

# A Content Analysis of Consumer Feedback on 'Teddy Tour Berlin' Within the Concept of Toy Tourism

## Abstract

With changing consumer trends and technological developments, the nature of tourism has evolved. On-line platforms have made it easier for tourists to share their experiences and evaluations of the services they have consumed. Evaluating tourism services is often possible only after consumption, increasing consumer feedback's effectiveness. This study aims to analyze the comments written by individuals on the website of Teddy Tour Berlin, an agency specializing in toy tourism. In the study, 34 comments from 2005 to February 1, 2022, interpreting the comments, have been analyzed using Maxqda qualitative data analysis software. A total of 182 codes were derived from 1016 words, and six main themes were identified, including positive reviews, materials provided, experiences, friendship, and suggestions and advice for the agency. The coding analysis indicates that nearly half of the comments (47.83%) consisted of positive opinions.

**Keywords:** tourism, toy tourism, anthropomorphism, imagination, content analysis

## 1. Introduction

According to Caillois (2001), play is an imaginative pursuit characterized by specific rules, carefully isolated from the rest of life, and often restricted by strict time and place limitations. Brodin (1999) notes that play is frequently associated with toys and is closely intertwined with education, history, geography, sociology, psychology, politics, industry, and tourism (Önder, 2018). For example, toys can have an auxiliary role in games that promote children's social and cognitive development in educational contexts (Blakemore & Centers, 2005). While nursery rhymes and folk songs utilized in plays are essential for philologists, anthropologists study the history of toys. Additionally, play and toys influence beliefs, values, and moral elements (Önder, 2018). In this context, Caillois (2001) argued that paidia and ludus reflect a culture's moral and intellectual values and contribute to its development. Paidia and Ludus represent two contrasting play styles that manifest in various aspects of everyday life. These styles can be conceptualized as existing on a continuum, with paidia describing unstructured, spontaneous activities and ludus representing more clearly defined tasks or games. However, it is often the case that paidias transform into ludus within human relationships. Additionally, cultural differences can be attributed to variations in rule development or restructuring processes.

Smith and Pellegrini (2013) categorized play into six types: locomotor play, social play, parallel play, object play, language play, and pretend play. Caillois (2001) also categorized play into four categories: Agôn (competition), Alea (chance), Mimicry (simulation), and Ilinx (vertigo). Agôn includes competitive games such as sports contests. Alea involves games of chance like roulette and lottery; Mimicry focuses on an imaginary universe, and Ilinx centres on seeking vertigo, like spinning as a whirling dervish. Regardless of the type of play, the pleasure derived from engagement motivates individuals intrinsically. Considering the dimensions

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of involvement and fun, it is believed that there is a correlation between play and tourism. For instance, in adventure tourism, tourists are motivated by high arousal through participating in unstable and unpredictable experiences. The acquisition of pleasurable experiences, ranging from cathartic displacement to refreshing relaxation to high joy, exemplifies the motivation and consequences of many play and tourist behaviours (Barnett & Hallmon, 2015). Therefore, Lett (1983) defined tourism generally as a prestigious, rewarding, and valuable form of play.

Considering the interrelation between play and tourism, it is natural for toys, which are an essential part of play, to travel with the traveller. This indicates how the definition of a tourist has changed due to digitalization, innovation, improved accessibility, social changes, and technological advancements. According to World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), a tourist travels between different geographical locations for any purpose and duration. However, Ivanov (2018) argues that non-human entities such as pets, social robots, or toys should also be included in the definition of a tourist. The trend of toy tourism has emerged, where toys travel alone through various agencies over time. The significance attributed to the toy, its narrative, and its dependence has resulted in toys being treated as individuals. Toy tourism is a growing trend that involves engaging in touristic activities with physical toys such as dolls, action figures, and stuffed animals. This type of tourism relies heavily on creativity, which can enhance the experience by enabling toy customization, movement, and storytelling (Heljakka & Ihamäki, 2021). The participation of non-human travellers, such as toys, in tourism activities highlights that tourism is not limited to human beings but also encompasses other entities. This underscores the importance of considering non-human perspectives and experiences in tourism research and planning.

