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Toward a More Comprehensive Use of Social Exchange Theory to Study Residents' Attitudes to Tourism

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Abstract

Early studies on residents' attitudes to tourism were criticized for being atheoretical. As a result, it was not clear to researchers how, why, and in what conditions residents of a destination react to the impacts of tourism. To address these shortcomings, researchers started making use of a number of theories, among which, the Social Exchange Theory (SET) is considered to have made the most important theoretical contribution to studies on residents' perceptions of tourism. This paper critically analyzes the different elements involved in the social exchange process between residents of a destination and the tourism industry. It analyzes the core constructs of the SET and in particular, focuses on power and trust between the actors in the exchange process. The arguments suggest that researchers have failed to integrate these core concepts in a single study to investigate their influence on residents' perceptions of tourism and their support for development. The paper suggests that the power and trust concepts have significant potential in explaining community acceptance of tourism and if this field of study is to be advanced theoretically, then researchers should empirically test these concepts in an integrative framework.

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1. Introduction

Tourism has been a growing sector in several parts of the world. It creates jobs, generates revenues for the local community, promotes cultural exchange, improves infrastructure, and acts as a vehicle for environmental protection and preservation (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, and Vogt, 2005; Hao, Long, and Kleckley, 2011). However, while

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tourism has brought many benefits, it has also led to several negative social, cultural, and environmental impacts (Choi and Sirakaya, 2005; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2007). The industry has been found notorious for its ability to disturb, disrupt, and destroy local communities, undermining social norms, degrading social structure, and stripping communities of individuality (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2011; Ramkissoon and Nunkoo, 2011; Simpson, 2008). Such concerns have led to an increased emphasis on the notion of sustainable tourism development, requiring residents' input in the tourism development process (Choi and Sirakaya, 2005). A community's active support for tourism is a pre-requisite for the sustainable development of the industry. The extent to which residents' desires are met and their views are taken into account determines their receptiveness to both tourism development as well as visitors (Davis, Allen, and Cosenza, 1988). Through an evaluation of the host community's views on tourism, the industry's negative impacts can be minimized and appropriate policies put in place (William and Lawson, 2001). Residents' attitudes to tourism also have a significant influence on tourism development policies. Consequently, studies on this topic have been an important topic of research and continue to proliferate in the literature (e.g. Nunkoo, 2015; Nunkoo, Gursoy and Juwaheer, 2010; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2010; Nunkoo, Smith, and Ramkissoon, 2013; Nunkoo and So, in press; Park, Nunkoo, and Yoon, 2015).

Early studies on residents' perceptions of tourism were of an atheoretical nature (Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004) and this limited researchers' understanding of why local residents perceived and responded to tourism as they did, and under what conditions they reacted to the impacts of tourism. As a result of the lack of theoretical underpinning of early studies on residents' perceptions of tourism, Husbands (1989) argued that:

....one persistent problem in this body of work is that the theoretical understanding of residents' perceptions of, or attitude to, tourism is weak. This accounts for the general absence of explanation grounded in the social structure of the destination society. There is, so far, no theoretical justification of why people, are or are not, favourably disposed to tourism (p. 239).

In an attempt to address these concerns and provide a better explanation of residents' perceptions of and their support for tourism, researchers have started making use of a number of theories. Although many theories have been put forward to explain residents' perceptions of tourism, the most widely utilized one has been the Social Exchange Theory (SET, Byrd et al., 2009). Ap (1992) describes SET as "a general sociological theory concerned with understanding the exchange of resources between individuals and groups in an interaction situation" (p. 668). Researchers consider SET to have made the most important theoretical contribution to the field of residents' perceptions of tourism (Fredline and Faulkner, 2000). However, despite the wide application of SET by researchers and scholars investigating this topic, important constructs such as trust and power which are relevant to the exchange relationship between residents of a destination and the tourism industry have been left out and need to be investigated further. While some studies, though limited in number, have considered the role of power in explaining residents' perceptions of tourism (e.g. Kayat, 2002; Madrigal, 1993), with the exception of a few studies e.g. Nunkoo and Smith, 2013; Nunkoo, Ramkissoon, and Gursoy, 2012; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2011; 2012), the construct of trust has to-date remained under-explored in the literature. In this context, Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2011) argue that:

The core ideas of trust and power that comprise the SET have yet to be adequately integrated in a single framework in research on community responses to tourism. Tests of the SET, as well as its application by researchers investigating residents' attitudes have been based on an incomplete specified set of ideas, leaving out important theoretical constructs relevant to the theory (p. 966).

