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Exploring the business feasibility of childcare provision in hotels

2

1 **ABSTRACT**

2 In light of continuous growth of family tourism hotels should consider providing childcare to
3 family guests. Very few hotels have however embraced this market opportunity and the
4 determinants of childcare provision in hotels remain poorly understood. This paper
5 contributes to knowledge by exploring the business feasibility of providing childcare in
6 hotels. Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, i.e. family guests (n=20) and
7 managers (n=9), in UK hotels establish the numerous benefits of childcare provision. They
8 also reveal such barriers of implementation as increased operational costs, lack of adequate
9 staffing, children's safety considerations and seasonality of family tourism demand. To
10 enhance feasibility of childcare provision, hotels should collaborate with each other, but also
11 with local nurseries, to resolve the issues of fluctuated demand and staffing. Hotels should
12 further consider extending childcare provision to their own employees and local residents.
13 Policy interventions can facilitate this by offering dedicated financial and training support.

14

1 KEYWORDS

2 Hotel, family tourism, childcare, business feasibility, United Kingdom

3

1 HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 • Explores the business feasibility of childcare provision in hotels
- 3 • Voices opinions of key stakeholders, i.e. hotel family guests and managers
- 4 • Establishes positive impact of childcare provision in hotels on consumer loyalty
- 5 • Reveals the impediments of childcare implementation in hotels
- 6 • Highlights measures to encourage the adoption of childcare provision in hotels

7

1 **1. INTRODUCTION**

2 Families with young children comprise circa 50% of the developed countries' population,
3 thus representing an important target market in tourism (Schanzel *et al.* 2012). Parents are
4 increasingly willing to spend quality time with their children and family tourism offers an
5 opportunity to fulfil this goal (Choat 2016). Family tourism is therefore forecast to grow at
6 the fastest rate among all segments of leisure travel, thus justifying the need for its
7 prioritisation by tourism providers (Schanzel and Yeoman 2015).

8 The growing magnitude of family tourism has prompted changes to tourism supply
9 which is becoming increasingly family tourism orientated (Schanzel and Yeoman 2015). This
10 holds true for hotels (Medlik and Ingram 2000) that look to accommodate the increasing
11 number of guests represented by younger demographics, such as children travelling with
12 parents (Rosenthal 2017). Due to increased children's participation in tourist decisions,
13 consumers have developed new requirements for accommodation, leisure and catering
14 facilities in hotels (Hay 2018), but also demanded new standards of care that are more suited
15 for children (Gaines *et al.* 2004). Children have, thus, become a separate category of
16 consumers who have their own needs, and these needs should be addressed by hotels to build
17 loyalty among their family guests (Schanzel and Yeoman 2015). Moreover, children can now
18 influence family holiday decisions as parents are being increasingly forced to take children's
19 views and needs into consideration (Koc 2004). This accelerates demand for hotels that can
20 effectively meet the needs of the young guests (Schanzel and Yeoman 2015). More
21 specifically, consumers have become interested in hotels that can provide childcare services
22 to families as such services can benefit both parents and their children (Gaines *et al.* 2004).

23 Traditional childcare providers, such as nurseries, play an important societal role by
24 simplifying life of families whose parents are in full-time employment (Elfer 2012). Having
25 realised the growing potential of the children's market in tourism and having acknowledged

1 the business model of traditional nurseries, hoteliers are increasingly engaging with family
2 tourists by addressing their need for temporary childcare when on holiday (Feng and Li 2016).
3 The provision of childcare facilities in tourism is not new as, in the 1950s and 1960s, one of
4 the key selling points of both Butlins and Pontins holiday camps was the provision of on-site
5 nurseries, with trained nurses looking after children (Dawson 2015). Building upon this
6 tradition of holiday camps, to date, childcare provision has become available in many holiday
7 resorts, with TUI leading on the provision of tailor-made services for children (TUI Family
8 Life 2018). The pioneering role of holiday resorts in providing childcare to their guests can
9 be explained by customer perception of these as being the places of family fun and relaxation,
10 with bespoke facilities and activities developed to meet demands of both adults and children
11 (Carr 2011). However, traditional hotels have not yet integrated childcare provision into the
12 scope of their operations with childcare services being offered on an ad-hoc, rather than
13 consistent, basis.

14 Although the growing societal importance of childcare provision has long been
15 recognised, the topic remains understudied in the context of hotel management (Gaines *et al.*
16 2004). While extant research has looked into public (Shdaimah and Palley 2018) and private
17 (Bastos and Cristia 2012) childcare provision as well as childcare provision at workplace
18 (Harker 2000), no studies have specifically addressed this topic in the context of hotels.
19 There is evidence that childcare provision holds multiple benefits for hoteliers, especially in
20 terms of revenue generation (Harris 1999), customer loyalty build-up (Leva and Ziliani 2018)
21 and, via the integration of childcare considerations into the corporate social responsibility
22 practices, on corporate image and reputation (Lai *et al.* 2010). This underlines the need for an
23 in-depth investigation as the lack of research leaves hotel businesses unsupported in their
24 decisions on whether or not to embrace childcare provision because no empirical evidence on
25 the (dis)benefits of its implementation in hotels can be found in the literature.

1 This paper plugs this knowledge gap by exploring the opportunities and challenges of
2 childcare provision in UK hotels. For a (more) holistic analysis, the topic is examined from
3 the perspective of two key stakeholders, i.e. hotel managers and family guests.