In the tourism industry, companies seek to gain a competitive advantage and increase revenue by catering to the sophisticated demands of consumers through product diversification. To achieve this, it is essential to introduce non-human travellers, such as robots, pets, and toys, into tourism activities. Product differentiation is known to maximize revenue, increase market share, and meet the sophisticated demands of consumers. Agencies that aim to offer differentiation in the tourism industry often ensure that their toys can travel, be photographed, and shared on social media platforms. This approach targets individuals unable to travel due to physical or psychological reasons. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the emerging trend of toy tourism, which aims to contribute to product diversity in the tourism industry, by analyzing comments posted on the agency websites that provide such services. To achieve this goal, the statements posted on Teddy Tour Berlin's website (Teddy Tour Berlin, 2005), one of the agencies providing toy tourism, were evaluated using content analysis. As comments on the website play a crucial role in information search, travel planning, and purchasing decisions (Litvin et al., 2008; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Mauri & Minazzi, 2013; Xie et al., 2014; Wang, 2015; Vincent, 2018), we believe that analyzing comments from toy tourists (i.e., toy owners) can make a valuable contribution to the field.

## 2. Literature review

Tourism is a crucial economic sector for many developed and developing economies and is the world's third-largest export category after fuels and chemicals. Tourism has experienced continuous expansion and diversification in recent years, making it one of the fastest-growing and largest economic sectors globally (UNWTO, 2021). One of its characteristic features is its dynamic nature, which means that tourism is constantly evolving (Kozak et al., 2015). For example, the development of artificial intelligence and robot technology (Ivanov et al., 2017), the emergence of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), and the growing importance of animal rights (Fennell, 2013) illustrate how the concept of tourism goes beyond individual travellers. The fact that tourists now travel with their pets, social robots, or toys highlights that tourism is insufficiently defined to meet the current requirements. In this context, Ivanov (2018) identified several non-human entities involved in providing or consuming tourism services (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Non-human entities involved in the provide or consumption processes of tourism products**

		Types of non-human entities in tourism	
		<i>Animate</i>	<i>Inanimate</i>
Role in the tourism industry	Service providers	Animals in zoos Animals for safaris, photo safaris, riding, etc. Aquatic animals for health and pedicures	Chatbots Self-service kiosks Robots
	Service consumers	Pets	Robots Toys Pet rocks

Source: Ivanov (2018, p. 3).

It is significant to include non-human travellers, such as robots, pets, and toys, in tourism activities to diversify tourism products, maximize revenues, increase market share, and meet fluctuating demands. When considering toy travel, a toy tourist is defined as an individual who cannot participate in the tourist experience but sends a stuffed toy or mascot that they identify with to the desired tourist destination (Robinson, 2014). According to Heljakka and Rääkkönen (2021), activities falling within the scope of toy tourism can be classified into three categories. Firstly, toys may accompany their owners during tourism activities. Secondly, owners may send their toys to volunteer and non-profit hosts. Lastly, owners may purchase products from agencies that provide professional services in toy tourism. For instance, Unagi Travel, a travel agency based in Tokyo, offers vacation opportunities to toys for people who cannot travel or lack the time or means to do so due to physical or psychological reasons. Pekerşen et al. (2017) conducted interviews with representatives from Unagi Travel to gather information on customer profiles, itineraries, and toy features to obtain a detailed understanding of toy tourism. Based on their findings, the authors determined that most toy owners were elderly or low-income individuals or children with disabilities. Furthermore, the tours typically lasted one day, and the toys had to weigh no more than 250 grams (Pekerşen et al., 2017). During World War I, examples of travelling toys were encountered. Teddy bears, referred to as "soldier bears" or "mascot bears," were carried by British soldiers to the front lines. Toting teddy bears to the front lines was a superstitious belief to bring good fortune. It is known that a soldier named Sir Robert Clark, who had carried his teddy bear named "Falla" with him since he was two years old, kept his teddy bear with him even during his servitude (Dossey, 2016). However, during those days, teddy bears were carried to gain inner strength during the war, not for tourism activities by their owners.

