UNDERSTANDING HOW SOCIO-CULTURAL NORMS SHAPE CONSUMER BEHAVIORS:
THE CASE FOR ECOLOGICAL MODERNIZATION OF BIRTHDAY PARTIES

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“Seventy-two percent of global greenhouse gas emissions come from household or “lifestyle” consumption, including mobility, diet, and housing, as opposed to government or capital and infrastructure investment.”

- Hertwich and Peters 2009

Consumerism plays a huge role in climate change; thus it is of utmost importance to recognize that every decision we make contributes either positively or negatively to the overall well-being of our planet. Taking accountability for our individual behaviors is a necessary step for making a positive societal transition to a resource-constrained future.

This thesis project examined the significance of socio-cultural influences behind children’s birthday celebrations, with the goal of understanding prospects for system interventions, specifically those needed to move consumers beyond a disposable mentality towards a greener sustainable lifestyle. Children’s birthday parties presented themselves as one of the most accessible places for sustainable interventions, acting as a place to make a positive impact on social and cultural fronts. These parties provide access to the heart of most families due to the family being the basic social unit of society, which is also where cultural changes are easily adapted by groups.

In order to determine the key stakeholders and to create a framework for sustainable interventions a base of parents with varied socio-cultural backgrounds was surveyed. A competitive study of family entertainment centers was conducted in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and other popular venues for birthday celebrations to understand which offered the most preferable products and services. Finally, a series of Systems Thinking tools were applied to those findings to generate theoretical and practical design solutions.

Through these processes, the author identified a near-term design solution that meets consumers wherever they are on their sustainability journey, using the power of emotional appeal and social incentives for motivating behavioral changes. A business concept for sustainably minded mobile app called thepartyrescue.com was developed with the intent to seamlessly connect and interact with customers through knowledge sharing, community building, and showcasing of sustainable products and practices.

The adoption of sustainable behaviors is integral for solving the challenge of climate change, especially when scaled up through collective action.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVERVIEW</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROBLEM STATEMENT</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGE</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today’s Facts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THESIS STATEMENT</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPPORT FOR THE IDEA</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomorrow’s Trends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance and impact of socializing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The power of social media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRATEGIC APPROACH</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Framework for Change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROJECT SCOPE</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Scope</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of Scope</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROFESSIONAL GOALS</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROJECT EXECUTION</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBJECTIVES</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roadmap for Discovery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROPOSED PROCESSES</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTUAL PROCESSES</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBSERVATIONS</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insights and Consumer Motivators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYSTEMS THINKING MAP</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE NATURAL STEP FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUNNEL VISION AND BACKSTACKING</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VALUE PROPOSITION CANVAS</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging Themes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIGN THINKING</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROJECT OUTCOME</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Findings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry point for sustainable intervention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target consumer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tool of trade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospects</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive Research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEXT STEPS</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The three phases of project outcome</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEAR-TERM DESIGN SOLUTION</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUDING THOUGHTS</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF FIGURES</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APENDIX 1</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APENDIX 2</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APENDIX 3</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APENDIX 4</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Our house is on fire. I am here to say, our house is on fire. [...] Adults keep saying: “We owe it to the young people to give them hope.” But I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is.”

INTRODUCTION

“Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The concept of sustainable development does imply limits - not absolute limits but limitations imposed by the present state of technology and social organization on environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities.”

- Brundtland, Gro Harlem.


OVERVIEW

Brundtland’s concept of sustainability seems simple, the needs of the present must not compromise the ability to meet the needs of the future. However, the idea of sustainability is immensely personal and subjective, meaning different things to different people around the world.

According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, psychological health is predicated on fulfillment of five categories of needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. While research shows support for some of Maslow’s basic needs, it was discovered in 2011 that the order of needs that people go through seemed to be more of a rough guide. “Meeting all the previous needs in the hierarchy wasn’t a prerequisite for people to meet their love and belonging needs.”

Amitai Etzioni, sociologist best known for his work on socioeconomics and communitarianism, stated that “the Western society has come close to the top of Maslow’s pyramid - our basic needs for food and shelter are met, and we’re searching for fulfillment in other ways.” The issue lies in the fulfillment methods, searching for happiness through shopping, acquiring, and owning. The consumerist culture manifests itself in social interactions and is particularly evident in consumption-driven extravagant children’s birthday parties that contribute to social, cultural and environmental degradation.

Perspectives offered in this thesis project include current and novel viewpoints on problems stemming from children’s birthday parties, as well as fundamental concepts, which propose and support a new hypothesis for sustainability.
INTRODUCTION

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Consumption-driven children’s birthday celebrations are culturally accepted ways of showing affection and love; however, excessive spending and waste generation promotes unhealthy habits and unsustainable relationships with people and the environment these children will inherit.

SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGE

Today’s Facts

According to a survey by BabyCenter.com more than 26-percent of parents said they spent more than $500 for their little one’s first birthday, with about $400 on the event, prior to presents. Many of these birthday accoutrements are non-recyclable and single use. With the third-largest population of all countries, the U.S. produced the most municipal solid waste in the world. In 2017, 258 million of waste generated. By contrast, second-place China generated 210 million tons of municipal solid waste in 2017.