4

5 **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

6 **2.1 Family tourism**

7 The large, and yet growing, magnitude of the phenomenon of family tourism has long been
8 recognised (Koc 2004). In the UK alone, family holidays account for 30.2 million overnight
9 domestic trips with an estimated 33% share in the UK's domestic tourism market
10 (Visitbritain 2015). Importantly, this figure represents immediate family holidays only, i.e.
11 the holidays of parents with their children, and excludes extended family holidays, i.e. the
12 holidays of grandparents with their grandchildren (Schanzel and Yeoman 2015). If these are
13 added to the picture, the overall share of family tourism in the UK's domestic tourism market
14 can be as high as 41% (Independent 2010). This figure is generally in line with the more
15 recent data from ABTA (2017) whose estimates suggest that family tourism in the UK
16 accounts for 40% of the market. The nature of family tourism and its fast growing rate imply
17 that it has become paramount for tourism and hospitality providers to design appropriate,
18 family tourism related, products to meet the rising expectations of their custom (Gaines *et al.*
19 2004)

20 The reasons for family tourism are manifold. Aside from considering family travel as a
21 means of strengthening family bonds, family tourists value the sense of achievement, fun and
22 memorable experience when on holiday (Ho *et al.* 2013). Further, family tourists view
23 holidays as an opportunity to learn new skills and spend quality leisure time away from home
24 (van Balen and Bos 2009). Decision-making in family tourism is complex with families
25 considering a number of factors prior to reaching a consensus on where to travel, how to

1 travel and where to stay (Blichfeldt 2008). Family income and personal preferences play an
2 important role in these considerations but other factors, such as children demands, may
3 intervene and complicate the decision-making process (Kang and Hsu 2005; Rojas-de-Gracia
4 *et al.* 2018; Wang *et al.* 2004). When traveling with children, parents tend to consider the
5 following main factors: destination safety; travel distance to a destination; quality of
6 interaction (entertainment) at a destination; availability of child-friendly activities and
7 facilities at a destination; and provision of family-oriented programmes in hotels (Khoo-
8 Lattimore *et al.* 2015). Importantly, besides the above holiday preferences of parents,
9 opinions of other family members have been increasingly influencing the decision-making
10 process of family tourists (Bronner and de Hoog 2008). The judgment made by parents of the
11 quality of family holidays has become strongly dependent on their envisaged children's
12 experiences (Gram 2006), thus highlighting an important role of children as a potential
13 enhancer of family holidays (positive effect) but, concurrently, as their possible inhibitor
14 (negative effect) (Hay 2017; Hay 2018).

15 In terms of the positive effect, holidays represent one of the most popular and long-
16 awaited family activities because, as a complex entertainment experience, they provide all
17 family members with an opportunity to experience a unique location outside home and allow
18 them to play a variety of new roles in the new context (Shaw and Dawson 2001). As a
19 specific way of social consumption, family tourism has a positive effect on socialisation and
20 maintenance of family bonds (Hay 2018). It can further increase cohesion among family
21 members and enhance family's common interests (Shaw and Dawson 2001). Holiday
22 activities improve children's collective awareness and help them learn new skills (Kluin and
23 Lehto 2012). This is because, when on holiday, children seek their own special experiences
24 that need to be unique, challenging and fun (Gaines *et al.* 2004). Hence, it has long been
25 recognised that provision of holiday services that can fulfil interests and expectations of both

1 adults and children represent a viable extension of the nature of hospitality which could make
2 tourism businesses more successful (Makens 1992).

3 In terms of the possible negative effect of children's presence on the quality of family
4 holidays, availability of adequate services for children to fulfil their needs and wants can
5 complicate holiday decisions of parents as it can hamper the selection of transport and
6 accommodation providers (Kang and Hsu 2005). As a result, tourism and hospitality
7 businesses that fail to provide satisfying services to families with children can put themselves
8 in a disadvantaged position in the marketplace (Schanzel *et al.* 2012). Moreover, the
9 satisfaction requirements between children and adults differ. The need to satisfy both parents
10 and children represents a difficult task for tourism and hospitality providers as both parties
11 impose strong influence on the perceived satisfaction level of a family as a whole (McDonald
12 2008). It is a vital challenge for business professionals to satisfy parents and children at the
13 same time, and Schanzel and Yeoman (2015) posit that the tourism and hospitality industry
14 should embrace the need to face this challenge for the long-term business sustainability.

15 The business challenge of catering for family tourists is further exacerbated in the
16 situations when parents put the satisfaction and desires of their children in advance of their
17 own. If children are dissatisfied with their holidays or a specific element of their holidays,
18 such as hotel stay, then their parents tend to experience frustration and discontent, the
19 phenomenon known as "vicarious enjoyment" (Levey 2009). Vicarious enjoyment is
20 particularly applicable to families who travel with young children, babies and toddlers as
21 parents tend to prioritise preferences and experiences of younger children due to their
22 perceived vulnerability and related well-being concerns (Lehto *et al.* 2012). The families with
23 both young children and older children may therefore represent the most demanding clients
24 for tourism and hospitality businesses who face the challenge of not only satisfying the
25 parents, but also satisfying their children, whose levels of satisfaction may, directly or

1 indirectly, affect the levels of satisfaction of their parents, as per above. Indeed, while
2 appropriate arrangements can be made to satisfy one party, there is always a danger that these
3 could make the other party dissatisfied, thus jeopardizing loyalty of family guests (Hay 2017).
4 Interestingly, extant research on family tourism tends to focus on the families with older
5 children while families with younger children or families with children representing a range
6 of age groups have been left largely unstudied (Small and Harris 2014).

7

8 *2.2. Hotel business model and family tourism*

9 The basic goal of a hotel business is to generate income by providing accommodation and
10 catering services to tourists (Harris 1999). For income maximisation, hotels take advantage of
11 revenue management techniques, especially those that aim to sell auxiliary products and services
12 (Oltean and Gabor 2016). These refer to any supplemental products or services that companies
13 can offer to their customers in addition to the traditional products and services (Morosan 2014).
14 In the case of hotels, auxiliary products and services are represented by the provision of leisure
15 and conference facilities, transport and accommodation upgrades, to mention a few (Oltean and
16 Gabor 2016).