Anthropomorphism, commonly exploited in the marketing industry recently, attributes human beings' features and religious concepts to nonhuman entities such as animals, objects, and natural elements (Stone, 2014). People often anthropomorphize things like cars, objects, animals, plants, and gods. Basic needs, such as getting a sense of the environment, establishing social bonds with others, and a sense of belonging, mediate the development of this tendency. The tendency of people to anthropomorphize all kinds of assets, including consumer products and brands, has oriented the marketing industry to understand and utilize this concept (Başfıncı & Çilingir, 2015). An example of anthropomorphism from the past is that Christian religious people carried their icons wherever they went (Yıldız, 2017). Web pages, social media accounts, and blogs are created for toys to share their travel experiences, and many people follow or subscribe to these accounts. The fact that individuals who, for various reasons, cannot participate in tourist activities choose to send their toys or unique mascots to desired destinations has led to the involvement of these objects in tourism under the name of "toy tourists." From a marketing perspective, it is possible to state that anthropomorphic strategies appeal to consumers, ultimately increasing sales, profits, and brand awareness (Laksmidewi et al., 2017).

The Moomin Cafe in Japan employs anthropomorphic marketing strategies to attract consumers. The concept of "Anti-loneliness restaurants" emerged in Tokyo in 2003 to provide relaxation for guests with busy working schedules and distract those who do not wish to dine alone. At the Moomin Cafe, a mascot named Moomin, the size of a teddy bear, accompanies customers during their meal upon the customer's request. Moomin is a character from Finnish comics created by the artist Tove Jansson, after whom the cafe is named (Pekerşen et al., 2017)

According to Robinson (2014), toy tourism is motivated by factors such as anthropomorphizing toys, taking them to famous places, and showcasing the skills and creativity of photographers. Some adults residing in Japan send their toys on trips to prevent them from feeling lonely, just as the owners do. Furthermore, individuals with disabilities have reported feeling like they received mental health therapy by sending their favourite toys on trips (Dossey, 2016).

In toy tourism, all activities are carried out by the hosts or agency crew on behalf of the toys. Therefore, the imagination and creativity of hosts or crew have a dominant effect on these actions. Experiences in toy tourism, which are presented in documents or digitally, address the affective dimensions of tourism (Heljakka & Rääkkönen, 2021). In research on users who post media about toys on Flickr, a media sharing and storage website, it was found that 72% of users enjoy posting documents and media about their toy travels. Sharing toy travel experiences chronologically through photos or videos, and expressing these experiences through notes provides users with opportunities for virtual sociality. Additionally, sharing toy experiences on social media platforms such as Flickr can transform an individual experience into a collective one (Robinson, 2014).

The tourism industry, which offers consumers an experiential purchase, has been conferred to benefit from the use of story-based marketing methods as opposed to traditional advertising approaches (Mei et al., 2020, p. 96). A compelling story requires three essential elements such as arena, characters, and a plot. The arena represents the context in which the experience or consumption takes place. In the marketing strategy of "storification," the presentation, conflict, and solution are essential components of the story (Mossberg, 2007). In the context of toy tourism, it can be argued that the toy owner assumes the role of the plot's presenter, the destinations that the toys visit represent the arena, and the toys are the characters of the story.

The initial travel agencies that professionally met the demands for toy tourism services were founded in the early 2010s. Although a couple of toy tourism travel agencies based in Barcelona and Prague are no longer operating, while Unagi Travel Agency still operates its toy tourism activities in Japan and guarantees to substantiate the trip with photographs for its customers (Heljakka & Ihamäki, 2021, p. 188). The closure of the toy tourism agencies established in Barcelona and Prague and the continued operation of Unagi in Japan may be attributed to cultural differences among potential customers. Toys with which people interact since infancy are significant tools of cultural transmission. Cultural transmission is an effective element in the shaping and continuity of societies. Expressions of emotions may differ across cultures. For example, Northern European culture is emotionally introverted, and its people tend to express their feelings less. In contrast, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cultures are emotionally extroverted, and their people have a much higher tendency to express their emotions (Cirhinlioğlu et al., 2016).

Along with being an entertaining activity, it is possible to say that the trend of toy tourism also has rehabilitative effects on individuals. For instance, a woman with walking disabilities who was isolated from society reported that upon observing her toy on tours, she was more motivated than before to move her legs, which enabled her to travel short distances. Additionally, another customer stated that witnessing his toy's travels made him happy and encouraged him to engage in activities he would not normally do (Pekerşen et al., 2017).