With this as background, the purpose of this conceptual paper is to address the above shortcomings with respect to the application of the SET to explain residents' perceptions of tourism. The paper discusses the dynamics of the exchange relationship between residents and the tourism industry. The different elements involved in the resident-tourism exchange process are analyzed. Power relationships and trust between the actors involved in the exchange process are discussed. The paper argues that issues of trust and power in a host-tourism context should be given more prominence by researchers and that if this field of study is to be advanced theoretically, then scholars should integrate these variables in their theoretical frameworks and test them empirically.

2. Social Exchange Theory and Residents' Attitudes to Tourism

SET has been popular in the sociology and social psychology literature and is considered to be one of the oldest theories of social behaviour (Homans, 1958). Emerson (1981) notes that social exchange involves two persons, each of whom provides some benefits to the other, and contingent upon rewards from the other. A few seminal studies which have contributed to the development of SET worth mentioning include that of Homans (1958), Thibaut and Kelley (1959), Emerson (1962), and Blau (1964). Homans (1958) emphasized on social behaviour in the exchange process. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) discussed how actors in an exchange relationship weigh the benefits of the exchange relation. Emerson's (1962) work related to the concept of power between the actors in an exchange relationship, while Blau (1964) emphasized on social interaction as an exchange process. SET is based on the premise that human behaviour or social interaction is an exchange of activity, tangible and intangible, particularly of rewards and costs (Homans, 1961). It analyzes how the structure of rewards and costs in a relationship affects patterns of interaction (Molm, 1991). SET considers exchange as the basis of human behaviour (Homans, 1961).

Actors in an exchange process are dependent on one another for outcomes they value. They behave in a way that increases outcomes they positively value and decreases outcome they negatively value and if the benefits from the exchange exceed the costs, actors engage in recurring exchanges over time (Cook, Molm, and Yamagishi, 1993). SET posits that all individuals' decisions to engage in an interaction process are based on the use of a subjective cost benefit analysis and the comparison of alternatives. Individuals engage in an exchange process once they have judged the rewards and the costs and will enter relationships in which they can maximize benefits and minimize costs. Actors will engage in an exchange if the resulting rewards are of value to them and the perceived costs do not exceed the perceived benefits (Ap, 1992). Interactions are likely to continue only if both parties feel that they are benefitting more from the exchange than they are giving up.

Social exchanges differ from economic ones in several fundamental ways. While benefits involved in economic exchanges are formal and often contractual, such benefits and their exact nature are rarely negotiated in social exchanges (Blau, 1964). Exchange of benefits is a voluntary action and entails unspecified future obligations. Benefits does not occur on a calculated or 'qui pro quo' basis (Konovsky and Pugh, 1994). There is also no guarantee that there will be a reciprocation of benefits. Thus, social exchanges involve uncertainty, particularly in the early stages of the relationship (Whitener et al., 1998). Like economic exchanges, in social exchanges, there exists an expectation of some future returns for contributions between the exchange partners although the exact nature of the returns is not known or negotiated in social exchanges (Blau, 1964). Social exchanges are also characterized by long-term fairness in contrast to short-term fairness that characterizes economic exchanges (Konovsky and Pugh, 1994). According to SET, the social exchange involves economic and/or social outcomes (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Whitener et al. (1998) note that exchanges may involve benefits with economic or without any objective utility and further argue that the latter may have a significant impact on the social dimension of the relationship.

From a tourism perspective, Sutton (1967) argues that the encounter between the host community and the guests "may provide either an opportunity for rewarding and satisfying exchanges, or it may stimulate and reinforce impulses to exploitation on the part of the host....." (p. 221). Supporting his assertion, a number of studies (e.g. Yoon, Gursoy, and Chen, 2000) demonstrate that the economic, social, and environmental elements resulting for the host-tourism exchange process affect residents' perceptions of tourism. The findings of these studies suggest that the value attributed to the elements of the exchange influence the way in which residents of a destination perceive tourism and determine the level of community acceptance of tourism development. "The way that residents

perceive the economic, socio-cultural and environmental elements of exchange affects the manner in which they react to tourism, which include the conative element of perception” (Andriotis and Vaughan, 2003, p. 173). The findings of existing studies suggest that in a host-tourism context, the elements in an exchange process include not only economic components but also social-cultural and environmental factors.

