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Research Paper

Residents' perceptions of non-casino gaming in an urban destination: The case of Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to understand residents' perceptions of the impacts of non-casino gaming on an urban destination. Executed in Hong Kong, the survey research found that the level of community support was determined by residents' perceptions of gaming impacts, as well as their power, behavior, and attachment to their community. While positive impacts largely fell into the social domain, the negative ones were more often associated with the environment. Residents' gaming behavior had significant effects on their level of support of the activity. Direct positive relationships were identified between residents' attachment to the community and their level of support. Moreover, power relations were found to be strongly embedded in community perceptions of gaming impacts. The research contributes to literature on non-casino gaming and residents' perceptions of its impacts on the destination community. Findings from the study provide useful information for the planning, management, and marketing of both the industry and of the urban destination.

1. Introduction

In an urban community, gaming can be an important provider of leisure and recreation facilities and services for both residents and tourists. In Hong Kong, for example, Mark Six lottery and horse racing are important components of local culture and recreation (Wong, 2009), projecting an attractive image of the destination (Hsu & Song, 2013). These have a great potential to be developed as new tourist attractions. In 2015, the number of visitors to Hong Kong from around the world declined by 2.5% compared to 2014 (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2015). Tourists from mainland China changed their taste from shopping and sightseeing to searching for experiences more closely related to local culture, as well as exciting and relaxing entertainment.

There is a huge market potential for Hong Kong to develop gaming attractions that are not allowed in mainland China, but Chinese tourists look for a variety of entertainment and leisure options for a novel experience as well as for socialization and relaxation, which goes beyond hardcore gambling (Rosenbaum & Wong, 2015). Non-casino gaming takes the forms of lotteries, wagering on racing, and sport betting (Eadington, 1999), and attracts customers with unique products, services, and diverse lifestyles (Wu & Chen, 2015).

In an urban destination, the success of gaming depends on residents' support: hence it is vital that its impacts on the community

are often monitored and researched. Chhabra and Andereck (2009) reported that improved community perceptions of gaming would facilitate higher patronage and help showcase the recreational nature of the industry. Fong, Au and Law (2015) suggested that more research should be conducted on the impact of gaming so as to sustain tourism in (or to) a destination. Moreover, while residents' perceptions of gaming have been subject to investigation for decades (Zhou, Lu & Yoo, 2014), the models and scales used to analyze its impacts and understand community attitudes have been mostly developed in the context of casino gaming. Residents' perceptions of non-casino gaming have not been assessed under a theoretical framework. Western research has found that gaming is a form of entertainment that begins in early life and continues throughout one's lifetime, instead of being something to be discarded along the way (Raymore, 1995). Hence, it has far-reaching effects on the local community. In turn, understanding the impacts of gaming on a community becomes important, particularly as gambling research and policy efforts begin to focus on public-health considerations such as economic and legal issues, as well as on responsible gambling efforts (Blaszczynski, Ladouceur & Shaffer, 2004).

This study aims to gain a greater understanding of community perceptions of non-casino gaming through a case study in Hong Kong. A potentially important gaming destination, horse racing has long been a tradition as spectacular event or tourism endeavor (Kurtzman, 2005).

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Specifically, the research addresses the questions of what residents' perceptions are of non-casino gaming, what factors affect residents' perceptions, and their underlying relationships in China and, by extension, in many Asian communities. Theoretically, while the study tests theories and hypotheses, findings on gaming behavior and community attitudes are also useful in practice for destination marketing and management. Hong Kong was chosen for this study because it was one of the first cities to take the initiative to develop tourism as an economic pillar. However, the existing urban attractions in Hong Kong could not explicitly satisfy tourists' need for such gaming activities. Hence results of the study could also shed light on strategic planning of the destination in terms of how it may sustain its tourism as the 'Asia's World City'.

2. Social exchange and community support of non-casino gaming

Social exchange theory posits that human relationships are formed on the basis of subjective assessments of costs and benefits as well as comparisons of alternatives (Homans, 1974). Previous studies have used social exchange theory and adopted structural equation approaches to understanding residents' attitudes toward gaming and tourism development (Back, 2005; Fong, Fong & Law, 2016; Lee, Kim & Kang, 2003; Vong, 2008). It can be concluded that social exchange theory can be a valid technique for explaining the relationships between perceived benefits and residents' level of support of gaming development in their community (Ap, 1992). The theory would suggest that the more dependent a community is on gaming, the more positive its residents' attitudes are toward its further development. The theory is methodologically applicable, as residents can evaluate the impacts of gaming in terms of perceived benefits or costs.

However, while previous studies examine the structural relationships between perceived impacts and levels of support of gaming development, residents' feeling towards their community and their gaming behavior has been under-researched (Fong et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2003). Moreover, the core ideas of power that comprise social exchange have yet to be adequately integrated into the research framework on community responses.

