

# Characteristics and contents of Korean kids theme park; Analysis of four representative cases

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## Abstract

Today, the focus on the children in the family is increasing due to the nuclear family, the advancement of women to society, and the decline in the birth rate, where parents seek to provide various experiences and educational environments to improve the quality of life for their children. As a result, an edutainment-style kids theme park that creates educational effects through play and experiences by children is becoming popular. This study aims to present a differentiated developmental direction that can preempt the long-term competitive advantage of kids theme park companies through case analysis of four major Korean kids theme parks.

**Keywords:** *Kids Theme Park, Edutainment-style Kids Theme Park, Kids Theme Park Strategy, Korean Theme park*

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, the importance and focus on children in the family is on the sharp rise due to the nuclear family, the advancement of women to society, and the decline in the birth rate. Parents wish to provide a variety of experiences and educational environments to improve the quality of life of their children (CIA, 2017; Statistics Korea, 2019; Hwang, 2020), and as a result, interest in kids theme parks for children is rapidly increasing (Kim, 2013; Kocca, 2019). In addition, the theme parks are moving toward edutainment, an approach of combining education and entertainment (Rheingold, 1992).

Compared to the decline in the number of visitors to large theme parks in recent years, the number of visitors to Kids Theme Parks is steadily increasing, where companies are making great efforts to provide a variety of

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content that meets their level of interest by identifying users' desires, preferences, and satisfaction.

This study intends to analysis of four major domestic kids theme parks, including Kidzania, Pororo Park, Hero Kids Park and Hero Play Park (Hero Group), and Mini Special Forces\* Theme Park (Icon Media Lab and Cube Studio), thereby providing a differentiated developmental development and direction that can preempt a competitive advantage, while giving insights for enhanced development and directions.

## **2. South Korea's Kids Theme Park and Content Factors**

### **2.1 Kids theme park and case studies**

Theme park is a compound word of theme and park derived from an amusement garden in France in the 17th century, and refers to a park with a theme. The 17th century amusement garden was a place that provided small-scale attractions such as games, music, and performances, where nowadays, the theme of experience, creativity, leisure, and adventure is integrated into a complex experience space that can be enjoyed for riding, performance and viewings (Son, 2020; Park, Kim, 2018).

Kids Theme Park is a theme park aimed at infants and children, and differentiates it from existing theme parks by recognizing kids' play and experiential features as an expanded concept and grafting them into space (Kim, 2013; Hwang, 2020). In recent years, parents with infants and children made direct participation, experience, learning and education, rather than utilizing the place only for the purpose of enjoyment and providing fun for children or seeking passive interactions through Kids Theme Park. They rather expect a space that can induce direct participation and experience, learning and education, that induces continuous interest and satisfaction of children and parents.

To meet these expectations, Korea's kids theme park is developing a variety of contents that reflect the characteristics of kids' theme parks such as education, learning, sociality, experienceability, playability, interactivity, and lesson (Kim, 2013). In this study, based on the data survey, the current status and characteristics of kids' theme parks in Korea were examined, and the contents are shown in [Table 1] below.

Table 1 Current Major Kids Theme Park in South Korea

Name (open year)	Explanation
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Name (open year)	Explanation
Kizania (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For children and adolescents (ages 3 to 16), A job experience theme park.</li> <li>• The entire park is made up of facilities where you can experience work by directing it like a city.</li> <li>• Issuance of Kijo (currency; economic activity),</li> <li>• Restriction of parental participation (improvement of self-reliant and independence)</li> </ul>
Bucheon Ball Bear Friends Sports Park (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first sports theme park in Korea for young, infants, children and parents.</li> <li>• Various sports (screen) experience using AR, indoor sports kids theme park (sports course, challenge course, digital course, infant course, ball bear park paid zone)</li> <li>• Providing family space with parents (water park, spa zone)</li> </ul>
PORORO Park (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A kids theme park with the theme of domestic characters, for children and young couples.</li> <li>• State-of-the-art interactive theme park such as 3D/4D.</li> <li>• The entire park is reproduced in the same space as the animation space, and the program is composed mainly of Pororo performances, and Pororo creates a sense of unity and bond between children and the theme park by giving visual stimulation of fantasy.</li> <li>• Located in shopping malls or department stores in large multi-purpose complexes, shopping and children's play are solved together.</li> </ul>
Ulsan Grand Park EBS Kids Theme Park (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For children (ages 4-13), youth (ages 14-19), adults, Korea's first creative education kids theme park to enjoy with EBS's representative characters.</li> <li>• Interesting and diverse contents and theme spaces for children by age group, family participation playground that enhances intimacy with parents, and creative experience contents.</li> <li>• A theme space that considers the physical and psychological characteristics of children through the directing of the cognitive development environment and the sensational space that you can learn by yourself</li> </ul>
Icheon Playz Park (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For children (12-18 months), minors, parents, A kids theme park that satisfies various five senses.</li> <li>• Separation of space by age (secure stability).</li> <li>• Provide sports play zone, adventure/training action hero, and IT play zone</li> <li>• Space sketch (providing coloring tools, seeing a hand-drawn picture on a real wall (beam project)), Imagine Sandbox (virtual experience using sand, tactile play)</li> <li>• Plays Park teacher resident, parental healing space (Nest Cafe).</li> </ul>
Hero Kids Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For infants, children and parents, The first experience-based family theme park in Korea.</li> </ul>