17 In light of the rapid development of family tourism hotels have (re-)designed their
18 facilities and amenities in order to cater for the needs of parents and children (Schanelz and
19 Yeoman 2015). To this end, some hotels have considered providing an auxiliary service of
20 childcare to their family guests as a means of boosting revenues and building consumer
21 loyalty (Oltean and Gabor 2016). Another consideration was given to childcare provision in
22 the context of hotel employment as, by offering childcare to staff, there is an opportunity to
23 improve the work-life balance of hotel employees, thus contributing to the goal of corporate
24 social responsibility in the hospitality industry (Habibah *et al.* 2015).

1 It is argued that the ‘classical’ recreational and catering facilities of hotels make them
2 suitable for offering childcare as an auxiliary service to guests, but also to staff. Hotels as
3 tourist accommodation providers have traditionally catered for a substantial share of the
4 global family tourism market which is due to (better) space availability and perceived value
5 (Carr 2011). Some hotels, such as the Luxury Family Hotel Group (LuxuryFamilyHotels
6 2018), have appealed to family tourists by incorporating children in their target market and
7 by offering children-friendly services to their guests. Following positive response from
8 consumers, some hotels have started providing the services of baby-sitting, children’s day
9 care and holiday kids’ clubs by default. For instance, the Omni Hotels (Omnihotels 2018)
10 offer tailor-made childcare services to their guests on a regular basis, thus positively
11 differentiating themselves from competition.

12 It is important to note that, for international hotel chains, targeting family tourists can
13 be challenging as families from different national cultures have different expectations
14 regarding the scope and the scale of holiday childcare provision. For instance, Asian parents
15 tend to focus more on the educational purpose of the children’s activities when on holiday
16 (Khoo-Lattimore *et al.* 2015). In comparison, many ‘western’ parents prefer the ‘novelty’ and
17 ‘out-of-the-box’ activities for their children (Schanzel and Yeoman 2015). This suggests that
18 hotels need to understand the market opportunities of providing childcare to their guests but,
19 concurrently, to appreciate its challenges (Gaines *et al.* 2004).

20 For hotels to learn about how to offer childcare to their guests, it would be necessary to
21 look at how these services are organised and managed by nurseries and other, more
22 professional and/or ‘experienced’ childcare provision organisations. Nursery is a place where
23 young children and toddlers are looked after while their parents are at work (Elfer 2012).
24 Childcare in nurseries not only covers many aspects of health care, parenting and
25 maintenance but, more importantly, it also contains the elements of education in its

1 connotation (Randall 1995). Extant research on childcare in nurseries is well-established and
2 has looked into the challenges of basic childcare provision (De-Regil *et al.* 2013), physical
3 fitness of children (Iwata *et al.* 2011), physiological and psychological reactions at the
4 growth stage of young children, and the relationship between children and the surrounding
5 environment (McCann *et al.* 2007), among others. The extensive line of research on childcare
6 provision in nurseries can guide hotels on how to offer childcare to their guests. For instance,
7 according to Hamalainen *et al.* (2013), the different types of educational games should be
8 provided to the children of different ages to enable better engagement and more effective
9 learning. Moreover, the often significant variations in children's physical and mental well-
10 being in the different playing and learning environments should also be considered (Vincent
11 *et al.* 2008).

12 Holiday resorts represent hospitality business ventures that are more 'experienced' in
13 childcare provision. Family tourists are interested in all-inclusive pricing and the business
14 model of holiday resorts revolves around this appeal (Schanzel *et al.* 2012). Holiday resorts
15 are often defined as a world of families with children, where appropriate facilities and
16 amenities are available to facilitate children's playing and learning (Carr 2011). The
17 provision of dedicated child-friendly facilities and amenities significantly increases the
18 operational costs of hospitality enterprises (Obrador 2012). However, childcare provision in
19 holiday resorts enhances satisfaction of family tourists, thus pinpointing a 'cost versus
20 consumer loyalty' dilemma which hoteliers have to face when deciding on whether or not to
21 invest in childcare provision (Gaines *et al.* 2004). The research exploring the opportunities
22 and challenges of childcare provision in all-inclusive holiday resorts as well as traditional
23 hotels is, however, under-developed, thus signifying a crucial knowledge gap.

24

25 *2.3. Integrating childcare provision in hotel business models*

1 Although there is limited evidence of research on the determinants of successful integration
2 of childcare provision in hotel business models, the literature review has revealed five factors
3 that should be considered by hoteliers aiming to cater for family tourists: provision of
4 facilities for children; provision of activities for children; staff skills and qualifications;
5 children's safety; and seasonality.

6 When it comes to the provision of adequate children's facilities, Hay (2017) posits that
7 consumers expect the same standard of facilities in hotels for both adults and children that
8 they would have at home. To this end, the hotels that cater for families should develop the
9 facilities based on the knowledge of their particular needs (Gaines *et al.* 2004). Further,
10 according to Brown (2001), 80% hotel guests expect a separate space for 'children to hang
11 out' when choosing a hotel, thus emphasizing the role of dedicated space for children's play,
12 but also underlining the need to have specialised equipment facilitating this play. This
13 requires hotels to not only consider the entertainment preferences of children, but also the
14 installation and maintenance costs of entertainment equipment. These may represent a
15 significant portion of hotel's overall operational costs (Kim 2013; Smith 2013; Fu and Park
16 2017).

17 In order to enhance the quality of relationships between family members, most parents
18 would like the hotels to not only offer a diverse programme of children's activities, but this
19 programme to also include the activities that parents could also participate in (Gaines *et al.*
20 2004). To this end, the Moonfleet Manor Hotel in the UK offers educational activities, such
21 as fossil walks and bird-watching tours, designed for both parents and children (Moonfleet
22 Manor Hotel 2018). The need for diversified activities that appeal to various consumer
23 groups (i.e. parents, older children and younger children) requires innovative thinking in the
24 planning of the hotel's infrastructure when targeting family tourists (Khoo-Lattimore *et al.*
25 2015). Encouraging participation of parents in children's activities is beneficial from the

1 hotel business' perspective as this holds the potential to enhance satisfaction of both parents
2 and their children (Backer 2013; Korstanje 2011; Kozak 2012).

