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Resident Sentiment: Preliminary Conceptualization and Measurement

A fundamental argument in tourism planning studies is that collaboration among all tourism stakeholders is a critical determinant of the success and sustainability of the development efforts (Sautter and Leisen 1999). Residents in the host community did not receive much attention in the tourism literature until the 1970s when “tourism impact” began to attract interests. Benefits as well as damages brought by tourism have been investigated at the local level where most of the impacts are felt (Lankford and Howard 1994). Extensive studies concerning local residents were thus carried out, almost unanimously aiming at identifying their perceptions and attitudes towards the outcomes caused by tourism development (e.g., Andereck, Valentine, Knopf and Vogt 2005).

Drawing from psychology and marketing literature, the authors propose the concept of “resident sentiment” to describe local residents’ overall perceptions, views, and emotional dispositions underlying their responses to tourism development. Correspondingly, a conceptual model on resident sentiment is structured, and innovative approaches of analyzing mass media/social media sentiment is proposed to generate supplementary insights to traditional survey approach.

As defined by psychologists, *sentiment* is “more general and more complex than an attitude or a judgement, and behaviour is typically implied (“Sentiment” 2009).” In one of his early works, Homans (1947), the pioneer of behavioral sociology and the social exchange theory, proposed that social behavior is comprised of three elements: *sentiment*, *operation* (activity), and *interaction*. Homans declared that sentiment itself cannot be observed, but rather it manifests in operations (e.g., facial and verbal expressions). Homans also asserted that the three elements of social behavior are interdependent; however, due to the lack of a sound measurement, the interrelationships were not examined empirically in his study.

Sentiment as a social psychological concept has been often overlooked by tourism researchers. On the rare occasions when *sentiment* was indeed mentioned, most likely it was used as a mere synonym for *attitude* (e.g., Williams and Lawson 2001) or as a convenient substitute for *attachment* (e.g., Williams, McDonald, Riden and Uysal 1995).

The literature review unveiled a general pattern of interrelationships among the key variables of interest, as demonstrated in the proposed model that outlines the antecedents and consequences of resident sentiment (Figure 1). While people have their own individual sentiment, they also share certain sentiment (actually a large part) with others (Heise 2010). There appears to be at least two levels of sentiment: individual sentiment and public sentiment. Individual sentiment, or in the present case, resident sentiment, is a broad and general disposition molded by experience with the external environment (Ryckman 2008), which includes tourism development, other residents, and destination characteristics. The social exchange theory as adopted in previous studies was to identify the determinants of resident attitudes by investigating the cost-benefit evaluation at the personal level. Thus, social exchange theory could serve as the underpinning theory examining determinants of resident sentiment, especially at the personal experience end of the model.

The aim of the current study goes beyond the investigation of personal level attitudes and the research team endeavors to unearth a more comprehensive indicator of the behavioral responses of residents, which include residents’ interaction with tourists, communication with other residents, and support for tourism development at the community level. This sentiment-

action/interaction interdependence is well supported by Homans (1947) and social representation theory (Fredline and Faulker 2000). As suggested by Li et al. (2015) that resident sentiment is something internal to each individual and social representations is largely a concept at the community level, the current study treats the social exchange and social representation theories as complementing rather than competing theories and explicitly incorporates both theories into the proposed model.

There also exists a synergy between the concept of public sentiment and social representation theory, as both of which are shaped and continuously reshaped by social interactions with objects and persons in the surrounding environment. Public sentiment is shared feelings and reactions resulted from dynamic, multilateral interactions among people, including hosts and guests or strangers (e.g., tourists), as well as friends and families (Heise 2007). The public sentiment is heavily affected by the macro environment, including socio-cultural, political, and economic factors. In today’s world, such sentiment is constantly shared and reflected by mass and social media, which also reciprocally cast influence on people’s individual sentiment. Hence, the authors conceptualize that mass and social media sentiment could serve as the proxy of a community’s public sentiment; and individual resident sentiment and public sentiment are naturally linked by perceived media sentiment, which is how individuals interpret and internalize public sentiment.

Operationally, individual resident sentiment and perceived media sentiment could be identified and monitored through both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Mass and social media (public) sentiment could be examined via sophisticated text mining approach, which could generate supplemental insights to the traditional survey/interview approach.

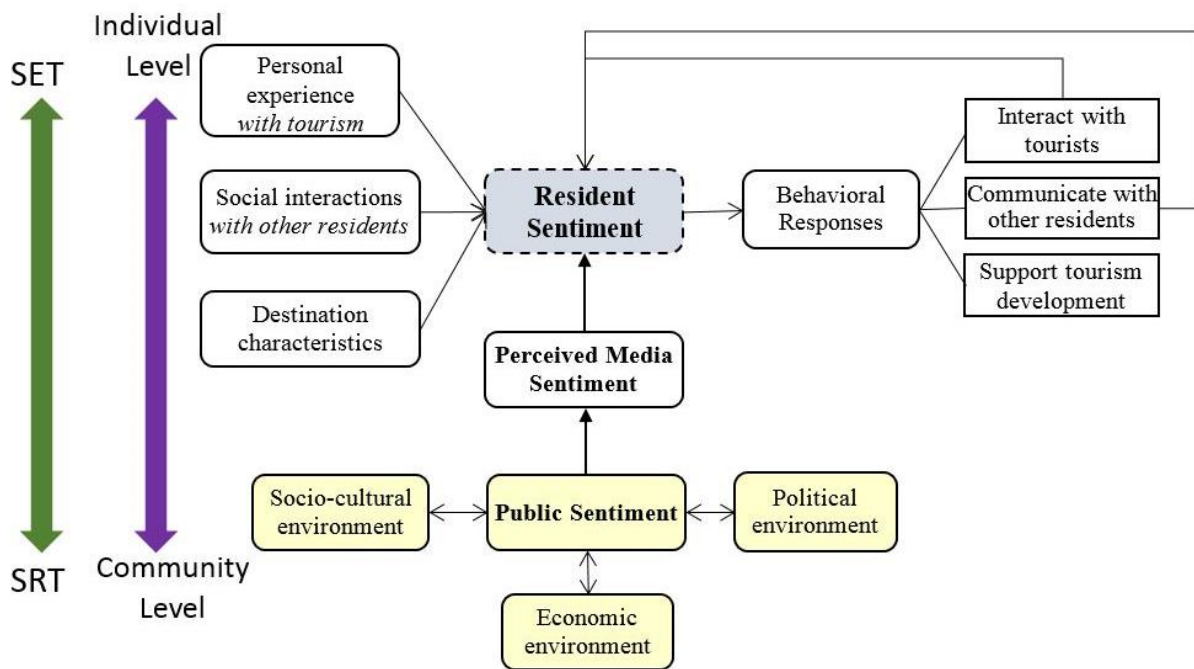


Figure 1. Proposed Resident Sentiment Model

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