



Religiosity and generational effects on gambling: Support for and opposition to introducing casino gambling in a non-gambling tourist entertainment environment

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ABSTRACT

Today casino gambling and state lotteries have become the dominant types of gambling. Tourist destinations are attractive targets for gambling because large markets of potential customers already exist. Previous studies focus primarily on the current residents in geographic markets to estimate support for proposed casino gambling. The current study examines visitors to an existing tourist destination to gauge the level of support for and opposition to casino gambling coming into a tourist region/market with over eight million annual visitors. Tourists representing all 50 US states participated in this study. Religiosity, religious giving, denominational and generational effects are important factors in explaining attitudes toward gambling among participants.

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1. Introduction

Gambling as a human activity traces back to the earliest of recorded history. Colonists are reported to have observed Native Americans betting on athletic events, and playing a game using six sided dice made from animal bones. It was thought that gambling was a gift from the gods and therefore had a spiritual dimension (Doody, 2008).

Gambling has become impressive in size and pervasive in society. Edmondson (1986) reports Americans spend more money on gambling than they give to their churches or invest in colleges. The gambling industry, worldwide, generated revenues of \$348 billion in 2009 and is expected to generate \$441 billion by 2014 (Datamonitor, 2010b). In the United States, the gambling industry generated \$89.8 billion in 2009 and is expected to generate \$97.6 billion by 2014. Only seven states do not currently have a lottery, and many states are enacting initiatives to either add or further expand gambling activities (Datamonitor, 2010a). Richard (2010) explains that casinos are often the largest employer in many areas; they pay higher tax rates than many businesses, and bring thousands of tourists to areas that might not otherwise attract a tourist population. This growing popularity for legalized gambling may come from the fact that it gives both voters and legislators an easy and relatively painless method to increase much needed state revenue without raising taxes.

Gambling is a lucrative activity that is both a benefit and a curse to a community. Positives include increased tax revenues which theoretically translate into more dollars for education, housing and healthcare, and higher wages for local residents. Negatives include moral concerns, as well as a variety of social costs including crime and gambling addictions. There is little doubt that social norms have an impact on the success or lack of success of the gambling industry. Cotton (1996) points out that historically religion and gambling have been intertwined in some manner in virtually every culture. It is important to understand the social fabric of a culture and region, including religious orientations and age factors as both have been shown to be relevant variables in explaining attitudes towards gambling.

Gambling is an act which has varied levels of support and opposition by various sections of society including religious groups and denominations. Brown, Roseman, and Ham (2003, p. 56) suggest that further studies need to be conducted on the level of support one might have for gambling based upon religious beliefs, and “quantifying the impact of religion would help identify where gambling and related tourist attractions will be successful.”

In the present study, the actual geographic area has a sparse population, but it is the tourist population that makes it attractive to the gambling industry. In fact, the area boasts 8 million visitors and \$1.7 billion in travel tourism dollars (Cassedy, 2002). The views of visitors to the area must be understood by potential casino gambling interests. If gambling in such a tourist area is seen negatively by visitors, concerns will be raised regarding potential damage to the existing tourist base as well as existing entertainment venues and businesses. Thus, the unique contribution of the current study is to examine the level of support for and

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opposition to casino gambling among a sample of tourist destination visitors deemed a target for gambling interests.

2. Literature

2.1. History of U.S. gambling

In North America the early colonists found that the Native Americans practiced various forms of gambling (Doody, 2008). Colonists held traditional English beliefs and customs which brought a basic tolerance for gambling as harmless recreation. Puritans were much stricter in their conservative views toward gambling but eventually came to tolerate gambling as long as gambling was not an individual's primary occupation. The 13 colonies all employed lotteries to raise revenue for civic projects, including many of today's most prestigious eastern universities (Dunstan, 1997). Edmondson (1986) notes that Thomas Jefferson is thought to have said that the lottery is a wonderful thing as it places taxes only on the willing. By the early 1800s casinos were established and riverboat and other types of gambling flourished in the South. By the 1830s religious concerns and lottery scandals were negatively influencing social views toward gambling.

By the mid-1880s western expansion fueled a second wave of gambling. To make the image of the states more respectable gambling was legally scaled down. Gambling in California moved underground and much of the activity was relocated in Nevada. Due to other scandals all forms of gambling in the United States ended by 1910 (Dunstan, 1997).

A third wave of gambling began in the 1930s and continues today. The financial stress of the depression after the 1929 stock market crash popularized gambling as a way to stimulate the economy. Bingo and horse racing were the first forms of legalized gambling, but illegal gambling continued in the East and Midwest. In 1931, Nevada legalized most forms of gambling anticipating a tourist boom resulting from the construction of Hoover Dam. Mobsters were involved in the early casinos, but they were driven out of the industry by the 1950s. After 1964, lotteries were legally implemented to generate revenue for states in light of strong opposition to tax increases. New Jersey was the second state to legalize casinos in 1978 making Atlantic City a popular tourist destination (Dunstan, 1997). Each wave in the history of gambling in the United States ended primarily as the result of public scandals and moral principles. These same principles likely have strong influences on the growth and expansion of casinos into new geographic markets.