3 Recruiting employees who are mature, caring and efficient is one of the key success
4 factors for a hotel business which caters for family tourists (Khoo-Lattimore *et al.* 2015).
5 Day-to-day work with children requires hotel staff to have adequate knowledge of such
6 subjects as education, nursing, psychology and/or recreation management (Gaines *et al.*
7 2004). This represents a challenge for hotels whose employees are not always educated to a
8 degree level. Further, provision of staff training on how to use hotel facilities and equipment
9 designed for children may be costly (Schanel *et al.* 2012). The needs for staff training have
10 to be identified and the related training costs carefully calculated which can be challenging
11 from the viewpoint of budgeting (Schanel and Yeoman 2015).

12 Children's safety is another concern that hotels have to address if they choose to offer
13 childcare to their guests (Khoo-Lattimore *et al.* 2015). Parents expect hotels to prioritise
14 safety of their children when they procure and install childcare related services, such as the
15 facilities requiring the use of electricity or water (Schanel and Yeoman 2015). These
16 facilities must be secured and regularly monitored to ensure they impose no risk onto
17 children, thus giving parents the 'piece of mind' feeling. Furthermore, in some countries,
18 such as the UK, hotel staff will likely need to go through a criminal records check, which
19 takes time and costs money, to ensure legal compliance (GOV.UK 2017).

20 Parents are fined for taking children of school age away on holiday during the term
21 time in the UK (GOV.UK 2018), but also in other countries, such as South Korea (Kim and
22 Lehto 2013). This suggests that childcare services in hotels would be in high demand only at
23 weekends and/or during the school holiday periods. This is challenging from the managerial
24 viewpoint as, for better return-on-investment efficiency, the services and facilities designed
25 for children should be kept open all year long, including the low season. Seasonality of

1 family tourism imposes extra costs as the hotels choosing to provide childcare to their guests
2 must maintain the staff and infrastructure to be used throughout the year.

3 Considerations of hoteliers regarding investment in childcare provision should embrace
4 an idea of offering childcare not only to hotel guests, but also to staff. This can not only
5 optimise operational costs, but further enhance the appeal of a hotel business to its key
6 stakeholder, i.e. employees. The instances of providing childcare to hotel's staff are however
7 rare. This is surprising given that, in the West, it is broadly expected that females with
8 children, even young children, work to make themselves financially independent (Hagen
9 2004). Further, Lewis (2011) pinpoints the crucial role of childcare provision played in
10 encouraging parents to go back to work, which is in line with Hagen (2004) who claims that,
11 to fulfil the expectations of parents, adequate support must be given to them in terms of
12 arranging cost-effective childcare services in the workplace. Previous research on work-
13 related stress and work-life balance has considered childcare provision in support of females
14 and younger parents at workplace. For instance, Hwang (2018) argues that working mothers
15 receive lower parenting stress when employed by family-supportive organisations. Likewise,
16 Perry-Jenkins *et al.* (2016) demonstrates that shift flexibility and organisational childcare
17 support correlate well with the reduction of depressive symptoms among young parents. Hipp
18 *et al.* (2016) shows that, by providing childcare, employers benefit from increased employee
19 job commitment. Lastly, Karatepe and Magaji (2008) highlight the crucial role of reliable
20 childcare provision for the enhanced work-life balance of female employees in hotels. All
21 these studies, despite being seminal in marking the importance of childcare provision in
22 hotels from the perspective of staff, did not consider a possibility for hotels to offer childcare
23 to their employees as well as to their guests.

24

25 *2.4. Research gap*

1 The topics of family holiday decision-making as well as children as a driver and barrier of
2 family holidays have long been discussed in academic literature. However, limited research
3 has attempted to understand the feasibility of childcare provision in hotels even though its
4 importance to drive satisfaction of family tourists and hotel staff has been shown. This study
5 will bridge this important knowledge gap.

6

7 **3. METHOD**

8 Considering scant nature and limited scope of research on childcare provision in hotels, and
9 due to anticipated difficulties in participant recruitment, an interpretive, qualitative research
10 method was chosen for primary data collection and analysis. Qualitative research was
11 considered most appropriate due to the exploratory character of this project as qualitative
12 research facilitates an in-depth evaluation and conceptualisation of people's feelings and
13 opinions, especially on societally important topics, such as childcare provision (Veal 2011).
14 Primary data were collected via face-to-face, in-depth semi-structured interviews. These
15 enabled participants to reveal their true feelings and opinions (Veal 2011), thus providing
16 rich information for an in-depth, exploratory analysis which this project set to undertake.

17 To examine the business feasibility of childcare provision in hotels, it was crucial to
18 understand its prospects from the viewpoint of key stakeholders, i.e. hotel guests and hotel
19 managers. Thus, two separate interview protocols were designed, with one targeting family
20 tourists and the other one focusing on hotel's senior managers. The initial themes explored in
21 the interview protocols were derived from the literature grounding upon five main topics: 1) the
22 factors affecting decision-making of family tourists when choosing a hotel to stay (Khoo-
23 Lattimore *et al.* 2015); 2) children as a driver of family holidays (Shaw and Dawson 2001)
24 and 3) their barrier (Kang and Hsu 2005), and; 4) the opportunities and 5) challenges of
25 childcare provision in hotels. Topics 1-3 were primarily investigated in interviews designed

1 for hotel guests and topics 4-5 were mainly examined in managerial interviews. Data analysis
2 was iterative and both interview protocols were regularly updated to include any new themes
3 emerging from interviews.

