Powerful stakeholders' views of entertainment in Macao's future ☆

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ABSTRACT

The researchers employ stakeholder interviews to explore prospects for entertainment development in one rapidly changing Asia Pacific location, Macao. The authors complete eleven useful interviews with influential stakeholders through the access provided by high level institutional networks. Using the discourse analysis approach, the 11 stakeholder interviews generate 267 inferences from 547 keywords/phrases. Overall the interviewees express enthusiasm for the usefulness of expanding entertainment options. Concerns the stakeholders highlight include potential value conflicts between the public and the private sectors in the collaboration process, the existing and dominant over-reliance on gaming development and the need for the government to maintain consistencies in entertainment enabling policies. Future forms of tourism and entertainment in Macao, and more generally in the Asia Pacific region, are arguably very likely to be influenced by the views of key stakeholders and the resolution of the issues they raise.

1. Introduction — growth and importance of leisure and entertainment

1.1. Transformation of leisure and lifestyle

Entertainment and the associated links to new lifestyle choices in the Asia Pacific region provide rich study topics for researchers. Branding, consumerism, emotional labor, facility design, interpretation, merchandising, mindfulness, popularity, profitability, regional distinctiveness, satisfaction, symbolism and technology are some from a long list of potential areas researchers can explore. Some relevant literature includes work on conceptualizing experience (Daniel, 1996; Pine & Gilmour, 1999; Uriely, 2005); consumer involvement (Gursoy & Gavcar, 2003; Lehto, O'Leary, & Morrison, 2004; Perfetto & Woodside, 2009); emotional, esthetic and performative labor (Bryman, 2004a); hyperreality (Eco, 1986), gaze and post modernism (Rojek, 1997; Urry, 1990); interpretation and mindfulness (Moscardo, 1999; Uzzell & Ballantyne, 1998); insincerity and authenticity (Boorstin, 1962; Cohen, 2007; MacCannell, 1976); leisure history (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000; Leitner, Leitner, & Associates, 2004; Toner, 1995); leisure mobility and experience (Hall, 2005); product life cycles (Butler, 2006); re-enchantment (Ritzer, 1999); staging and dramaturgical analyses (Goffman, 1959; Harre, 1979); the use of time and slow time (Gershuny, 2000; Manrai & Manrai, 1995; Matos, 2004; Woehler, 2004); and leisure and the quality of life (Neal, Sirgy, & Uysal, 1999; Richards, 1999).

One of the challenges in researching the entertainment field and in exploring the array of ideas mentioned lies in considering perspectives of key stakeholders. In the entertainment world one can identify at least three groups of stakeholders: those who make the decisions about the entertainment, those who provide the entertainment and the audiences or consumers who experience the fruits of the other two parties' efforts (Pearce, 2008). Obtaining information from consumers is easier than collecting data from performers or the power holders; however, from a business perspective, studies designed to understand the views and actions of the key decision makers towards entertainment and its uses are desirable. The experiences available in any twenty-first century city are strongly dependent upon the provision of entertainment spaces and facilities, especially in the Asia Pacific cities (McCarthy, 2002; Minton, 1998; Ryan & Gu, 2009; Santos, Belhassen, & Caton, 2008).

1.2. Entertainment and gambling

In many gambling destinations, entertainment has been a critical element of the experience. Those destinations that are trying to combine the two lucrative sectors of gambling and entertainment hope to see the creation of synergy and diversification. Having entertainment associated with gambling helps to create a more attractive image and package for the gambling industry; in return, gambling revenue supports the huge capital needed for the continuous development of entertainment elements.

This entertainment–gambling symbiosis is especially applicable for casino-based destinations that are undergoing re-development. The business plan of most casino managers and owners is to pursue diversified entertainment ventures and no longer exclusively rely on gambling. As a result, most people prefer to use the term "gaming" instead of gambling to reflect the recreational component of the industry. For many people, gambling may simply mean inadvisable risk-taking, either with one's money or one's wellbeing, and this thought may not be closely linked to the values of recreation (Wolf, 1999). The incorporation of entertainment into gambling helps dilute some of the pejorative overtones linked to an exclusive focus on gambling. d'Hauteserre (2000), quoting Paynton (1993), considers that the incorporation of entertainment can make visiting a casino no longer a vice, only a slightly sinful indulgence. Entertainment linked to gambling is thus fast becoming the driving force of sections of economies in locations as diverse as Singapore, certain parts of the United States, Australia and Eastern Europe. Marketers see providing entertainment as important to a regeneration or rejuvenation strategy for a sector that depends on gambling (Fainstein & Robert, 1998; McCarthy, 2002; Minton, 1998).

Since Macao is also vigorously developing an entertainment industry alongside the current gambling orientation, this paper provides contemporary information on how key stakeholders view the prospects for such development.

