

Research note

Collecting data from children in hospitality and tourism settings

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ABSTRACT

This research note explores *Minecraft* as a methodological tool for collecting data from children in hospitality and tourism settings. While research involving children remains limited in these fields, *Minecraft* offers a playful, immersive, and participatory environment well suited to capturing their preferences and perceptions. The paper outlines a proposed methodological framework that details how *Minecraft* can be used to facilitate child-led exploration, construction, and interaction within virtual tourism spaces. Although promising, the method presents challenges related mainly to ethics and reliability, epitomised by the opposition covert and overt use of *Minecraft*.

1. Introduction

Academic research on children in tourism and hospitality setting is growing but remains a niche. Indeed, as a heterogeneous group, children are still 'left behind' by both the industry and academic research (Grande and Séraphin, 2025a). Having said that, academics in hospitality and cognate disciplines such as tourism are supporting the fact that children's voice ought to be heard because they are fully fledged members of the society and because they represent the future of the industry (Koščak et al., 2023).

Practitioners are acknowledging the fact they do not know enough about children and therefore do not fully meet their needs, the same way they meet those of adults, particularly when it comes to the development of products and services to be used exclusively by them (Ben Lahouel and Montargot, 2020). This gap of knowledge is essentially due to the fact there is a lack of data identifying the specific needs of children, because of a lack of expertise when it comes to data collection with children (Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2015). As a result, data are collecting from parents (Poris, 2006), and yet, children are the best informant about their own needs (Poria and Timothy, 2014).

The limited empirical research directly collecting data from children has generally lacked innovation, often relying on the same approaches—such as drawings, interviews, and questionnaires (Hixson, 2014; Radic, 2017). Some studies have been more creative: for example, Canosa et al. (2017) employed a participatory film project, while Mandić et al. (2024) used a cognitive neuroscience experiment. The

main limitations of existing research are the frequent use of props and structured tasks, which can influence children's responses (Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2015), as well as the positionality of the researcher, which introduces further bias (Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2015). This research note presents *Minecraft* as a suitable tool for collecting data from children in hospitality settings, as it minimizes the need for props, structured tasks, researcher positionality, or other prerequisites.

This research note is significant from a managerial perspective because it provides practitioners with a tool capable of collecting reliable and unbiased data from children, while involving them both covertly and overtly in a co-creation process. From an academic perspective, its contribution is twofold. First, it advances hospitality research's engagement with equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) from a childism perspective. To date, EDI in hospitality has been examined almost exclusively through an adult lens, focusing on topics such as working conditions, gender, leadership, community engagement, empowerment, accessibility, and disability (Dashper, 2020; Je et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2025; Russen et al., 2026). This research note extends EDI discussions to children as consumers and guests, showing how hospitality organizations, such as hotels, resorts, and attractions, can design services, mini clubs, and experiences that are inclusive and responsive to children's needs (Alrawadieh and Altinay, 2025). Second, it contributes to conceptualizing the types of tools best suited for collecting data from children, providing hospitality practitioners with insights to develop products and services that are both engaging and ethically sound. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research

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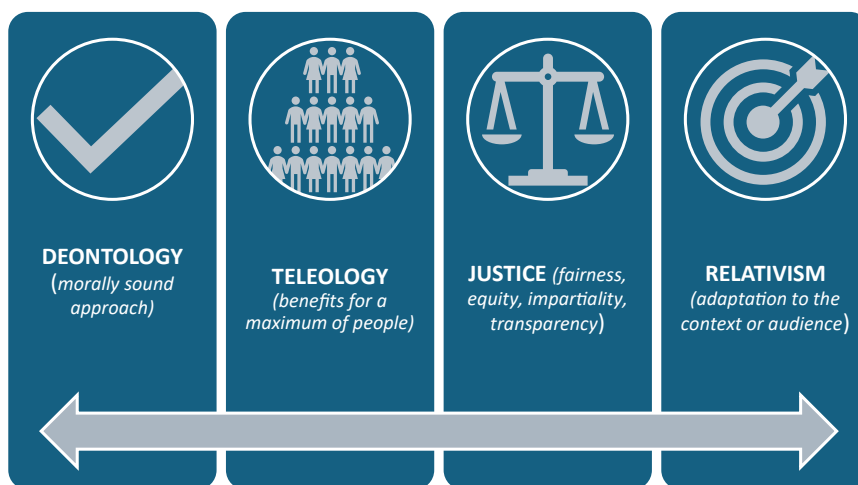


Fig. 1. Research Principles Source: The authors (adapted from Silver et al., 2021).

question: Why is *Minecraft* a suitable tool to collect data from children?