4 Interviewing took place in July-August 2018. Homogeneous purposive sampling was
5 applied for recruitment which is due to known difficulties in engaging hospitality managers
6 and hotel guests in research projects (Filimonau and Krivcova 2017). The sample of hotel
7 managers was represented by senior managers of upmarket hotels in Dorset (UK). The focus
8 on upmarket hotels was deliberate as it is argued that these hold the foremost appeal in terms
9 of childcare provision given they cater to relatively wealthy categories of clientele. To enable
10 a diversity of views, all managers represented different hotel businesses. They were first
11 approached via email which explained the purpose of research and requested an interview.
12 Following this, an on-site visit was made to those hotel businesses that responded positively
13 to the email, aiming to provide more detail on the research project and confirm willingness of
14 managers to be interviewed. The sample of hotel guests was made by family tourists staying
15 in the same hotels where managerial interviews were conducted. Consent from hotel
16 management to approach their guests was always obtained prior to recruiting family tourists
17 and, on some occasions, hotel managers aided in the recruitment by introducing researchers
18 to family guests. Both members of the family were interviewed to enable an in-depth
19 elaboration. As family interviews often exemplify the (dis)balance of power (Eggenberger
20 and Nelms 2007), every effort was made to ensure that both family members could voice
21 their opinions freely and in sufficient detail. To this end, a number of dedicated prompts were
22 added onto the interview protocols seeking engagement of both members of the family in the
23 conversations held. Given that national culture may affect perception of family tourists
24 regarding the scope and scale of childcare services provided in hotels (Khoo-Lattimore *et al.*

1 2015), the sample of hotel guests in this study was represented by domestic (British) tourists
2 only.

3 Sample size was determined by data saturation. Saunders *et al.* (2012) suggest that at
4 least twelve in-depth interviews are required for reaching saturation and disclosing the
5 commonalities in interview responses. In this project, saturation was reached with 29
6 interviews (Table 1). The average duration of interviews was 30-40 minutes. Interviews were
7 digitally recorded and transcribed. No incentives were offered for participation.

8 [Insert Table 1 here]

9 Thematic analysis was applied to the data collected. Following the procedure outlined
10 in Braun and Clark (2006), the codes and sub-codes were identified and categorised into
11 major themes. This was facilitated by specialist software for qualitative data analysis, NVivo,
12 which enabled a deeper review of the rich data collected and provided better visualisation of
13 the inter-linkages between the main codes and sub-codes derived. The key concepts emerged
14 from thematic analysis were supported by the most representative quotations. Figure 1
15 represents the coding structure.

16 [Insert Figure 1 here]

17

18 **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

19 *4.1 Factors affecting family holiday decision-making*

20 Family holidays can be divided into several stages in which the stage of decision-making
21 comes first (Rojas-de-Gracia *et al.* 2018). The influence of children is foremost at this stage
22 as children can affect family travel decisions and behaviour by imposing physical (presence)
23 and preference constraints, such as on travel distance and destination choice (Wang *et al.*
24 2004). Previous research reports that most parents consider children's experience as one of
25 the major factors impacting the holiday decisions of the entire family (Gram 2006; Hay 2017).

1 This study confirms this by finding that while parents make holiday decisions by themselves,
2 the decision-making process they undertake is complex and usually revolves around the
3 needs and the wants of their children:

4

5 *'No, [my daughter] she didn't involve in [making a holiday decision] at all. It was
6 my decision. But I think about what she will enjoy and something we could enjoy
7 together as well. And I will search online to find somewhere we will all like to go'*
8 (Sian)

9

10 As tourists spend a lot of time in a hotel, its amenities represent an important factor in
11 holiday decisions of family tourists (Harris 1999). Further, the relative 'child-friendliness' of
12 the destination and hotel staff exerts a strong influence (Blichfeldt 2008). This study confirms
13 the literature by finding that the features of the hotel and its surroundings play a crucial role
14 in family holiday decision-making (Figure 1) with all parents looking for places to stay where
15 their children would be safe and well looked after. Once parents are satisfied with the hotel
16 providing proper care to their children, there is a tendency to return, which is great from the
17 viewpoint of the long-term hotel's business sustainability. Interestingly, many participants
18 pinpointed the availability of supervised childcare sessions in hotels as one of the main
19 reasons for their (return) holiday choice:

20

21 *'Last year we were in Portugal, and we stayed in Kinder hotels and they're the
22 family friendly ones. So, we benefited from having a kids' club. So, once we've
23 experienced that, there's no going back really'* (Diana)

24

1 In summary, the findings demonstrate that children affect family holiday decision-
2 making. Children's needs and preferences, as well as the ability of hotels to cater for these,
3 play an important role in the destination and accommodation choice of parents. This suggests
4 that hoteliers should recognise children as one of their primary clientele given the influence
5 they may impose on the purchasing power holders, i.e. their parents.

6

7 *4.2 Children as a driver of family holidays*

8 Family tourism provides a special way for parents to interact with their children, and children
9 can thus be a driver of family holidays (Lamb 2010). Shaw and Dawson (2001) posit that
10 family travel represents an opportunity to escape and spend quality time together. This study
11 confirms this with its participants viewing family holiday as a compensation for not spending
12 enough time with the children:

13

14 '*I'd like to spend more time with her [daughter] when taking her on holiday as*
15 *I'm always working and don't spend enough time with her. Quality time spent*
16 *together is what a holiday is about and it is very important for us'* (Susan)

17

18 Nowadays, children experience holidays more often than before (Clark 2001). As a
19 result, they have developed a desire of their own special experience when on holiday with
20 activities to fit their own interests (Gaines *et al.* 2004). Parents increasingly understand the
21 importance for children to enjoy themselves on holiday by engaging in the things they like,
22 and they often join the children's fun to bond with the loved ones (Gaines *et al.* 2004). In this
23 study, many participants claimed that holidays offered an opportunity to their children to
24 make new friends and/or to reinforce connections with other family members:

25

1 ‘My daughter is eight and she’s our single child. She’s in the age that she always
2 wants to play with friends, so she feels lonely sometimes. In a hotel like this she’s
3 very excited to play with other children and make new friends’ (Sarah)

4

5 In summary, children drive family tourism by encouraging parents to spend more time
6 together and by watching children enjoying themselves and having fun. However, there are
7 certain challenges of traveling with children that family tourists need to consider.