Teddy Tour Berlin is another toy tourism agency established in Berlin in 2010. Its catchphrase is, "Cuddly toys are selfless creatures born with a boundless instinct to help others. This results in the owner continuously feeling better but the cuddly toy feeling worse! As teddy bears can't defend themselves, they rely on human support. We, the bearologists, have tackled this problem and consider ourselves lobbyists for cuddly toy rights since every cuddly toy has the right to be treated fairly." Although it provides a similar service to Unagi Travel, Teddy Tour Berlin differs from Unagi Travel in terms of organizational structure. While the owner works alone at Unagi Travel, Teddy Tour Berlin has a staff to run its toy tourism activities.

Additionally, Teddy Tour Berlin has been using cause-based marketing methods since 2014 by donating 5 Euros to a charity called Neswärme Deutschland in Trier, Germany, for every reservation they receive. This charity supports families of children with disabilities or chronic diseases. Cause-based marketing, applied by many companies to meet social responsibilities and reflect a positive stance for consumers, also provides diversification from competitors (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012, p. 84).

### 3. Research methodology

In this study, the aim is to assess the feedback provided by customers on the Teddy Tour Berlin Travel Agency's website regarding the tours their toys participated in, as well as their experiences with the travel agency and staff. The analysis is conducted through content analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2016) of the customers' comments, which were translated from German to English before being coded using Maxqda qualitative analysis software. A total of 182 statements were coded based on predetermined themes by the researchers, and the frequency of occurrence of relevant themes in the comments and their relationships with each other were evaluated. A word cloud was also created using the most commonly used words in the comments. The research population consists of 34 comments posted as feedback by toy tourists or their owners who purchased products from Teddy Tour Berlin until February 01, 2022, in German between 2005-2021.

In research conducted using the method of content analysis, the data should go through the phases of description, analysis, and interpretation. Categorizing, examining, coding, and deciphering the essential elements in the text and deducing systematic inferences are the functions of the content analysis method (Bilgin, 2014). According to Guba (1981), reflecting qualitative research's reliability and validity values depends on eliminating concerns related to applicability, consistency, and impartiality. Qualitative studies do not provide a particular result as to whether the collected data supports the researched theory or not, unlike quantitative studies. Concerning the validity and reliability of the data and codes in qualitative research, validity and reliability analysis is performed by comparing the observations of other researchers on the same data or case (Karaman, 2018, p. 651). On the other hand, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), definitions become more consistent when two researchers code the same data set differently. The intercoder reliability ratio may be calculated by dividing the number of agreed ultimate codes by the sum of agreed and disagreed codes made by the particular researchers. In the first stage, the intercoder agreement rate is not expected to exceed 70%. However, after the reconciliation process among the intercoders, it is recommended that this reliability ratio should be approximately 80%, or even more than 90%, depending on the size of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In this study, the data obtained was independently coded by two observers. Any discrepancies between the codes were resolved through a consensus method. After reaching a consensus, the total number of codes used in the study was divided by the sum of the codes created by both observers, and the resulting reliability ratio was calculated. Table 2 presents numerical data on the number of codes generated by each observer, equivalent codes, the number of codes with discrepancies, and the reliability ratio.



The primary sub-code paradigm was utilized in coding the data within the scope of the research. Main codes were used to describe the main themes, while sub-codes were used to depict the sub-themes that emerged from the main themes. Six main themes were identified in this study, and Table 3 presents the frequency and percentage of these themes in the comments. The analysis of Table 3 reveals that most of the comments were related to positive reviews, delivered materials, and experiences.

**Table 3**  
Code frequency

Code	Frequency	Percentage %
Positive reviews	87	47.83
Materials delivered	40	21.97
Experiences	25	13.73
Friendship	13	7.14
Wishes	9	4.94
Advices to agency	8	4.39
Total codes	182	100
Total documents have been coded	34	

While frequency values based on themes can be helpful in general interpretation, they provide limited information about the subject. However, a more detailed understanding can be obtained through the code subcode model, which displays the sub-themes created about the main theme.