In addition to being wasteful, the birthday industry is also immensely profitable. According to a report published by Allied Market Research, the Family Entertainment Center (EFC) market, was valued at around 19 billion dollars in 2017, with the market projected to reach over 40 billion dollars by 2025. The compound annual growth rate is estimated to be 10.2-percent from 2018 to 2025. This is double digit growth trend sustained over the last 15 years, even during the periods of major economical swings.

While birthday celebrations comprise a clearly booming business market, it is also important to recognize the influence birthday celebrations have on growth of other industries. Confections and beverage industries, single use plastics, and toys, are a few of the related industries that see higher revenue in relation to the parties. Additionally, there is a growing trend of pet owners throwing their furry children celebrations that rival the most elaborate kids’ birthday parties. The so-called “paw-ties” have all the makings of Instagram-worthy affairs complete with decorations and goodie bags and treats for two legged and four legged guests.
INTRODUCTION

THESIS STATEMENT

Using children’s birthday parties as an example, this thesis project presentation will examine the significance of socio-economic influence on consumerism. It will propose practical solutions for value creation to help redefine the forces behind such practices and move our society towards a more sustainable future.

SUPPORT FOR THE IDEA

Tomorrow’s Trends

The importance and impact of socializing

Social and cultural interactions present an immense amount of enjoyment. They boost confidence and strengthen interpersonal relationships among friends and family, rather than exchange of short-lived non-recyclables we consider gifts. Instead of continuing to turn birthdays into consumerist affairs, the focus needs to be shifted from excessive gift-buying to quality time spent with the loved ones. For example, the pet “paw-ties” could become donation drives and awareness campaigns aimed at helping sheltered animals in need of adaption.

The power of social media

To understand consumer behaviors in the larger context, we first must consider the magnitude of impact social media plays in their everyday lives. For example, Pinterest is one of the top sources for party planning. Women ages 25 to 54 a significant amount of planning decisions and about 80-percent of all buying decisions in U.S. households. As of 2019, 79.5-percent of Pinterest users are female. A smaller but rapidly growing number of social-savvy youths (at least 13 years of age per Pinterest’s terms of service) are also used to planning and looking for new ideas on the platform, subsequently making requests and suggestions for their birthday celebrations.

Enlisting social media platforms to frame messaging around sustainable consumption and influence the two key stakeholder groups (parents and children) could make a significant positive impact. The internet, like climate change is a great equalizer.
INTRODUCTION

STRATEGIC APPROACH

Using the tools for disruptive design, this thesis includes culturally compelling strategies for behavior change and disruptive business ideas aimed at ecological modernization of the birthday party industry. The backbone of this approach is rooted in restorative practices, sustainable education, and hands on STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) activities.

A framework for change

In the book 'The Innovator's Dilemma', Harvard professor Clayton Christensen described two kinds of innovation in the business world: disruptive innovation and sustaining innovation. Disruptive innovation is a new paradigm offering long-term value creation which disrupts and displaces the existing markets, while sustaining innovation is an incremental innovation process to improve the operations and maximize efficiencies.¹⁴

PROJECT SCOPE

In scope

- Define the systems boundaries of birthday parties
- Identify constrains that limit sustainability
- Define the business need and the expected outcome of the project
- Compile ideas for sustainable products and services

Out of scope

- Formulate detailed business plan
- Identify entities with which the project team will interface
- Identify constraints that limit solution development

PROFESSIONAL GOALS

- Intended purpose of this thesis project is to identify emerging sustainability themes and evidence-based intervention strategies to support ecological modernization of birthday parties, and in near future seek out meaningful partnerships and business possibilities for implementation
- Earn master’s degree in Sustainable Design to propel career forward
"If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses." ¹⁵

- Henry Ford, Founder of Ford Motors
PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The long-term objective of this thesis project is to increase the number of parents and children involved in sustainable practices, starting with positive views on sustainable consumption regarding birthday celebrations. The thesis project also intends to explore if and how children and their parents currently choose to celebrate important family milestones without contributing to negative impacts on the global scale. It is important to recognize any areas of good practice as well as potential areas of conflict and build off that.

Roadmap for discovery

The following research philosophies were selected to show the way information regarding this thesis project objective was collected, examined, and implemented:

- Research Methodologies: Proposed vs Actual pages 11-12
- Observations page 13
- Systems Thinking Map page 14
- The Natural Step Framework: Backstacking and Funnel Vision pages 15-16
- Value Proposition Canvas: Emerging trends page 17
- Design Thinking page 18

The research findings will contribute to the development of a design concept framework or toolkit designed to support families living and consuming more sustainably.
PROJECT EXECUTION

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: PROPOSED PROCESS

- **OBSERVATION**
  Research, Immersion, Understanding

- **BRAINSTORMING**
  Ideation, Visualization, Mind Mapping

- **IMPLEMENTATION**
  Test, Timing and Action Plan, Launch

- **PROTOTYPING**
  Product Dummies, Design Brief

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AJDA MESIC MA in Sustainable Design, 2019
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: ACTUAL PROCESS

RESEARCH LIFE CYCLE

Project Definition
- Define systems and elements within, outlining how they relate to and influence one another
- Find one (or more areas) of concern to focus on
- Define the business need and the expected outcome of the project
- Identify consumer needs and design challenges (appendix 3, pg. 35)
- Identify constrains that limit sustainability

Research Plan
- Articulate Design Vision
- Define Problem(s)
- Understand challenges
- Whole Systems Thinking pg. 14