Name (open year)	Explanation
(Hero Group, 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is composed of brands such as Hero Kids Park, Hero Sports Park, Hero Play Park, Hero Premium Kids Cafe, Little Hero Kids Cafe, and Hero of LilyPot.</li> <li>• Hero Play Park character utilization, various play and educational experiences.</li> <li>• Hero Kids Park and Hero Play Park provide a space where you can get various experiences and knowledge and play safely by combining the concept of an indoor large-scale playground, a new play culture space, and play and educational elements.</li> </ul>
Mini Special Forces Theme Park (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For infants, children and parents, An experiential four-season theme park based on storytelling that combines a play space and VR (virtual reality) technology.</li> <li>• Realize the space and characters in the animation, challenge the adventure while performing missions with the characters in the cartoon, become a commando and experience 3 training experiences and issue a commando card</li> <li>• Equipped with a variety of experience play zones, family lounges, and toddler zones.</li> </ul>
Paju Azidong Theme Park (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kids theme park that continuously provides content as a shelter for mothers and character education for infants and young children under 7 years old</li> <li>• Aji-dong is a character with a fun and touching story created by 5 dogs with strong personality and 3 cats (genetic variation of a cat).</li> <li>• Aji-dong Barun Life Song, which was produced with the theme of the right life education for children, is currently produced in 7 series, aired on talent broadcasting and SK Broadband, and offline product licensing.</li> <li>• Museum(Miniature, Korea story), Kids&amp;Book cafe, AZIDONG experience(DIY, ART, Music, Cooking, Play(Stopmotion animation))</li> </ul>
BUSAN Haeundae Paradise Hotel Kids&Family VR Theme Park (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For children, adults, Virtual reality (VR) + augmented reality (AR) experience theme park.</li> <li>• VR+AR experience and empathy, the core science technology of the future, Creating an environment that is familiar with science and technology, and providing a place of experience for science that dreams of the future.</li> <li>• Eating out and kids culture coexist.</li> </ul>

## 2.2 Kids theme park content factors

Previous research has been carried out on what success factors of a theme park influence the content of the park. According to the literature, the success factors include offering a wide range of attractions (Kagelmann, 2004), uniqueness (Swarbrooke, 1995), theming, infrastructure, involvement (Milman, 2001), branding, and imagination. These could all be categorized

into the following two factors: experiences and authenticity (Birgit et al, 2007).

While experiences could be distinguished from one another based on theming, infrastructure and branding, all experiences pursue the same goal of inspiring the psychological insights of consumers. Therefore, experiences are designed to satisfy consumers' needs for emotional experiences such as fun, adventure or excitement. Authenticity is the concept of being something not forged or simulated (Golomb, 1995). The major theme parks in western countries have developed their own characters and merchandised them through movies and toys. But today it appears that the quality of authenticity does not necessarily equate to being exotic or unfamiliar to the western audiences; rather authenticity relates to the originality and potential of their products and services. Considering these two content factors, this paper will discuss the conceptual characteristics of five kids theme parks.

### **3. Case analysis of Korea's kids theme park**

#### **3.1 Kidzania Theme Park**

Kidzania is a compound word of 'Kid+Z+Ania', meaning "children's joyful country", and is a "children's job experience theme park". (Seo, 2017; kidzania, 2020). The four kids' theme parks subject to case analysis (Kidzania, PORORO Park, HERO KIDS PARK and HERO PLAY PARK, Mini Special Forces\*Theme Park) are selected based on the judgment that it provides various contents that reflect the characteristics of the kids' theme park. The research analysis frame was composed of ① Subject and Target ② establishment year and location, ③ characteristics, and ④ contents of each kids theme park. In particular, it focused on the characteristics and contents of each kids theme park. (Table 2)

KidZania does not limit its role for play and fun, but seek to improve personal qualities and teach economic concepts through job experience and kizo (money). The park also promotes a particular educational format based upon communication by providing children with the feeling of achievement created from earning their own money and then spending it (Magalhaes, 2018). In particular, it is possible to improve self-reliance and independence of children unaccompanied by their parents. The location is adjacent to shopping malls and department stores, and the effect of mutual customer growth and positive product sales are expected.