1.3. Generalizability of the study

Of the many destinations that are developing gambling activities, this paper addresses the concerns and visions of those who shape the emerging business of entertainment in one Asian Pacific city, China's special administrative region of Macao. Despite the fact that this study focuses on a small city in China, the implications and generalizability reach beyond that setting. This era of globalization has led to an increasing interdependence between travel destination markets and experience transfer from one place to another at no or low cost and time.

Globalization not only increases the interactivity among competing destinations, but also heightens the competition among travel destinations. Destinations not having a significant competitive advantage over others, either because of deteriorated tourist attractions or lack of variety, will undoubtedly face decline in this world arena. The understanding of entertainment development prospects for Macao can shed light on other travel destinations that are facing similar difficulties and/or having similar concerns in their pursuit of tourism development.

In addition to this increasing interdependence of destinations, this study on Macao also has specific marketing implications for other gambling destinations. People often pair many of these gambling destinations based on stereotypical perceptual images. For example, a predominant image of people is that Macao is associated with Las Vegas and/or Monte Carlo; examples include citing Macao as the "Las Vegas of the East" and the "Monte Carlo of the Orient," Loi (2008) compares Macao to six other gambling destinations on five continents and the results reveal many similarities between Macao and the selected destinations. Loi's paper suggests that consumers perceive Macao as sharing many similarities in terms of entertainment offerings with Genting (Malaysia), Atlantic City, Monte Carlo, Gold Coast and Sun City. In particular, that paper reveals that people perceive Macao to be similar to Monte Carlo in all investigated entertainment elements (a total of 26 items). The high resemblance between Macao and these five global destinations can be a reference point to support the generalizability of this study. As Flyvbjerg (2006) points out, a common misunderstanding is that "one cannot generalize on the basis of a case." Woodside and Wilson (2003) also illustrate the usefulness of case study research (CSR) in theory building and marketing. Researchers often successfully use studies of specific cases to draw inferences about the wider world as greater generalizability is not necessarily achieved by increasing the sample size or studied areas (Kennedy, 1979). Alternatively, the strategic selection of cases can increase generalizability, as in this case.

The changes taking place in the size and scale of the special administrative region's gaming industry provide a succinct summary of the main features of the Macao entertainment industry. The number of visitors has increased from 9 million to more than 21 million over the last decade (Macao Statistics & Census Service, 2010). This increase in tourist arrivals is not balanced, with more than 80% of tourists coming from only two markets, namely Mainland China and Hong Kong. In addition to this concentration problem, the average time spent by tourists in Macao is very short, at less than two days on average. As a result, attempts to attract visitors from wider market sources and to keep them in the community longer are a key consideration prompting the major casinos to offer more non-gaming entertainment alternatives such as youth centers, themed and brand shopping, concerts and events, themed dining and weddings, and the like. Non-gaming entertainment therefore has become one major strategy both the private and public sectors use in an effort to prolong the average stay of tourists. Therefore, the researchers undertake this study in this context of strategies to increase the value of tourism to Macao.

This paper utilizes a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews guided by open-ended questions yield information that the researchers interpret and summarize through a structured discourse analysis framework. The main aim of the paper is to identify specific views of key stakeholders on the development of entertainment in Macao. The more general goal is to identify issues that marketers need to consider in order to successfully mix gambling and entertainment.

2. Method

The qualitative research approach has gained increasing acceptance in many fields such as education, sociology, anthropology and consumer behavior (Bryman, 2004b; Riley & Love, 2000). Crawford-Welch and McCleary (1992) and Dann, Nash, and Pearce (1988) suggest that qualitative research has made significant and valuable contributions to the tourism and leisure knowledge base.

The interview is one of the main research methods associated with qualitative research (Bryman, 2004b). Taylor and Bogdan (1998) contend that in-depth interviewing seems especially well suited in situations where (1) the researchers have a relatively clear sense of their research interests and the kinds of questions they wish to address; (2) the settings or people are difficult to access using purely quantitative sampling methods; (3) researchers use time efficiently compared to techniques such as participant observation; and (4) the researcher is interested only in the views of key people in a setting. Following these principles and considering that the key and powerful stakeholders are not easily accessible and further that the procedures for eliciting information need to be flexible as well as engaging and respectful of respondents' time, the researchers opted for the use of in-depth interviews.

The authors used the semi-structured interview with open ended questions to gather data for this study. In a semi-structured interview, the authors prepare a list of questions in advance to cover the topics to be investigated. The interviewers can ask questions in different sequences, that is, the answers given by the respondents in part guide the conversation. In addition, throughout the interview, facilitators can ask additional questions based on the replies given. The semi-structured interview is also flexible in that the process allows room to pursue topics of particular interest but still preserves a pattern of questions (Leidner, 1993). One can see semi-structured interviews as closely aligned to in-depth interviews, which many social science researchers often cite as the favored investigative tool (Benney & Hughes, 1970; Kvale, 1996; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).