Research Outcomes
- Data Interpretation
- Test Ideas on Users
- Implement
- Observe Users

Data Collection
- Surveys and Focus Groups
- Literature and Online Research
- Case Studies
- Research 5-8 top Family Entertainment Centers in Minneapolis (appendix 2 pg.34)

Prototyping
- Surveys and Focus Groups
- Ideate Many Solutions
- Gather Feedback
- Prototype and Iterate

Value Proposition
- pg. 16

Design Thinking
- pg. 17

BRAINSTORMING: EXPENDED STEPS

OBSERVATION

Empirical research and parent survey (appendix 1, pg. 33)

Observation and Motivators pg. 13

Gain a deeper understanding of how users think and feel

IMPLEMENTATION

List ideas for sustainable products and seek consumer feedback (appendix 4, pg 36)

Define the business need and the expected outcome of the project

PROTOTYPING

What steps must we take to become sustainable

Fig. 41 “Research Life Cycle” Mesic, Ajda
“We are accustomed to thinking the industry and the environment as being at odds with each other, because conventional methods of extraction, manufacturing, and disposal are destructive to the natural world.”  

- William McDonough

OBSERVATIONS

Insights and Consumer Motivators

For this thesis project, empirical research was carried out through interviews with fifty-two mothers, who are generally the key players and decision-makers for birthday parties. While the range of stakeholders to be surveyed is indeed wider than the cultural representation of all parents, the small group did include:

- Wide age range (25 to 55 years of age)
- Varied demographic and economic status (stay at home moms, blue-collar and white-collar workers)
- Different ethnic and racial makeup (Caucasian, Asian, African American, Hispanic)
- Mothers of children with disabilities (both visible and hidden) and life-threatening allergies

The survey participants were asked to describe their sentiments about the links between culture and consumerism. The interview then continued with questions regarding the connection between birthday, ecology, and climate change. Personal finances played a major factor in level of eco-involvement and eco-activity. There were two groups that emerged from the research, the first was “Eco-Minded” group and the second was “Not Aware” group. The Eco-Minded participants focused on either spending the least amount of money on their well-being and sustainability aware lifestyles. The Not Aware participants focused on convenience and value factors, but disliked limitations and lack of unique experiences. Based on the research poll results, eco-friendly consumerism was deemed inaccessible. The information retrieved in these surveys has been used to substantiate, integrate and revise all theoretical models in this thesis project and support strategies for ecological interventions.
Systems thinking requires a perception shift and a desire to develop a more complex understanding of the system being explored. The system thinking map provides an exploration of the birthday party celebration system communicating understanding of interdependencies and system dynamics. Once all the elements, agents, actors, and nodes are mined, the key connections and relationships between all components are drawn. The system mapping tool facilitates the identification of knowledge gaps and intervention points.

Process Flows:
- Product and Materials Flow
- Monetary Value
- Cultural Values/ Community
- Waste Generation/Emissions

Some examples of the places identified for intervention in this system map include:
- Shifting away from “like to have” to “need to have” product and material production and consumption
- Maintaining opportunities for employment and income through focusing on service quality and value generation
- Using social medial to influence sustainable behaviors, eliminating the need for waste and reducing emissions by choosing the waste free practices and materials

“Study the science of art. Study the art of science. Develop your senses - especially learn how to see. Realize that everything connects to everything else.”

- Leonardo Da Vinci

![Fig. 31](image1)

![Fig. 44 “Process Flow Diagram” Mesic, Ajda](image2)
**PROJECT EXECUTION**

“Going back to a simpler life based on living by sufficiency rather than excess is not a step backward.”

- Yvon Chouinard, Founder and owner of Patagonia Inc.

**THE NATURAL STEP FRAMEWORK (TNS)**

TNS is a systems thinking methodology which is used to organize a shared understanding of organizational priorities. It creates a common language to facilitate cooperation across all entities, and cultures, and is rooted in design criteria that can be used to direct social, environmental and economic changes.

The **ABCD Method** is a planning framework used for backcasting from sustainability principles as shown below.

---

**THE FOUR SUSTAINABILITY PRINCIPLES**

1. **Awareness**
2. **Baseline Analysis**
3. **Creative Solutions**
4. **Visioning**

**Fig. 45 The four sustainability principles -TNS**

**Fig. 46 “The ABCD Method” Mesic, Ajda**
Use natural or biodegradable decorations (leaf confetti)
Replace single use plastics with reusable serve ware
Compost leftover food
Buy local, certifiable and sustainably made
Refuse artificial foods/colors and replace gifts with activities

▪ Conduct scheduling and guest management electronically
▪ Use products made from post-consumer recycled materials
▪ Replace birthday games/entertainment with educational experiences such as STEAM experiments
▪ Engage in community building around shared goals and values
▪ Give back to less fortunate

**FUNNEL VISION AND BACKSTACKING FROM PRINCIPLES**

A **FUNNEL** is a metaphor used by The Natural Step to illustrate the sustainability challenge. This metaphor helps users understand how demand increases and decreases over time. Following the four sustainability principles will allow for the reversal of the current state and improvement in the future.²⁰

**BACKCASTING** as opposed to forecasting, is a process of planning a desirable outcome by working backwards to identify the necessary steps to reach the stated vision for the future.²¹

**VISION**

A future in which people find joy in simple and sustainable celebrations with loved ones.
Without feeling any social pressure, or demand on their wallets.
VALUE PROPOSITION CANVAS (VPC)

The VPC is a tool used to understand how to best create value for customers. The circle in the VPC highlights the Customer Jobs-to-be-Done, which refers to the underlying reasons that drive customers to select and buy specific products and services. The Gains, which is what the customers wish they could achieve, and the Pains are sentiments customers feel towards existing solutions or the lack there of. This knowledge helps highlight the value that can be created modified or new product or service. This is done by relieving pain and/or creating gain for customers as showcased in the square section of the VPC.