2.2. Religiosity and gambling

Ellison and Nybroten (1999) point out that the Bible does not specifically address lotteries, however there are scriptural passages that do discourage gambling. These passages indicate that gambling encourages individuals to place their faith in luck rather than God's guidance, violates biblical instructions on stewardship, and suggests that individuals rely on luck rather than on hard work. Cotton (1996) notes there have been more Christian publications pointing out the evils of gambling than the evils of alcohol. Bernhard, Futrell, and Harper (2010) report that during the period from 1816 to 1915, gambling was seen as an individual sin; and numerous well known ministers delivered scathing sermons on the evils of gambling. Moran (1997, p. 50) states that "For much of the twentieth century, gambling was generally regarded as a pernicious vice, only slightly less unsavory than prostitution." There can be no doubt that religion and gambling are in conflict.

Ellison and Nybroten (1999) find religion does play a role in shaping one's overall views of gambling and state wide lotteries. Specifically, they report members of conservative Protestant groups are more likely to oppose lotteries; attitudes toward lotteries are related to religious attendance; and those believing that the Bible is the Word of God are less likely to support lotteries. Diaz (2000) reports that one's religious denomination influences gambling frequency, the level of importance placed on religion, and the frequency with which one attends religious

services. Diaz reports finding a weak relationship between the level of importance of religion and the frequency of attendance of religious services with the amount of money an individual gambles.

Buss (2003) writes that Protestants tend to view gambling as an evil which is the cause of both personal and social pain, whereas Catholics view gambling as not being wrong unless it becomes addictive or hurtful. Brown et al. (2003), find support for the conclusion that different faiths or denominations tend to hold differing views toward the gambling industry. Specifically, they find that Catholics are more positive toward the idea of legalizing gambling while Protestants are less supportive. They suggest that a more effective marketing strategy is to target highly Catholic communities when considering locations for a gambling facility. Richard (2010, p. 297) states, "Religion clearly has an impact on casino gambling legalization decisions." He notes that both Berry and Berry (1990) and Von Herrmann (1999) find significant negative relationships between religiosity and the adoption of gambling establishments.

Religious leaders forming a united front against gambling does not necessarily mean that all gambling propositions will be defeated. South Carolina passed legislation instituting a state wide lottery in 2000 despite the resistance of the clergy. While religious institutions ran statewide advertisements and the clergy wrote letters to the newspapers, voters chose to override those protests. Results indicate evangelical voters rejected gambling by a 2:1 margin, while mainline Protestants gave the proposal the needed majority to become law (Olson, Guth, & Guth, 2003).

2.3. Generational effects on gambling

In 1975, a national sample examined the extent of gambling in the United States. Results indicate a majority of all adult Americans gamble, a larger number of younger people tend to gamble, and a negative relationship exists between age and gambling (Kallick-Kaufmann, 1979). Since that time, there have been significant increases in the percentage of people who gamble within each age group. Jones (2004) reports that within the previous year, 63% of 18–24 year olds gambled, 68% of 30–49 year olds gambled, 69% of 50–64 year olds gambled, and 61% of those 65 and older gambled. Gambling behavior is evenly distributed over all the age groups. Chhabra and Gursay (2009) confirm previous results reporting similar gambling behaviors are present across all age cohorts, and gambling behavior appears to start early and continue throughout life.

While all age groups enjoy gambling, they have very different reasons for doing so. Shields (2009) reports younger adults express a strong desire to travel and this sense of "wanderlust" gives the gambling industry an advantage as many casinos and other gambling destinations provide fun and exciting attractions. Shields relates that the activities of family and friends have a major impact on the attitudes of college age gamblers, and males are willing to spend more on gambling than females. He indicates that because of this positive attitude toward gambling and travel among college age adults, the success of both the travel and gambling industries are closely allied.

Older gamblers express very different reasons for gambling. Loroz (2004) suggests gambling provides older adults with life experiences including fun, fantasy, and escapism. Gambling provides older adults with a diversion from a more sedentary life and gives them a positive outlook and a better social life. Moufakkir (2006) reports older adults behave differently than younger adults when it comes to trip spending and gambling behaviors. Elderly gamblers are not likely to engage in other forms of recreation while on trips to casinos. Typically older adults patronize hotels, travel on chartered buses, prefer to visit casinos on weekdays, prefer packages that include several casinos, and primarily rely on word of mouth to gather information about the casinos they are visiting. Casinos and other gambling institutions must understand these motivations to successfully market their products and services.

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