Three categories are considered in building the constructs for this study. The first is the level of resident support, which is an important indicator in the context of casino gaming and is hence examined as the ultimate dependent variable in this study. In some destinations, such as Hong Kong, horse racing is one of the few activities in which gambling is legal, thereby giving it a significant advantage over other sports where gaming is not permitted. The most difficult and least resolved issues relative to the introduction of gaming in communities relate to social consequences, which have rarely received any attention in the field of lottery, horse racing and sport betting. For developing non-casino gaming opportunities as tourist attractions, planning is important and it should begin during the early conceptual stages. The second category contains perceived positive and negative impacts. These are chosen because they represent the effects of gaming on the community. The third category contains variables that exert influences on residents' perceptions of gaming impacts such as community attachment, gaming behavior, and power.

To elaborate, as postulated in social exchange theory, community's expression of support can be seen as a proxy of its residents entering into an exchange relationship through a development initiative (Ap, 1992). A community is likely to support certain kinds of industry development if its residents perceive that the industry could bring them more benefits than costs (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004). Over the past decades, the question of whether or not gambling is a leisure activity has emerged as an important issue in related research. Those who agree with this assert that gambling can offer various benefits, such as entertainment, leisure options, job creation, and tax revenues (Walker, 2007). However, opponents of gambling stress the undesirable con-

sequences such as increases in addiction and criminality (Hing & Breen, 2001). Some studies ignore the pleasurable aspects of risking money on an uncertain venture, and instead focus on gambling as addiction and pathological compulsion.

In terms of perceived positive impacts, most variables in prior studies are grouped into social-cultural, economic, and environmental constructs (Lee, 2001). When managed properly, gaming may help generate revenues to advance the economic and social-cultural development of a community, serving as an effective means to boosting consumer spending, generating tax incomes, and promoting other related industries (Li, Zhang, Mao & Min, 2012). Among the positive results of the casino industry, the most obvious benefits to the society are the creation of jobs and improvements in the prospects of local businesses (Carmichael, 1996). Rosenbaum and Wong (2015) further acknowledge the positive impact of gaming as a means of alleviating mental fatigue and strain. This health-related consequence of gaming means that it has properties that allow people to escape from boredom and daily routines as well as the ability to enjoy novelty while wagering.

Beyond the traditional casino gaming, horse racing and lotteries are more modest and easier to be accepted by family vacationers (McManus & Graham, 2014). Many participants do not get 'hooked': rather, they have considered racing as novelty, cultural experience, and sport (Neal, 2005). The recreational value for both tourists and residents generate the community support. Hence, it is hypothesized:

H₁. A positive relationship exists between residents' perceived positive impacts and their level of support of non-casino gaming.

Despite the positive aspects of gaming, there are evident negative impacts associated with this activity, of which problem gambling is a major issue and can have a drastic impact on a community if not managed properly. Lee and Back (2003) found that residents held stronger perceptions of some types of negative social impacts, such as gambling addiction, speculative gambling, increases in bankruptcy rates, and destructive effects on families. Socio-environmental problems (including worsening traffic congestion, air pollution, and crowding in the city) caused residents to develop negative sentiments or even resentment towards gambling development. In the case of Macau, the world's gambling capital, environmental deterioration caused by a rapidly growing tourism and gambling industry has become the focus of local media. These factors have made residents become more conservative (Vong, 2008). The rapid increase in traffic volume on rural roads leading to communities disrupted residents' lives (Kang, Lee, Yoon, & Long, 2008). Other negative impacts such as corruption, poor quality of life, and increase of crime rates are relatively intangible and hard to measure in reality (Chhabra, 2007). Crime rates are often cited as a negative impact of gaming (Stokowski, 1996). Consequently, such negative perceptions have affected community support in general. It is thus hypothesized:

H₂. A negative relationship exists between residents' perceived negative impacts and their level of support of non-casino gaming.

Moreover, McCool and Martin (1994, p. 30) defined community attachment as the 'extent and pattern of social participation and integration into community life, and sentiment or affect toward the community'. Residents who express a high level of attachment to their communities are more likely to regard tourism as both economically and socially beneficial (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004). Residents with strong community attachment are more likely to perceive positive social impacts from casino development and are less likely to perceive negative social impacts. In addition, level of community attachment influences perceived benefits and support. The higher the level of attachment, the stronger the perceived benefits among residents (Lee, Kang & Regisinger, 2010). Gursoy, Jurowski and Uysal (2002) found that the more attached residents are to their community, the more likely they evaluate the benefits positively and minimize the negative impacts. The following hypotheses are thus developed:

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