Emerging Themes

The pains observed customers felt focused around lack of time and strong dislike of one-size-fits-all solutions that come at a hefty price. Despite the lack of diverse options, many parents chose to invest the money on curated parties. Parents were unhappy with catering options, most of which consisted of pizza and soda combinations. The parents also found no allergy sensitive accommodations nor regard for childhood obesity or diabetes considerations. Single use plastics and disposable décor also topped the pain points as birthday venues do not recycle or compost any waste. Besides physical activity at some venues, parents felt that there was little to no educational impact made by the birthday celebrations in the lives of their children. The value map also provided an outline for the most impactful solutions including an “easy mix and match” option template, an all-in-one advice platform, and a timely, customizable option for last-minute inspiration and addition.
DESIGN THINKING

The iterative framework known as Design Thinking, as presented by IDEO, was used to outline the next steps for the system interventions. This includes procedures and alternative solutions intended to ecologize birthday celebrations.

“This approach brings together what is desirable from a human point of view with what is technologically feasible and economically viable.”

- Tim Brown, CEO of IDEO

“Design thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer's toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success.”

- Tim Brown, CEO of IDEO

EMPATHIZE

PROS:
Parents want to provide their child with the most popular and over the top birthday party possible.

CONS:
Parents find birthday parties to be:
- Stressful
- Time consuming
- Socially obligatory
- Financially burdensome
- Wasteful

DEFINE

PROS:
Parents like:
- Time savings
- Convenience
- Abounding accoutrements
- Easy clean up

CONS:
Parents feel that structured parties are:
- Less flexible
- Limited time

IDEATE

NEED:
Parents need: all needs and concerns they encounter addressed during party planning.

BUSINESS IDEA:
A mobile app, thepartyrescue.com facilitates a "one stop shop" solution.

PROTOTYPE

PHASE 1:
Disclose wireframe and demonstrate app visually, including enough information to explain benefits of using the app.

TEST

SURVEY
Seek app feedback from the existing pool of parents concerning:
- Name/brand
- Recognition page
- Elements, navigation, and actions
- Problem solving efficacy of the app and website
- Recommendations or suggestion for future app iterations
- Competitor option availability and landscape

NEXT STEPS:
- Identify support team members
- Operational budget calibration
- Develop workshops and informative events for engagement

PHASE 2 and PHASE 3:
See project outcome section

Fig. 54 “Design Thinking Framework” Mesic, Ajda

All icons designed by http://freepik.com
“Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance you must keep moving.”

- Albert Einstein
“We don’t really worry about climate change because it’s too overwhelming and we’re already in too deep. It’s like if you owe your bookie $1,000, you’re like, ‘OK, I’ve got to pay this dude back.’ But if you owe your bookie $1 million dollars, you’re like, ‘I guess I’m just going to die.’”

- Colin Jost, Saturday Night Live, 10/13/18

**Early findings**

People often express feeling powerless in their ability to effect change on a scale that matters for issues as significant as climate change. This helpless statement from Saturday Night Live the “Weekend Update” report to the United Nations climate findings on October 13, 2018 summed up what most participants of our consumer research were feeling. Contrary to this mentality, the behavior of one individual multiplied by thousands, or millions, makes for a very decisive impact. After using several research methods and design frameworks intended to develop a theoretical framework for the thesis, it became clear that the task of motivating sustainable consumption had to be grounded in understandings of the social and cultural theories of consumption. For a behavioral change to happen, there needs to be an internal desire to change as well as some sort of external social motivation.

**Entry point for sustainable intervention**

Linking lifestyle choices with sustainability is key. Children’s birthday parties appear to be an easy access point for early interventions due to several factors. Sustainability needs to be made easy, fun, and allow for participation. Birthday parties are all the above. Knowledge sharing is crucial, and the group setting allows us to equip people with knowledge. They like to learn from observing one another. It allows them to become comfortable with a new behavior before they try it out. Lastly, birthday celebrations are rewarding and provide extrinsic motivation. The kind of motivation that people develop internally, long-lasting and rooted in their beliefs.

Lastly, birthday celebrations are rewarding and provide extrinsic motivation that is developed internally with long-lasting impacts rooted in their beliefs.
“Discovery consists of seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody else has thought.” 

- Albert Szent-Gyorgyi

**Indicators**

In order to identify the best tool to communicate the near-term, medium-term and long-term visions to consumers, it is important to unpack the complexities of consumer’s challenges by breaking them down into root causes, destabilizing causes and trigger factors. Understanding the interaction of these elements for consumer challenges is essential in progressing towards the ultimate goals.

**Target consumer**

The demographic specific to children’s birthday parties consists of parents (age 25 to 55) and their young children (youth ranging from toddlers up to the late teens). This demographic relies heavily on social media channels to access worldwide information.