8

9 4.3 *Children as a barrier for family holidays*

10 When travelling as a family, there is a growing customer expectation that hotels will provide
11 extra services to the younger guests (Smith 2013). However, this study shows that the choice
12 of family-friendly hotels and the availability of childcare services in hotels are limited in the
13 UK, thus uncovering the related difficulties of family travel. Another issue raised by
14 participants referred to the limited school holiday time which was seen as a major barrier for
15 family tourism due to a small ‘window of opportunity’, but also because of higher holiday
16 costs. Guests with babies and toddlers were particularly concerned about their future holidays
17 fearing that school holidays would be a limitation for them to travel as a family.

18

19 ‘We always have to plan ahead when taking the children away on holiday,
20 especially we need to be careful with [not missing] the school time. While it’s
21 school holiday, this type of hotel may be booked up two or three weeks before. So,
22 planning is very important’ (Susan)

23

24 The high cost of travelling with children and the travel stress were frequently cited as
25 the other main impediments of family tourism (Figure 1), which is in line with the literature

1 (Schanzel *et al.* 2012). Tourism and hospitality providers were repeatedly blamed for taking
2 advantage of the limited holiday opportunities available to families and charging excessive
3 premiums to accommodate increased consumer demand during the non-school periods
4 (Buhalis 2000). This notwithstanding, many participants expressed a strong desire to pay a
5 reasonable price premium for an opportunity to have seamless holidays where the needs and
6 the wants of all family members would be accounted for.

7

8 *4.4 Opportunities of childcare provision in hotels*

9 All hotel managers agreed that family tourism represented a growing market trend (Schanzel
10 *et al.* 2012) which their businesses strove to tap into in pursuit of improved revenues. To this
11 end, many participants indicated that their hotels adjusted their product offer to make it more
12 family- and children-friendly. For example, the ‘kids’ meals and menus have become
13 mainstream in all studied hotels while extra beds were often offered free of charge to family
14 customers. Moreover, a few managers claimed to have realised the potential held by various
15 temporary childcare services to attract family tourists and acknowledged the need for the
16 hotel sector to engage in their provision more actively.

17 Nowadays, apart from the traditional bed and breakfast service, additional services are
18 necessary to maximise and diversify revenues for hotel businesses (Oltean and Gabor 2016).
19 Childcare provision as an auxiliary service in hotels was viewed favourably by the majority
20 of participants representing both hotel guests and managers. Most guests indicated their
21 willingness to pay for childcare related services, such as baby-sitting or children’s activities,
22 when staying in a hotel. They claimed that by providing childcare to their guests, hotel
23 businesses could enhance consumer loyalty and become more competitive in the marketplace.
24 Most hotel managers demonstrated good understanding of this market desire and
25 acknowledged the numerous benefits held by childcare provision in hotels (Figure 1). Raouf

1 and Joyoti (2017) suggest that a key for business success for hoteliers is to work on satisfying
2 the needs of existing guests, which is to maintain the relationship and maximise their lifetime
3 value. This holds true for the sample hotels as many managers referred to short stays as being
4 dominant in their businesses, thus seeing childcare provision as an opportunity to improve
5 customer satisfaction and encourage longer stays:

6

7 *'I think this is a great opportunity. The guests would stay longer if we could*
8 *provide childcare and, potentially, it could generate more revenue by increasing*
9 *the occupancy'* (Patrick)

10

11 Previous (positive) hotel stay experience has substantial influence on repeat purchase
12 and return intention of family tourists, especially for prolonged holidays (Leva and Ziliani
13 2018). Hotel businesses should therefore strive to improve guest experience in an attempt of
14 building consumer loyalty (Ariffin *et al.* 2018). The study found that, by implementing
15 childcare, hotels could enhance experience of family tourists. It also identified that childcare
16 provision in hotels should be properly evaluated to ensure that children's activities and
17 services do not endanger the quality of hotel stay experience for non-family guests. This can
18 be achieved by, for example, separating spaces for family and non-family tourists, but also by
19 holding children's activities at different times and in designated locations:

20

21 *'Good thing about this hotel is that we can be separated in the same hotel. Means*
22 *we can have breakfast together. And, for dinner, we can eat at different times and*
23 *tables. Children have their kids' supper and they go upstairs to play and go to bed.*

24 *The great thing here is that you can send your children over to the Bear's Den*
25 *[children's club], they will have a lovely time and they can't escape, they will be*

1 well looked after. So, the parents can relax, and grandparents can stay asleep'

2 (Jim)

3

4 Further, the study revealed that, by offering childcare, hotels could improve the well-
5 being of their staff and to engage with local communities, such as schools and nurseries, so to
6 share the human resources with their specialised skillsets, children's facilities and (initial
7 equipment investment and maintenance) costs. Corporate social responsibility practices are
8 gaining appeal among hotel businesses (Medlik and Ingram 2000). These prompt hotels to
9 invest in building sustained relations with the wider society / local community (Dahlsrud
10 2008) and own employees (Vinerean *et al.* 2013). By extending the scope of childcare
11 provision to the non-guests/general public and staff, hotels can progress towards the goals of
12 corporate social responsibility, thus improving societal reputation and enhancing employee
13 loyalty. Many managers from this study stated that they would like to see their hotels to
14 better engage with the local people and staff, so these stakeholders could benefit from the
15 services provided by the hotels.

16 In summary, the study identified numerous opportunities for childcare provision in
17 hotels to meet the needs of the growing market of family tourism, but also to (better) appeal
18 to the local communities and hotel staff. However, challenges in implementing childcare in
19 hotels were also highlighted.