**Figure 2**  
Sub-code model related to positive reviews

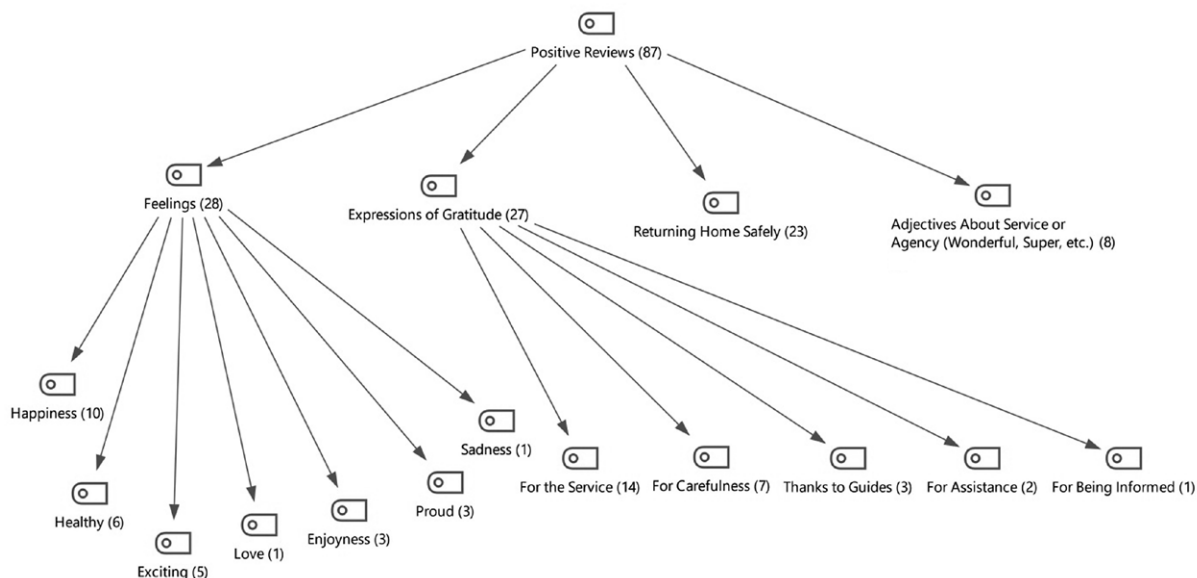


Figure 2 presents the code sub-code model for the central theme of positive reviews. It has been determined that shared positive reviews are associated with feelings, expressions of gratitude, returning home safely, and adjectives describing the service. The themes of emotions and expressions of appreciation were categorized under the happiness secondary sub-code, which was the most frequently coded. Expressions of gratitude predominantly featured service-related comments. The sub-code "returning home safely" was established based on comments made by owners about their experience of safely returning home. The sub-code "adjectives about service" was created to group the adjectives used by customers to describe the service they received. Defining the service using their own unique and positive adjectives may serve as an indicator of their satisfaction with the purchased service.

**Figure 3**  
*Sub-code model related to materials delivered*

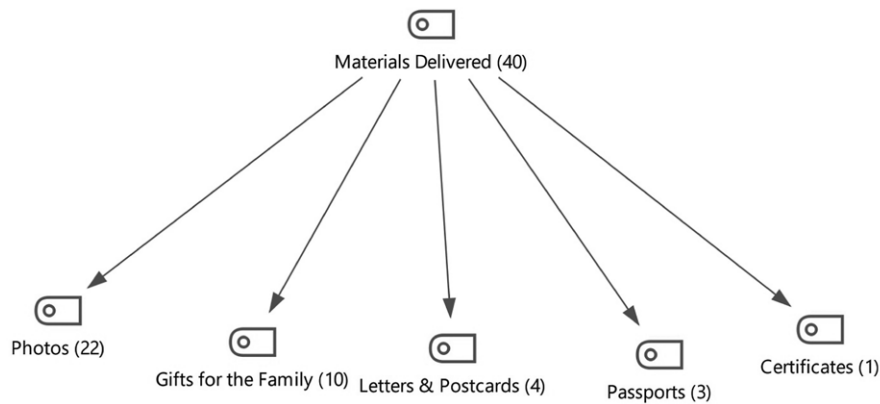
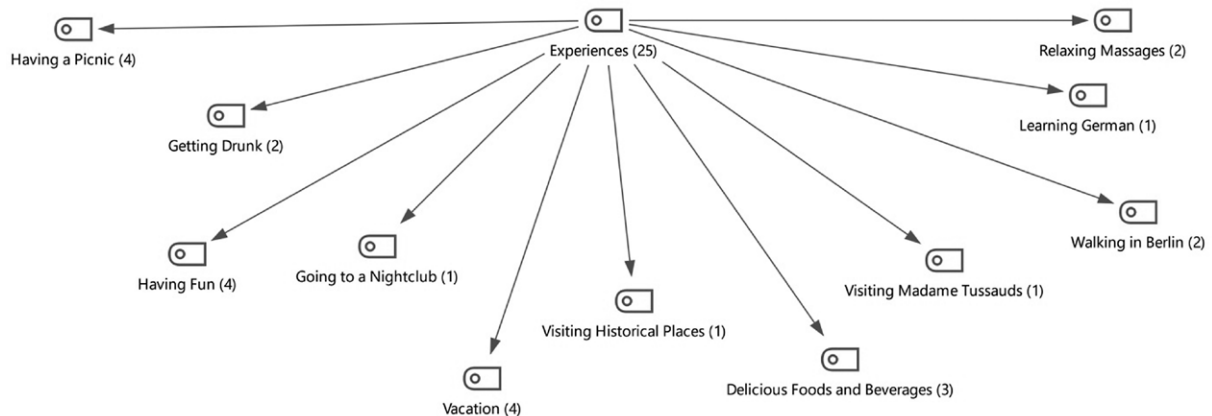