Some 74-percent of all shoppers make buying decisions based on social media, according to Sprout Social. According to the PricewaterhouseCoopers (doing business as PwC) in 2016 total retail survey, 45-percent of global respondents said that reading online reviews, comments, and feedback influences their shopping behavior. Content from social media influencers has a large effect on their followers, regardless of sponsorship by companies. Lastly, social media allows people to stay in touch with friends and family from afar, making opinions of loved ones still carry more worth than those of strangers. According to research, 80-percent of consumers are likely to purchase an item based on a friend or family member’s suggestions.

**The tool of trade**

We currently live in a world in which social media allows millions of people to connect with each other. It also allows business owners to promote their businesses to people all over the world to get exposure, people all over the world to get exposure, increase traffic, and gain market insights. Social media not only allows for tremendous outreach and networking, but also allows for interactivity that can be very beneficial to businesses for a variety of reasons.
"If you change nothing, nothing will change. But one small change can change everything."  

-Anonymous

Prospects

The thesis research findings suggest that several specific trends may serve as catalysts for sustainable changes. These trends include broad-reaching appeal, necessary convenience, considerable options, and hybridized environmental and societal compassion. Building on the insight from the trends, the next phase of this thesis project was developing a concept for a one-stop-shop design solution. The solution included an online service that delivered on all the previously identified consumer needs, a lifestyle platform called thepartyrescue.com, which was envisioned as a destination for consumers to discover new concepts and products and curate unique and sustainable birthday parties. The free contents ranged from rigorously researched inspiration for DIY ideas to dedicated showcase of locally sourced (Minneapolis) and sustainably produced offerings and services, all translating to a lower environmental footprint.

Competitive Research

When designing novel solutions to a common problem, researching and drawing inspiration from known successful methods is essential. Competitive analysis can reveal broad trends in the marketplace, opportunities for product differentiation and white space opportunities. All comparative apps in this study were highly ranked. The apps were assessed against four value propositions, such as social, practical, lifestyle and sustainability. Some of the apps bridged two or more of these values.

After exploring all direct and indirect competitors three opportunities popped out emerged:

- Presence of abundant market gaps and underserved consumers
- Strategies that work to build from (and those that trail behind)
- New ideas and applicable solutions from other markets and industries
Next Steps

The three phases of project outcome

Originally the author planned on creating a business concept for a closed loop mobile party venue, specifically a business based on restoring old school buses and converting to solar power to cater personalized eco-friendly birthday parties. However, upon completion of strategic research it became clear that staggered approach was more feasible and sustainable in the long term.

- The first **near-term** concept was developing a mobile app that could be used to gain attention, grow a follower base, and establish partnerships with local businesses.
- The **medium-term** concept was to grow the platform geographically, gaining broader reach and venturing into owned brand product solutions.
- The final **long-term** phase was to include physical party space, the eco-party bus, which could be franchised.

Fig. 70 “Shor-term to Long-term business methodology” Mesic, Ajda
The intent of thepartyrescue.com was simple: enable consumers to access and evaluate a broad range of information before making any purchases. As access becomes the new form of consumption, unlimited access to goods and services creates value. Products become services and services connect consumers and business. The fragmented nature of birthday parties makes planning and cost management hard to monitor and thepartyrescue.com aims to provide an all-in-one platform to collect, store and manage any and all information regarding the party, from inspiration, to invites and image sharing.
PHASE 01: NEAR-TERM DESIGN SOLUTION

Often the children involved in birthday planning have minimal expectations, they just want to have fun with their friends. However, parents often turn the birthday parties into overwhelming celebrations of the children rather than something for them. Thepartyrescue.com provides both parents and their children with inspiration to create birthday parties of their dreams, focused on child’s interests and curiosities. Some of the ideas include micro adventures that are easy to plan and execute like cooking for kids, craft making, expeditions and glamping in the back yard. All geared towards manifesting the child’s individual identity.

The way each category works is for children and parents to browse through subset of ideas together and agree about the innerworkings of their party. If users are unsure about party details, they can have their guests vote for the most popular option or open it up for suggestions.

One of the party ideas for an aspiring humanitarian could be hosted (for free) at a local animal shelter, in return for some TLC for the animals. Another idea for a budding philanthropist would be to host a "present free" birthday party, suggesting a donation to charity be made instead because that reflects their family values.

Being honest with the birthday child and the party guests about the reasons for not having presents is important. The idea only works if all the guests understand and agree collectively not to have party bags or presents. In with conscious eco-parties and out with ostentatious ones.
It is significant to emphasize the importance of the online platform thepartyrescue.com as an entry point of choice for consumers on their sustainability journeys. Also to allow vendors to play along and connect with consumers. Vendors should also be allowed to play along and connect with consumers as long the vendors meet sustainability criteria such as local, fair trade, organic, refurbished, and energy/water conserving. They can offer differentiated products and services on emotions, curation and trust.

These relationships can establish a marketplace where people could buy, share, or exchange used items (ex. serving dishes for a tea party or as props or decorations). The reuse mentality feeds into thepartyrescue.com’s values surrounding sustainability, which could be a great way to create relationships with customers, support the local economy, and build stronger communities.
“In the absence of information, we jump to the worst conclusions. Don’t be afraid to talk instead of jumping to conclusions.”

- Myra Kassim

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Sustainability is a critical business focus that requires understanding consumerism in a whole new way. This thesis project aimed to remedy a knowledge gap at the intersection between socio-cultural values and sustainable consumerism. By examining how core socio-cultural and economic factors relate to consumer behaviors, the research conducted during this thesis project provided an initial framework for sustainable intervention.