2. Understanding Children's Tourism Preferences through *Minecraft*

In hospitality and cognate disciplines, there is a need to collect specific data using the most appropriate research method. This lack of rigour has caused academic research in the field to limit its capacity of development and innovation, particularly for research regarding some specific groups such as children and youth (Viglia et al., 2024). In this line of thoughts, Demiral, Yilmaz (2025) explain that to leave a suitable heritage to children, the generation currently in charge (adults) must have a good grasp of how children perceive their current and future environment. Subsequently, this study is arguing that for the hospitality and tourism businesses to be able to develop suitable products and services for children, they must have a clear understanding of how children are perceiving these settings. This study is arguing that *Minecraft* has the potential to do so.

Minecraft is a bestselling Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL) tool which provides players freedom with no predetermine goals, to construct 3D structures (Slattery et al., 2025) using the inventory available to them (Bateman and Zagal, 2017). Existing recent research essentially assimilate *Minecraft* to an educational tool for children in learning environments (Di Leo and Traetta, 2025). From research conducted by Séraphin and Vo-Thán (2020) and Grande and Séraphin (2025b), it appears that resort mini-clubs can also be assimilated to learning environments providing education and edutainment (edutainment) activities for children.

Other research highlights the positive impacts of *Minecraft* on learners, including improvements in academic outcomes, spatial thinking, creativity, critical thinking, and performance in subjects such as mathematics, science, and language (Slattery et al., 2025), as well as personality development (Holik et al., 2024) and inventiveness (Nguyen, 2016). In short, *Minecraft* is widely recognized as an empowerment tool for children (Sulaiman et al., 2024). Similarly, resort mini clubs are sometimes described as empowering environments for children (Grande and Séraphin, 2025b; Séraphin and Vo-Thán, 2020). Other studies have examined *Minecraft*'s technical and architectural dimensions (Earle et al., 2024).

Since the hospitality and tourism industries already offer children opportunities to learn through various edutainment activities—such as city scavenger hunts or resort mini clubs (Séraphin and Grande, 2024)—they can be considered learning environments for young visitors (Grande & Séraphin, 2025). In this context, using *Minecraft* appears consistent with these educational aims and represents a potentially

suitable tool for engaging children in exploratory and creative tasks.

3. Proposed methodological framework

This section outlines a methodological framework for using *Minecraft* as a data collection tool with children in tourism and hospitality settings. The approach focuses on leveraging *Minecraft*'s open-ended, creative environment to capture children's mental representations and preferences related to tourism experiences (Bateman and Zagal, 2017).

3.1. Covert methodological approach

Taking the example of resort mini clubs, a product and service specifically dedicated to children in resorts (Grande & Séraphin, 2025), electronic games would be made available for children as it is already the case in some (Séraphin and Grande, 2024). Amongst the games available for children on the devices would be *Minecraft*. The children will decide to play or not with this DGBL. The inventory section will include tools for children to design the interior of the resort mini club as well as the entire resort environment. The sessions played on *Minecraft* will be saved by default and then analysed. Data collection consists primarily of the digital creations themselves, which serve as visual and spatial representations of children's perceptions and preferences. Additionally, researchers can capture screenshots and videos during the session to document the building process and the evolving designs.

Covert method is not often used in academic research; however, it has proven to be particularly effective for the investigation of sensitive topics with participants who do not want to reveal themselves (Lugosi, 2006).

3.2. Overt methodological approach

The first step involves selecting a suitable context for the data collection. This can take place in various environments or directly within hospitality settings that host children, such as family hotels or resorts. The key is to create a setting where children feel comfortable and engaged, allowing natural interactions with the *Minecraft* platform. The facilitator can then introduce a clear, child-friendly theme related to tourism or hospitality, for instance: "Build your ideal hotel,". These open-ended activities invite children to express their ideas without rigid constraints or predefined objectives. The facilitator's role is primarily to observe and assist with technical issues. The sessions can last between 30 min and one hour, depending on the children's age, ability and attention span.

Data collection consists primarily of the digital creations themselves,

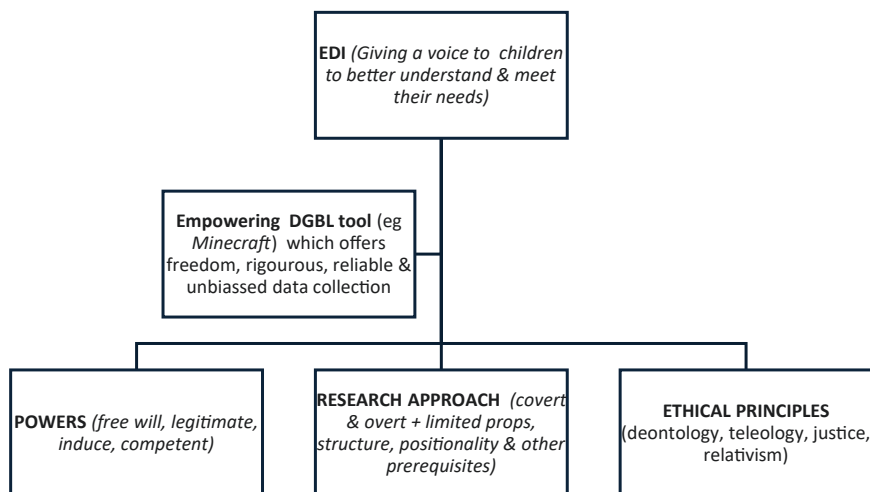


Fig. 2. Three main dimensions of research tools for collecting data from children Source: The authors.

which serve as visual and spatial representations of children's perceptions and preferences. These creations are saved as game files and can be revisited for detailed analysis (Fan et al., 2022). Additionally, researchers can capture screenshots and videos during the session to document the building process and the evolving designs. To enrich the data, facilitators may incorporate brief, informal conversations or post-session interviews where children describe their constructions in their own words. This verbal information complements the visual data and provides insight into children's intentions and meanings behind specific design choices.