Table 2 Case Study of Kidzania Theme Park

Item	Explanation
Subject/Target	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job Experience/ 3 to 16 years old</li> </ul>
Establishment and Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2010/ Seoul</li> </ul>
Feature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A city recreated by reducing the real world as it is.</li> <li>• Choose and experience the job you want from over 90 different jobs, After working, experience the economic activity of earning and spending money by receiving kizo (kidzania currency) as a salary.</li> </ul>
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry : Ice cream shop, donut shop, bakery, chocolate factory, beverage factory, department store, mart, biscuit factory, pizza restaurant, hamburger cafeteria, etc.</li> <li>• Media : TV studio, radio studio, newspaper, shopping company, etc.</li> <li>• Transportation : City tour bus, car repair shop, driver's license test center, etc.</li> <li>• Culture/Sports : Theater, soccer stadium, sports club, etc.</li> <li>• Service : Hospital, fire station, police station, court, bank, delivery company, bookstore, E-kidzo card center, beauty salon, etc.</li> <li>• Education : University, kindergarten, flight attendant education center, career counseling center, etc.</li> </ul>

### 3.2 Pororo Park

Pororo Park is a kids theme park with the theme of Korean characters. Pororo Park's Pororo gives a strong motivation for children to feel familiarity and interest in the kids theme park and enter the space provided by the theme park. The interior design using popular anime characters and animation settings stimulates the curiosity of infants and toddlers. (Kim, 2015; Pororo Park, 2020) (Table 3)

Pororo Park provides play and fun through interactive content and services that combine new technologies such as VR and AR with a play space. In particular, Pororo characters effectively deliver familiarity, joy and emotion to users, thus resulting in multiple return visitations. The authenticity of the character, Pororo, is a major factor which park visitors are attracted to expect to see and interact because the interactions with Pororo do not feel simulated or forged. Also, the location is located adjacent to the residential and commercial complexes, shopping malls, etc., promoting a win-win relationship with the shopping mall.

Table 3 Case Study of Pororo Park

Item	Explanation
Subject/Target	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pororo Kids Park/ Toddlers and Infants</li> </ul>
Establishment and Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2011/ Seoul</li> </ul>
Feature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mixed-Use Residential complexes and shopping malls,</li> <li>• Couple customers with small children solve shopping and children's play together,</li> <li>• Promote mutual win-win relationship between shopping mall and children's kids theme park.</li> </ul>
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tongtongi little Theater : Character performances and various performances, 3D animation, photo time</li> <li>• Pororo's House : Reproduce the animation's Pororo House</li> <li>• Character Room : Harry's Karaoke Room, Eddie's House, Loopy's Playroom, Block Playroom</li> <li>• Porong Porong Little Train</li> </ul>

### 3.3 Hero Kids Park and Hero Play Park of CM HERO Group

HERO Group is Korea's first experience-based family theme park leading company. It is in the spotlight by children and parents as a theme park where children and parents can safely play with various experiences and knowledge by combining educational elements as well as play. (Cho, 2020; CM Hero Group, 2020) (Table 4)

Hero Kids Park and Hero Play Park provide various experiences and knowledge to visitors in different age groups through experiences and educational elements as well as play and fun. In particular, it delivers 'the value of a hero' in everyday life by influencing consumers' motivation and providing them emotional experiences such as fun, adventure or excitement. In addition, it provides content and services that enable continuous communication and exchange between children and parents, as well as differentiated content and services by age group.

Table 4 Case Study of HERO Group

Item	Explanation
Subject/Target	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hero Play Park's characters(Courage, Confidence, Challenge Spirit, Dreams, Wisdom),</li> <li>• Experience of various play and education/ Infants and Children, Parents</li> </ul>
Establishment and Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2016/ Seoul</li> </ul>
Feature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the concept of “indoor large-scale playground”, a new play culture space where play and educational elements can be combined to gain diverse experiences and knowledge and play safely.</li> <li>• Differentiated interiors, facilities, and themes of each branch are designed to differentiate it from existing franchises.</li> <li>• The characters in Hero Play Park represent five “values”: courage, confidence, challenge spirit, dreams, and wisdom. The “values” symbolized by the characters are interpreted and translated into various contents in the park to convey the “value of heroes” in everyday life.</li> </ul>
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hero Kids Park : Children's indoor playground</li> <li>• Hero Play Park : Large children's indoor theme park where children and families can enjoy together, various play and educational experience spaces</li> <li>• Hero Sports Park : An indoor sports theme park for the whole family, from elementary school to middle school, high school, college students, and parents</li> <li>• Hero Premium Café : Indoor kids cafe for children</li> <li>• THEME Amusement Facilities : Sports theme, digital theme (motion technology applied), attractions theme, kids theme, experience theme, party room</li> </ul>