Social, economic, and environmental sustainability are interdependent and will become increasingly more so as society becomes more aware. Trading products and services, which utilize natural resources, often come with an environmental cost. This thesis project offered an alternative pathway to sustainable consumption focused on transforming consumer behaviors beyond extrinsic value through use of a known technology-based form of innovation, social media. Our research findings showed that social media often led consumer preferences for products and services as consumers tend to influence behaviors of other individuals in their social networks. Therefore, an interactive app concept was created as a proof of concept.

It was important to acknowledge that creating a proof of concept is very different than scaling an idea into product of a meaningful level of scale or usefulness. Besides getting consumers excited about sustainable and restorative practices, thepartyrescue.com aspires to create opportunities for communities to build local economies that are socially and ecologically beneficial. We envision business opportunities in converting old school buses into franchise of mobile party venues, run on clean energy. These venues would help shape key community partnership necessary to address social issues while improving and restoring local businesses and supply chains.

While future research could further identify strategies to more effectively motivate sustainable consumerism in a holistic manner. However, despite the limitations of our analysis, this thesis project does offer hope that more sustainable future is possible via consuming less through behavior change.
Many thanks to WENDY JEDLICKA the best Spirit Guide and mentor one could ask for, DENISE DELUCA the Chief Creator of Opportunities, CURT MCNAMARA the Living Compass and Method Man, NOBLE CUMMING the Futurist and Progressive Strategies and KELLI SMITH the Language Arts Manager. Without all of you this journey would have come short on substance.

Lastly, this journey would not have been possible without the dedicated support of my family. Thank you to my trophy husband ELVIS TRAVANCIC for your tireless and loving care for our demanding children AZRA and LAYLA over the past few years, it has made this endeavor possible. You may not have always understand me, nonetheless you supported many of my pursuits, professional and otherwise. I cannot begin to give you the thanks that you deserve.

With love, Ajda


26 Weekend Update: U.N.’s Climate Change Report - SNL. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07ce1m67eik&list=PLQ4UMGLVqbs9nXHOTVbEU2dqhATpnrn&index=9&t=0s&app=desktop


LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1  “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2019. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1573501

Fig. 2  “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2018. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1446217

Fig. 3  “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2019. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1569941

Fig. 4  “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2018. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1443463

Fig. 5  “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 20118. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1459519

Fig. 6  “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2018. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1431455

Fig. 7  “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2017. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1267651

Fig. 8  “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2018. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1458643


Fig. 10  “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2017. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1065399


Fig. 12  “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2018. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1431551

Fig. 13  “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2018. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1457029

Fig. 14  “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2018. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1457983

Fig. 15  “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2019. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1558129

Fig. 16  “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2018. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1458005

Fig. 17  Thunberg, Greta. “School Strike Week 46. The Climate Crisis Doesn't Go on Summer Holiday, and Neither Will We. We Go on.#Fridaysforfuture #schoolstrike4climate #Climatestrike Pic.twitter.com/JGdvAVaSjW.” Twitter. Twitter, July 5, 2019. https://twitter.com/gretathunberg/status/1147026982808543232.

To identify the largest producers of waste, 24/7 Tempo calculated the special waste and regular municipal solid waste per capita produced by each country, using data from the World Bank’s “What a Waste” global database, last updated in September of 2018. (Photo: hxdyl / Getty Images)

NEW YORK, NY - JULY 01: Tracy Morgan celebrates his daughter's birthday with the Minions at Dylan's Candy Bar on July 1, 2017 in New York City. (Photo by Presley Ann/Patrick McMullan via Getty Images)


“Disruptive vs. Sustaining Innovation” Mesic, Ajda
LIST OF FIGURES

Fig.34 “Technology Adoption Lifecycle” Mesic, Ajda
Fig.35 “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2017. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/793075
Fig.37 “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2018. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1451207
Fig.40 “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2018. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1168339
Fig.41 “Research Life Cycle” Mesic, Ajda
Fig.42 “Sustainability Venn Diagram” Mesic, Ajda
Fig.43 “Consumer Motivators Axis” Mesic, Ajda
Fig.44 “Process Flow Diagram” Mesic, Ajda
Fig.45 The four sustainability principles -TNS
Fig.46 “The ABCD method” Mesic, Ajda
Fig.47 “Backstacking” Mesic, Ajda
Fig.48 “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2017. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1229808
Fig.49 “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2017. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1179311
Fig.50 SO Mum. “Summer Holiday Activities in Southampton.” SO Mum, July 19, 2019. https://so-mum.co.uk/blog/2019/07/19/summer-holiday-activities-in-southampton/.
Fig.51 “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2017. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/709836
Fig.52 “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2017. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/773699
Fig.53 “Value Proposition Canvas Explained” Mesic, Ajda
Fig. 54 “Design Thinking Framework” Mesic, Ajda


Fig. 56 “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2017. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/725511

Fig. 57 “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2017. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/548291

Fig. 58 “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2017. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/198625

Fig. 59 “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2017. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/684419

Fig. 60 “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2016. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/133498


Fig. 66 “Competitive Value Axis” Mesic, Ajda

Fig. 67 “Competitive Assessment Chart” Mesic, Ajda

Fig. 68 “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2018. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1431639