Second, by integrating virtual versions of real-world destinations - such as heritage villages, museums, or national parks - within Minecraft, researchers can observe how children navigate and engage with these spaces. Virtual reality (VR) is more and more used in hospitality and tourism settings to have a better understanding of customers (de Lurdes Calisto and Sarkar, 2024). Equally important, this technology provides emerging possibilities for conducting research with children. Museum have been particularly proactive in using VR to engage children as the latter are particularly fascinated with technology, and VR has proven to have impacts on consumption decisions (Fouad and Elsaid, 2021).

As opposed to covert research, in overt research the purpose of the research is disclosed to the target, which can lead the latter to provide convenient answers (Lugosi, 2006).

4. Ethical considerations and challenges

Children participating in research can be considered a vulnerable group, and tourism or hospitality contexts can amplify this vulnerability (Brunt et al., 2017). When collecting data from children, it is essential to ensure that research adheres to the core ethical principles outlined by Silver et al. (2021): deontology, teleology, justice, and relativism (Fig. 1).

From a deontological perspective, researchers must prioritize children's rights, safety, and well-being above organizational or commercial interests (Brunt et al., 2017). Using Minecraft offers a potentially suitable environment, as it is a familiar digital game, provides creative freedom, and functions as an educational and empowerment tool for children (Di Leo and Traetta, 2025; Slattery et al., 2025; Sulaiman et al., 2024).

From a teleological perspective, data collected through Minecraft can help ensure that tourism products and services better align with children's needs, a group historically overlooked in the industry (Grande and Séraphin, 2025a), while supporting organizational goals such as service improvement and engagement (Grande and Séraphin, 2025b).

Regarding justice, Minecraft allows children to participate at

multiple levels, from being listened to and supported in expressing their views to sharing responsibility in decision-making processes, consistent with Shier's (2001) model of participation. It also promotes cooperation between adults and children, contributing to children's meaningful engagement in social contexts (Olsen, 2023).

Finally, relativism requires recognizing context-specific challenges, such as informed consent, data privacy, and potential psychological impact. In practice, consent should be obtained from both children and their caregivers, ensuring they understand participation is voluntary. Anonymity and confidentiality can be managed through secure logins and careful handling of digital data (Silver et al., 2021). Researchers should also monitor children's emotional responses, providing support if frustration or distress occurs during gameplay.

Implementing Minecraft as a data collection tool in hospitality and tourism contexts also involves practical and financial challenges (Pavlatos and Paggios, 2009). Facilitators require training to guide children effectively, manage the software, and observe behaviors without influencing outcomes, which incurs both time and monetary costs. Data collection itself can be time-intensive, as children may need extended sessions to fully express their ideas. Additionally, parents or institutions may resist participation due to concerns about screen time, privacy, or unfamiliarity with digital games (Floyd, 2024). Addressing these challenges requires clear communication, allocation of adequate resources, and stakeholder engagement to ensure ethical and effective implementation.

5. Conclusion

In covert research, Minecraft can be conceptualized as a tool encompassing four main types of power. First, free will power: children are not compelled to do anything, and the decision to play is entirely theirs. Second, legitimate power: children can design the resort or mini club as they wish, with the complexity of their designs varying according to age and proficiency with the game. Third, induced power: children decide whether to play individually or with others, and whether to recommend the game to peers attending the mini club. Fourth, competent power: children provide suggestions to resort managers without necessarily being aware of their contribution to improving products or services. In overt research, Minecraft affords all four types of power but within a more structured environment. The tool aligns well with the four principles of ethical research. In summary, designing a research tool to collect data from children should consider three key dimensions: power, research approach, and ethical principles (Fig. 2).

In terms of limitations, this manuscript presents a theoretical framework for using Minecraft but does not include empirical data or

case studies demonstrating its effectiveness or reliability in real-world hospitality or tourism contexts, nor does it compare Minecraft with other potential tools. This leaves a gap between the theoretical potential of the method and its practical application, which future research should address. While no studies have yet tested Minecraft specifically for collecting data from children, other forms of online gaming and visual online learning materials in tourism settings have been shown to engage children and youth effectively, and to facilitate observation of their preferences and behaviors (Séraphin et al., 2016).

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Séraphin Hugues: Writing – original draft, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Chaney Damien:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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