Figure 3 depicts the sub-code model for "materials delivered," which encompasses the words and comments related to the materials sent to the owners of the toy tourists. According to the comments, these materials included photos of the toy tourists during their travels, family gifts, letters and postcards, passports, and certificates. The photos showcased the toy tourists' experiences and demonstrated to customers what they received for their payment. The comments about the small gifts sent to the toy owners by the agency with the toy tourists were analyzed within the sub-code called "gifts for the families." A study on toy tourism found that toy owners who send their toys on trips are more interested in photographs of their toys besides the gifts (Heljakka and Ihamäki, 2021).

**Figure 4**  
*Sub-code model related to experiences*



The primary code, referred to as "Experiences," involves the unique experiences of toy tourists. This code includes inferences about toy tourists with experiences such as learning German or having a relaxation massage. The primary and sub-code model reveals that the owners of the toy tourists and the agencies providing toy tourism services tend to attribute anthropomorphic features to the toys. This tendency is associated with imagination and highlights a positive example of creativity in the tourism industry. In toy tourism, a link between reality and imagination is established through the toy owner or mediator. Thus, owners of the toys have gained indirect experiences by imagining the experiences of the toys or establishing a virtual bond with them (Robinson, 2014).



**Figure 5**  
Main code related to friendship



Friendship (13)

In Figure 5, a prominent theme involving comments on the socialization of toy tourists is presented. Through this encoding, it is not possible to infer anything beyond the existence of anthropomorphic behaviours. The examination of toy owners' levels of imagination is a subject that other disciplines should explore. Therefore, no sub-code has been developed for the main code, "Friendship." However, it is noteworthy that in toy tourism, toy owners often view their toys as friends, treating them as if they were individuals. For instance, in a study on toy tourism, one participant described their toy as an imaginary friend (Heljakka & Ihamäki, 2021).

**Figure 6**  
Sub-code model related to wishes

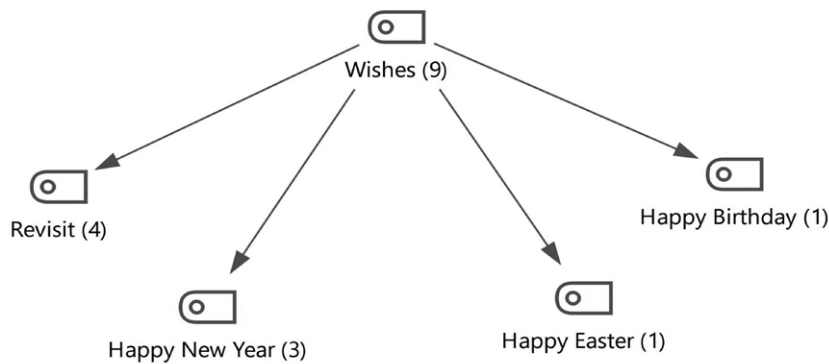


Figure 6 presents the code-subcode scheme used to classify comments expressing regard by both toy tourists and their owners regarding the tour guides and agency.