Fig. 69 “Free Images & Free Stock Photos - PxHere.” 2017. Available at: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1433049

Fig. 70 “Shor-term to Long-term business methodology” Mesic, Ajda

Fig. 71 “Shown: CODE FREE WIREFRAME for thepartyrescue.com with clickable sign in elements, leading users to interface.” Mesic, Ajda


AJDA MESIC MA in Sustainable Design, 2019
“Shown: CODE FREE WIREFRAME for thepartyrescue.com with : CODE FREE WIREFRAME for thepartyrescue.com with the first scene and widget palette including shapes, text, input fields, all in hierarchical order.” Mesic, Ajda


LIST OF FIGURES


Fig.91 100010509524078. “Simple 'Thank You' Notes Can Boost Your Emotional Well Being.” dtNext.in, August 29, 2018. https://www.dtnext.in/Lifestyle/LifeStyleTopNews/2018/08/29221706/1086372/Simple-thank-you-notes-can-boost-your-emotional-well-.vpf.


Fig.98 “Shown: CODE FREE WIREFRAME for thepartyrescue.com with properties palette containing the input text fields.” Mesic, Ajda


### LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 116</td>
<td>“30 Of the Most Striking Environmental Campaign Ads We've Ever Seen.”</td>
<td>BrightSide, April 15, 2017. <a href="https://brightside.me/article/30-of-the-most-striking-environmental-campaign-ads-weve-ever-seen-71205/">https://brightside.me/article/30-of-the-most-striking-environmental-campaign-ads-weve-ever-seen-71205/</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 117</td>
<td>“30 Of the Most Striking Environmental Campaign Ads We've Ever Seen.”</td>
<td>BrightSide, April 15, 2017. <a href="https://brightside.me/article/30-of-the-most-striking-environmental-campaign-ads-weve-ever-seen-71205/">https://brightside.me/article/30-of-the-most-striking-environmental-campaign-ads-weve-ever-seen-71205/</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 118</td>
<td>“30 Of the Most Striking Environmental Campaign Ads We've Ever Seen.”</td>
<td>BrightSide, April 15, 2017. <a href="https://brightside.me/article/30-of-the-most-striking-environmental-campaign-ads-weve-ever-seen-71205/">https://brightside.me/article/30-of-the-most-striking-environmental-campaign-ads-weve-ever-seen-71205/</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 120</td>
<td>“30 Of the Most Striking Environmental Campaign Ads We've Ever Seen.”</td>
<td>BrightSide, April 15, 2017. <a href="https://brightside.me/article/30-of-the-most-striking-environmental-campaign-ads-weve-ever-seen-71205/">https://brightside.me/article/30-of-the-most-striking-environmental-campaign-ads-weve-ever-seen-71205/</a>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1
Insights and Consumer Motivators: Parent Survey

APPENDIX 2
Minneapolis Family Entertainment Center Market Research

APPENDIX 3
Value Proposition Canvas

APPENDIX 4
User Feedback: Proof of Concept, Testing and Iteration
At what age did you throw the first big birthday party for your child?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>2 (1.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 years</td>
<td>4 (2.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6 years</td>
<td>10 (5.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8 years</td>
<td>22 (11.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10 years</td>
<td>24 (12.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-12 years</td>
<td>31 (15.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-14 years</td>
<td>32 (16.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-16 years</td>
<td>20 (10.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-18 years</td>
<td>9 (4.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-21 years</td>
<td>6 (3.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24 years</td>
<td>1 (0.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At what age did your child stop having themed birthday parties?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>1 (0.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 years</td>
<td>2 (1.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6 years</td>
<td>2 (1.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8 years</td>
<td>6 (3.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10 years</td>
<td>10 (5.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-12 years</td>
<td>12 (6.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-14 years</td>
<td>13 (6.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-16 years</td>
<td>5 (2.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-18 years</td>
<td>1 (0.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-21 years</td>
<td>2 (1.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24 years</td>
<td>1 (0.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where do you usually have your child’s birthday parties? At home, a venue or?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At home</td>
<td>10 (53.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venue</td>
<td>9 (46.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is the driving factor for home birthday parties? Staying within a budget or delivering a unique and memorable experience?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>20 (50.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>20 (50.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How do you feel about gift wrap and what do you do with it after gifts are unwrapped? Paper plates and plastic utensils? Decorations? Balloons? (Leftover food?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gift wrap</td>
<td>10 (20.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plates</td>
<td>20 (40.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utensils</td>
<td>10 (20.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decorations</td>
<td>10 (20.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balloons</td>
<td>10 (20.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are there aspects of birthday parties you are currently missing but would like to experience in the future?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>31 (62.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>8 (16.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venue</td>
<td>24 (48.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For venue-based birthday parties: what is the typical size of the party?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-10 kids</td>
<td>46 (92.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 kids</td>
<td>46 (92.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 kids</td>
<td>45 (90.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are home parties stressful? If yes explain why? If no explain why?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>41 (82.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5 (10.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In between</td>
<td>2 (4.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What are some of the gains/positives you look for when choosing with venue-based birthday parties?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gain</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No stress</td>
<td>46 (92.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More play</td>
<td>46 (92.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniformity</td>
<td>46 (92.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>46 (92.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What are some of the pain points you experience when dealing with venue-based birthday parties you would like to improve? (e.g. flexibility, customization, etc.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pain point</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>10 (20.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule</td>
<td>10 (20.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>10 (20.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venue</td>
<td>10 (20.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*AJDA MESIC MA in Sustainable Design, 2019*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BUSINESS</th>
<th>SERVICE</th>
<th>PRODUCT</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>COST</th>
<th>RECYCLE</th>
<th>COMPOST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ZERO GRAVITY</td>
<td>Trampolines, games, laser guns</td>
<td>Cake, pizza, soda, socks, toys, gift bags</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>Average $15+/ person for 10+</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIG THRILL FACTORY</td>
<td>Arcade games laser guns, dance, light show</td>
<td>Cake, pizza, soda, toys, gift bags</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>Average 27+/ person for 10+</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUMP IT UP</td>
<td>Bouncy castles, inflatables</td>
<td>Cake, pizza, soda, socks, toys, gift bags</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>Average $20+/ person for 10+</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck E. Cheese</td>
<td>Arcade games</td>
<td>Cake, pizza, soda, gift bag</td>
<td>1.5 hours +</td>
<td>Average $18+/ person for 10+</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Como Zoo</td>
<td>Party room, animal show</td>
<td>Cake, pizza, soda, juice, toys</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
<td>Average $22+/ person for 15+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota Zoo</td>
<td>Animal show, free admission to zoo</td>
<td>Cake, pizza, soda, juice, toys</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
<td>Average $26+/ person for 15+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The WOW Bar</td>
<td>Make Over for girls</td>
<td>Blowouts and make-up.</td>
<td>TBD/ depends on group size</td>
<td>$65-90 per child</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adorable Kids Parties</td>
<td>Mobile Spa comes to your home</td>
<td>Mani/ padi, brunch, OJ (virgin mimosas)</td>
<td>90 min – 2 hrs.</td>
<td>$45 to 67+/ per child for 8 children</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build-a-Bear</td>
<td>Building a small bear and party time</td>
<td>Bears, toys and clothes for bears and kids</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td>$18-45+/ per child for 5 + children</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color Me Mine</td>
<td>Art/ Ceramic Studio</td>
<td>Art making/ Paining Ceramics</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>%15+/ person for up to 20</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Top 10 of 17 business evaluated, others are niche stand-alone boutique business.*
VALUE PROPOSITION CANVAS

