggli, Ohnmacht & Stettler, 2019). 'The play expresses the complexity of the dilemma the city currently faces, illustrating that when something is called for, one often receives more than one expected' (Weber et al, 2019: 176). Academic research is also doing the same. Many journals for instance have special issues on COVD-19 and tourism. As for this study, it is turning a negative situation into an opportunity to develop research toolkits in tourism with children. 'It is always pleasantly surprising to find inspiration in unexpected places' (Lugosi, 2016: 217).

The activities suggested in this study (table 1) have not been tested empirically, therefore adjustments might be needed to some of the claims made. Additionally, this study is not based on a systematic literature review of children in tourism (and cognate sectors), some current good practices and poor practices have probably been overlooked. For this reason, this study should be seen as a pilot study.

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