**Figure 7**  
Sub-code model related to advice to the agency

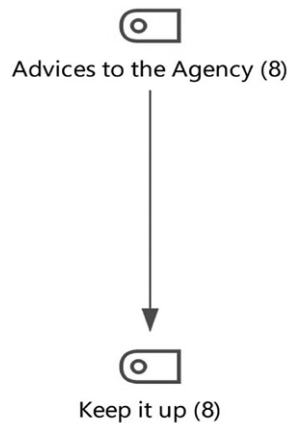


Figure 7 presents the sub-code model depicting the central theme of advice given to the agency. It has been observed that all comments containing advice are associated with the sub-code referred to as 'Keep it up'.

## 5. Conclusion

In recent years, the tourism sector has undergone constant change and development due to the development of technology, the presence of more demanding consumers, and the dynamic nature of tourism. One of these changes is that robots, toys, and pets are now involved in tourism activities as travellers, in addition to individuals. In this study, posted comments and feedback by toy tourism consumers on the Teddy Tour Berlin travel agency website were evaluated using content analysis. The Maxqda qualitative data analysis package program was used to interpret 34 comments on the Teddy Tour Berlin travel agency website. A total of 182 codes were identified from 1016 words, and six principal codes were determined as "positive reviews", "materials delivered", "experiences", "friendship", "wishes", and "advice to the agency". As a result of the coding, it was found that almost half of the comments on the website (47.83%) consisted of positive opinions. When the agency sent the toy tourists back to their homes, they also provided some materials, such as photographs, certificates, and gifts for the family. These materials serve as proof of the toy tourists' experiences and are more than just modest gifts for their families. The theme of experiences indicates that some activities were performed by the toys as if they were individuals, such as learning German and having a picnic. One of the interesting findings of the study was that toy owners and agency officers attributed anthropomorphic features to toy tourists. In the Friendship theme, comments indicated that toy tourists miss each other and interact, suggesting that toy tourism activities are anthropomorphic games played among toy owners and agency crew. The Wishes theme included comments from toy owners about the agency crew and guides. The fact that the toy owners wrote congratulatory messages for special days in the comments and expressed their intention to visit again indicates their satisfaction with the service and the bond they have established with the agency staff. The "Advices to agency" theme collected suggestions for the agency, and the only suggestion was to "keep it up," which is another indicator of high customer satisfaction. Overall, this study provides insights into the growing phenomenon of toy tourism and highlights the importance of customer satisfaction in this emerging sector.

When examining the current state of toy tourism activities in Turkey, it becomes apparent that no organization presents products in this field. While the idea of toys being marketed to consumers may seem unconventional, it presents an opportunity for tourism businesses seeking to enhance creativity and diversify their offerings. By providing environments for storytelling or photography featuring toys in accommodation establishments, sharing such content via social media, and developing products specifically for toy tourists (Heljakka & Rääkkönen, 2021), significant contributions can be made to customer satisfaction and the overall tourism experience.

Product demand for toy tourism may differ from country to country. While toy tourism has garnered attention in Japan, it has not attracted people in the Czech Republic, and the agency established to provide toy tourism services there has since closed. When evaluating each country within its own cultural, social, and economic context, it is natural that there may be different approaches to toy tourism. For instance, an Instagram phenomenon named Ülker Üner photographed and shared the Taboo game toy named Süreyya wherever she travelled (Kukla Sureyya, 2021). Although the toy tourist "Puppet Süreyya" was started by an Instagram phenomenon, it could not create a "toy tourist" or "toy tourism" trend in Turkish culture.

This research's most important theoretical contribution is the idea that a toy or an inanimate object can also receive services as a consumer in tourism activities. Due to its unique structure, toy tourism has expanded the traditional definition of tourism and has demonstrated that the tourism concept has been enlarged with the development of this trend. In practical terms, toy tourism is a tourism branch that can ensure product diversification in the tourism industry. However, the limitations of this study include the lack of other websites that have published toy tourist feedback. In the future, it is expected that the existence of websites where different toy tourism agencies publish customer feedback and conduct studies to examine the behaviour of toy owners will contribute to the literature.

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