GAIN CREATORS
What can you offer your customer to help them achieve their gains?

NEAR REAL TIME SOLUTIONS
DIY PARTY IDEAS FOR EASY PLANING
SOCIAL ACCEPTABLE
FLEXIBILITY TO MEET DIVERSE SOLUTIONS / NO FIXED SOLUTIONS
ABILITY TO MAKE PARTIES INCLUSIVE OF ALL AGES/ ABILITIES
INSPIRING
APPROACHABILITY

PAIN RELIEVERS
How can you help your customer to relieve their pains? What problems can you eradicate?

SUPERVISION/ HELP WITH GUESTS & KIDS
RENTAL OPTIONS
RESOURCES
SUSTAINABLE PARTY KIT
EASE AND CONVENIENCE
NUTRITIOUS AND HEALTHY MEALS
RECYCLING AND COMPOSTING OPTIONS
EASY ACCESS

PRODUCTS & SERVICES
What are the products and services you can offer your customer so they can get their job done?

NEAR REAL TIME SOLUTIONS
DIY PARTY IDEAS FOR EASY PLANING
FLEXIBILITY TO MEET DIVERSE SOLUTIONS / NO FIXED SOLUTIONS
ABILITY TO MAKE PARTIES INCLUSIVE OF ALL AGES/ ABILITIES
SOCIAL ACCEPTABLE

GAINS
What would make your customer happy? What would make their life and the job-to-be-done easier?

MAKE A DIFFERENCE
FEEL GOOD
FUN
POPULAR
EASY TO USE
EDUCATIONAL
PRICE/ VALUE EQUATION
AGE APPROPRIATE
FREE OF STRESS
HAPPINESS
MEMORABLE
UNIQUE & PERSONALIZED
FAMILY FRIENDLY
PRICE/ VALUE EQUATION
EQUATION

JOB-TO-BE-DONE
What is the job the customer wants to get done in their work or life??

LAST MINUTE PLAN CHANGES
SOCIAL PRESSURE
FEELING OVERWHELMED
TIRED
NO HELP
ENSURING APPEAL
OVERSIGHT
TRAVEL/ BACK AND FORTH
ENJOY

PAINS
What is annoying or troubling your customer? What is preventing them from getting the job done?

FEED BACK
FEED BACK
FEED BACK
FEED BACK
FEED BACK
FEED BACK
FEED BACK
FEED BACK

© BUSINESS MODEL FOUNDRY AG

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USER FEEDBACK

Several users who originally participated in the parent index were invited to review the simulation for the mobile prototypes. While reviewers were not able to view and interact with the prototypes, they were instructed to leave comments on screens and UI elements as well as ask questions and make suggestions. The conclusions were drawn from this exercise.

TESTING AND ITERATION

Enable users to contribute through ideas and participate in codeveloping a more sustainable future through a web/blog portal. Encourage users to collaborate on celebration planning, share tools and supplies. Turn super users into “influencers” who promote sustainable lifestyles. Allow for people and local businesses to collaborate easily.

FUNCTIONS

PRIMARY

INHERENT

SECONDARY

Optimize and organize the content into searchable consumer-centric database which is easy to use and navigate.
THANK YOU