### 3.4 Mini Special Forces Theme Park

ICON Media Lab and Cube Studio's 'Mini Special Forces\*Theme Park' is not a simple play space, and by grafting VR (virtual reality) technology, the space and characters in the animation are realized in real life, and in that space, perform missions with the characters in the cartoon It is a theme park based on storytelling where you can adventure while playing. (Moon, 2017; ICONMEDIALAB, 2020)

Mini Commando\*Theme Park combines characters and VR (virtual reality) technology to provide a space for challenges and experiences, missions, and training, thereby enhancing the sense of adventure and cooperation of users and enhancing their physical strength. In particular, a sense of responsibility and independence can be improved by issuing a commando card. As for the location, positive product sales effects can be expected due to its high



accessibility adjacent to industrial, residential, and complex cultural facilities in clustered areas.(Table 5)

Table 5 Case Study of Mini Special Forces\*Theme Park

Item	Explanation
Subject/Target	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini Special Forces, Exploring the world in animation/ Infants and Children, Parents</li> </ul>
Establishment and Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2017/ Gyeonggi-do</li> </ul>
Feature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing the spirit of adventure and cooperation,</li> <li>• A new concept experience-based theme park that embodies mini commando characters and a mysterious spaceship space.</li> <li>• Great accessibility and maximization of space efficiency as it is located in a concentrated area of industrial, residential and complex cultural facilities.</li> <li>• Entrance system linked with mobile app.</li> <li>• At the same time as entrance, you can take a QR code for each experience space installed in the kids cafe and perform missions, accumulate mileage and record the experience (photo).</li> </ul>
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing a play and training zone where you can experience a commando directly, issuing a commando card,</li> <li>• Equipped with a variety of experience facilities such as mini-game field, large trampoline, ball pool, shooting, sports games, etc. to help improve physical strength and develop the five senses</li> <li>• Infant and toddler spaces such as toy playgrounds and family rest spaces such as family cafes and party zones.</li> </ul>

The contents of case analysis of the four representative Korean kids' theme parks above are summarized as follows.

- ① In addition to playing and having fun, pursuing and delivering new values and elements such as experience, adventure, challenge, mission, training, education, etc.
- ② Providing various contents targeting customers by age group.
- ③ Provide continuous communication and exchange with parents
- ④ Provide an experience that raises self-reliance and independence by issuing kijo (money, economic activities) and commando card
- ⑤ Provides interactive content based on storytelling that combines play space and new technologies such as VR, AR, and AI
- ⑥ Continuous communication (exchange) is possible through linkage with various media platforms such as Online, Offline, and Mobile.
- ⑦ Activation of contents (character, Ajidongsong, etc.) applying the concept of OSMU and creation of economic added value.

⑧ The effect of increasing mutual customers through connection with cultural centers, nearby marts, shopping malls, department stores, hotels, etc.

⑨ Four seasons, 24 hours operation due to securing outdoor and indoor spaces.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study attempts to present differentiated development strategies and directions of kid's theme parks through an empirical case analysis of four such parks. As a result of the study, the following strategies were suggested. First, characters create great added value through visual image effects, conveying intimacy, and commercialization.

In particular, it can be expanded to content in various mediums such as publishing, broadcasting, video, albums, animation, mobile apps, games, theme parks, etc., and encouraging multiple visitations by delivering familiarity, joy, and emotion to users. Therefore, the use of differentiated characters in the kids' theme park not only has a positive effect on customer satisfaction, but also makes it possible to generate profits in business aspects. Second, since the actual users (young, infants, children, etc.) and buyers (parents) of kid's content are different, it is necessary to develop content and services that can satisfy both.

Parents, in particular, expect to improve their quality of life by providing their children with diverse experiences and educational environments, while desiring smooth communication and intimate sharing. By providing programs and services for communication between children and parents, it is possible to induce continued interest and satisfaction of children and parents.

In addition, since the needs of users are diversified and the market has become more segmented in recent years, more positive effects can be expected by developing and providing differentiated content and services for each age group. Third, it is required to build and maintain a cutting-edge interactive environment based on technologies such as 3D/4D, motion sensor, RFID, VR, AR, and AI.

Establishing a variety of educational experience facilities and an interactive environment that reinforces the expertise and realism of the field can provide content that enables more active communication to the participants than previously provided services. Kids' theme parks can be found in locations adjacent to cultural centers, nearby marts, shopping malls, department stores, etc., and can have the beneficial effects of increasing mutual customers through links with them, and induce positive effects in terms of product sales.

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