20

21 4.5 *Challenges of childcare provision in hotels*

22 Health and safety concerns over children play an important role in travel considerations of
23 family tourists (Doganer 2012). These concerns impose a major challenge on hotels in terms
24 of childcare arrangements as there is a need for hoteliers to provide adequate space and
25 equipment, but also to recruit staff with the 'right' skillset to cater for children's needs

1 (Gaines *et al.* 2004). The related issue of costs represents another determinant of hotel
2 businesses' evaluation on whether or not to provide childcare as financial considerations sit
3 high on hotel's corporate agenda (Harris 1999). High seasonality of family tourism was
4 further provided as an explanation of participants' reluctance to invest in childcare provision
5 (Figure 1). This is in line with the literature pinpointing seasonal demand for childcare as a
6 main impediment for hotels in terms of attracting and retaining qualified staff and balancing
7 operational costs over the whole year (Brian *et al.* 2017). To alleviate the negative effect of
8 seasonality, a number of managers elaborated upon the possibility of collaborating with local
9 nurseries and/or other local childcare providers, such as child-minders, subject to adequate
10 costs of such 'shared' childcare provision. According to managers, they would like to be able
11 to 'borrow' professional nurses to fulfil the demand for childcare services in their hotels if
12 and when required. In turn, in addition to paying salaries to professional nurses, hoteliers
13 were prepared to offer them extra benefits, such as free meals and free hotel stays in periods
14 of low consumer demand.

15

16 *'...The high seasons for the family guests are basically school holiday time. So,
17 the demand of childcare is seasonal, then it'll be difficult for the hotel to find the
18 seasonal staff who'd like to do these jobs. What's more is the facilities and
19 activities for children will cost quite a bit of money, the management needs to
20 think well if it's worth doing it'* (Andrew)

21

22 Family tourists expect hotels to provide various childcare services to cater for a range
23 of children's wants and desires, such as child-friendly facilities (for example, playgrounds
24 and pools), activities (for instance, kids' clubs) and childcare related programmes (Gaines *et*
25 *al.* 2004). Some participants considered that there were enough facilities for younger children

1 in their respective hotels; however, the need to have more (suitable) facilities for older
2 children was recognised. Further, the majority of interviewed hotel guests expected hotels to
3 provide tailored activities for children, but also for the whole family, which is to aid families
4 in building their connections (Khoo-Lattimore *et al.* 2015). Varied facilities for children in
5 different age groups and diverse activities that would occupy the whole family were however
6 found challenging for hotels to provide.

7 Local government plays an important role in encouraging the growth and development
8 of the local economy (Meyer and Meyer 2016). In the UK, a number of government schemes
9 exist that facilitate childcare provision in nurseries (Lewis 2011). However, regarding
10 childcare provision in hotels, most managers claimed there was no dedicated governmental
11 support available to them (Figure 1). This was seen as a main obstacle, and support from the
12 government / local authorities was repeatedly called for by participants to aid hoteliers in
13 implementing childcare services:

14

15 *'There are a number of financial roles the government can play in supporting*
16 *childcare provision in hotels. Interest-free loans to buy the equipment, for*
17 *instance. And also provide more training activities. Hospitality industry*
18 *contributes to GDP more than a lot of other industries, we'd like to see more*
19 *support from the government in this regard'* (Mark)

20

21 5. CONCLUSIONS

22 Although the hotel sector has traditionally relied upon a small number of (what can be
23 classed as conventional) business models, there is an increasing pressure on hoteliers to
24 maximise and diversify their revenues. Considering the rapid growth of family tourism,
25 globally and in the UK, childcare services may provide hotels with new business

1 opportunities as childcare can be offered to customers as one of the hotel's auxiliary services.
2 This notwithstanding, the topic of childcare provision in hotels has never been explored
3 scholarly, especially from the viewpoint of its business feasibility.

4 This study enriched the understanding of the needs of childcare provision in hotels and
5 the related challenges and opportunities from the perspective of providers (hotel managers)
6 and consumers (family tourists). It established high awareness of industry practitioners of the
7 benefits attributed to childcare provision, such as improved consumer experience, increased
8 business competitiveness, enhanced corporate image and, ultimately, maximised business
9 revenues. Concurrently, the study revealed such impediments of childcare provision in hotels
10 as increased costs, inadequate staffing, space constraints, children's safety and the potential
11 negative impact of childcare on non-family hotel guests. While hoteliers, as the key providers
12 of tourist accommodation services, should be prepared to satisfy the growing needs of the
13 family tourism market, they should carefully balance out the pluses and minuses of providing
14 childcare on their business premises.

15 To aid hoteliers in implementing childcare, relevant policies need to be developed.
16 These should aim at providing hotels with staff training and financial incentives, such as
17 subsidies and interest-free loans, to purchase childcare equipment. What is more, policies
18 should strive to design certification standards to reinforce the standards of childcare provision
19 in hotels. Lastly, policies can be applied to the existing system of UK's childcare vouchers so
20 that these could be redeemed in hotels, and not only in nurseries.

21 The study highlighted the need for better inter- and cross-sectoral collaboration in
22 effective childcare implementation in hotels. The cross-sectoral collaboration should take the
23 form of hotels sharing resources with each other in light of high seasonality of family tourism
24 demand. A shared approach to childcare provision will enable hotels to optimise the use of
25 trained staff, thus reducing labour costs that are significant. The inter-sectoral collaboration

1 should enable hotels to use the services of nurseries and child-minders at the times of peak
2 demand for childcare, but also at the times of unpredictable demand for it. Such a ‘shared’
3 approach to childcare provision will not only benefit hotel guests, but also hotel staff, thus
4 improving job satisfaction and employee retention. What is more, hotels could consider
5 developing nurseries as franchises and locate them either directly on, or very close to, hotel
6 business premises. Such novel business models would enable hotels to execute more control
7 over nursery services, thus taking advantage of their joint use not only for children of family
8 guests, but also for children of hotel staff as well as for children of general public.

9 The study outlined a number of promising research directions. Firstly, the results of this
10 exploratory study should be validated on a larger sample. To this end, quantitative surveys
11 with hotel guests and hotel managers representing different categories of tourist
12 accommodation (for example, budget hotels or luxury hotels) and different consumption
13 markets (for instance, outside the UK) should be conducted to gain more representative data.
14 Secondly, future research should investigate perspectives on childcare provision in hotels as
15 dominant among the different stakeholders, such as nurseries, hotel staff and non-family
16 guests. It would be particularly valuable to examine opinions of children, given they
17 represent the key stakeholder in the topic concerned, subject to securing beforehand adequate
18 research ethics clearance. Further, opinions of nursery managers could be sought on the
19 opportunity to open their facilities to children of family tourists, thus aiding hoteliers to cater
20 for family guests at the time of peak demand. Thirdly, future research should examine the
21 feasibility of childcare provision in hotels for children of different age groups, i.e. babies,
22 toddlers and older children, but also for families with children of different age groups.
23 Fourthly, future study should investigate consumer willingness to pay for childcare in hotels,
24 thus giving hoteliers an indication of potential revenues they can generate by offering it to
25 guests. Lastly, a dedicated stream of future research should engage national policy-makers to

1 explore the possibility of including hotels into the childcare provision system in the UK and
2 beyond. Destination management professionals could also be studied to explore opportunities
3 of business collaboration between hotels and nurseries in pursuit of attracting larger numbers
4 of family tourists to a destination.

5

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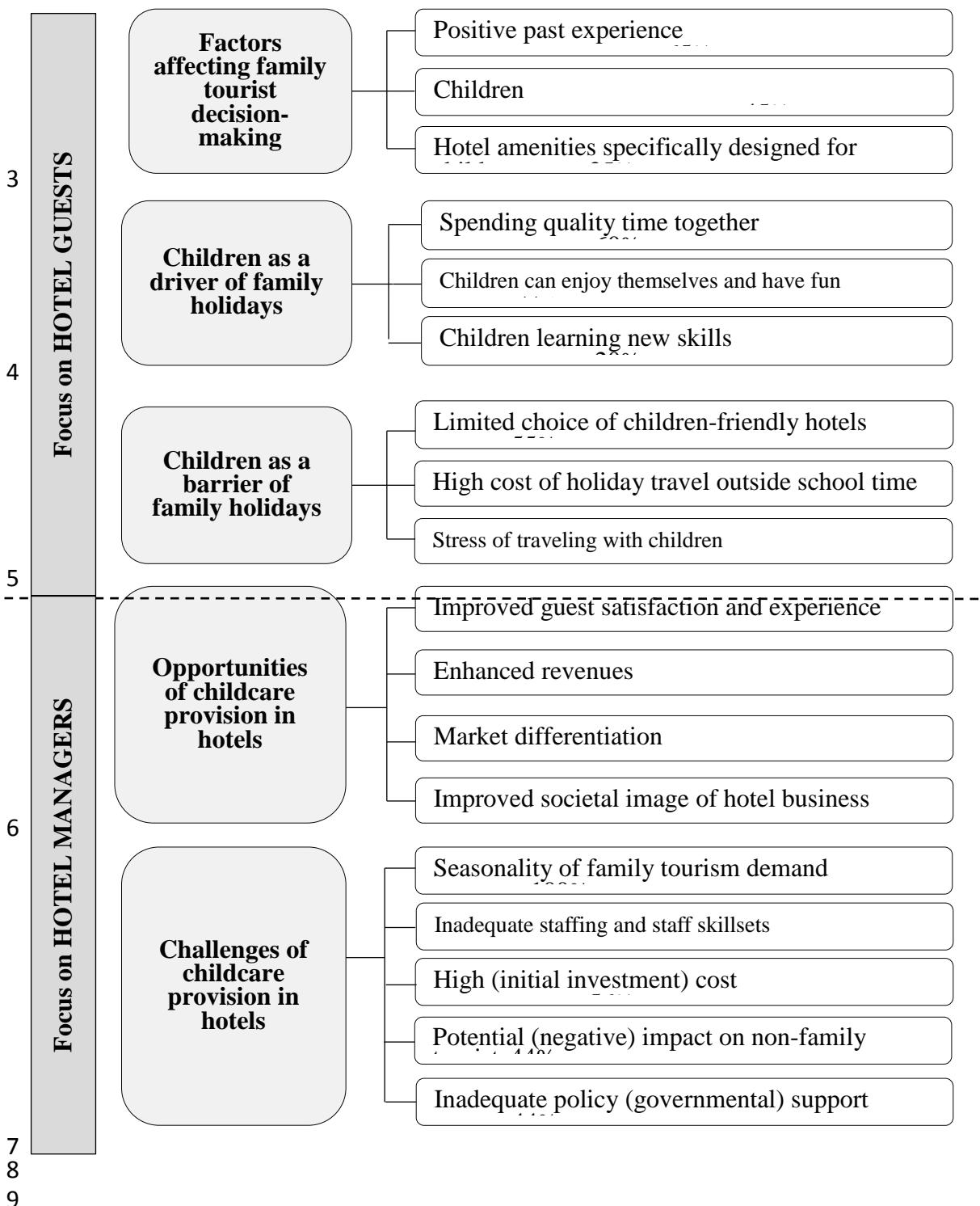
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1 Figure 1. Coding structure with themes, codes, and percentage of text passages accredited
 2 to each code (only themes that have been mentioned by over 10% of participants are listed)



1 Table 1. Profiles of interview participants

Group	Pseudonym	Gender	Approximate Age
Hotel managers	Maria	Female	50's 3
	Roy	Male	50's 4
	Sue	Female	20's
	Mark	Male	40's
	Mike	Male	20's
	Patrick	Male	30's
	Lucy	Female	30's
	Lynn	Female	40's
	Andrew	Male	20's
Hotel family guests ¹	Diana +1	Female	30's
	Phoebe+1	Female	20's
	Sarah+1	Female	30's
	Emily+1	Female	20's
	Sam+1	Female	20's
	Susan+1	Female	40's
	Sian+1	Female	30's
	Jim+1	Male	60's
	Ann+1	Female	20's
	Laura+1	Female	30's

¹ Both family members were interviewed but the interview profile describes a family member who led the conversation.