2.1.1 Power, Social Exchange, and Residents’ Attitudes to Tourism

Introduced by Emerson (1962) in social exchanges, the concept of power is a central component of the SET. Since then, the concept has attracted the attention of several researchers who have discussed the influence actors’ level of power on the social exchange process (e.g. Molm, 1991). Ap (1992) argues that inclusion of power in social exchanges is necessary because it determines the partners’ ability to take advantage of the outcome of the exchange. Power in a social exchange relationship is defined as the ability of one actor to influence the outcome of another actor’s behaviour or experience (Wrong, 1979). Dalh (1968) refers to power in modern social science as “subsets of relations among social units such that the behaviours of one or more units....depend in some circumstances on the behaviour of other units” (p. 407). Thus, power can be conceptualized as the capacity to attain ends, usually to produce intended effects on others. It is also important to note that power in social exchanges is not used in the context of authoritarian rule, but rather in a way to achieve mutual benefits between the actors involved in the exchange process (Ap, 1992).

Wrong (1979) notes that a common approach to conceptualize power is to enumerate the resources that enable an actor to exercise power on another. Power in an exchange situation is determined by the actors’ level of control over resources that another actor needs and values. A resource can be anything such as property, money, competence, knowledge, and skills owned by a person and that can be made available to others as instrumental to the satisfaction of their needs (Wolfe, 1959). March (1966) also suggests that power is a function of resources (e.g. economic, social, cultural, environmental, political), position (e.g. office, role), and skill (type of behaviour, alliances, and coalitions). Thus, from a social exchange perspective the word ‘resources’ is used very broadly and includes both materialistic and non-materialistic aspects unlike in economic exchanges where the focus is on ‘wealth’ as a resource for the partners. A partner with power is someone who owns and controls different resources which are available for exchange with the other partner. The greater are these resources, the greater is the level of power of one actor over the other. In this context, Ap (1992) notes that “power is vested in the number and availability of valued resources that may be used as concessions to influence another (p. 680).

Power relations can be extended beyond individuals to include community groups (Emerson, 1962). The resources owned by the community are important sources of power as they influence residents’ ability to influence tourism development in a community in order to satisfy their needs. From this perspective, power in the context of residents’ perceptions of tourism can be conceptualized as “residents’ ability to control the resources required for tourism development (such as labour, capital, culture, and natural resources) and to secure personal returns from having tourism in their community” (Kayat, 2002, p. 175). These resources determine residents’ willingness and ability to enter an exchange process with tourism actors and this in turn influence their perceptions of tourism development in the community. The role of power in an exchange process between residents of a community and other tourism actors involved in the industry can be better analyzed and explained using the exchange outcome matrix (Cohen and Bradford, 1990) illustrated in Figure 1. Depending on the level of power of each individual actor in a social exchange between residents of a destination community and other tourism actors (a resort developer in this case), the exchange may result in four possible outcomes. These outcomes influence the way residents react to tourism development in their community.

Quadrant 1 illustrates a situation where both residents and the resort developer have a high level of power. Both parties have a range of resources to exchange and as a result, there is a greater likelihood for exchange to occur. In this case, the exchange process results in mutual benefits for both parties as both of them find the exchange to be rewarding. In communities where tourism development is a priority, the resort developer is welcomed and is placed in a power-advantage position because the investor owns and controls an array of resources for tourism development. For example, Krippendorf (1987) argues that destinations which are eager to develop tourism should accept any price offered by the bidders. In such a case, the developer is given the flexibility of establishing and develop the tourism product without much interference and be in a position of control. As tourism develops, the community starts benefiting from the industry (e.g. through income, entrepreneurial opportunities, environmental

improvements, enhancement in living standards) and in return local residents are expected to be tolerant toward the negative impacts of the industry (e.g. pollution, traffic congestion) and be supportive of tourism development.

As tourism develops further, the resort developer starts losing some advantages it initially had and its influence over decision-making decreases because the developer starts becoming more dependent on the local community. For example, the local community becomes an important source of labour supply and this provides the residents with a source of power in the tourism development process (Ap, 1992). In addition, the tourism operator will also depend largely on the residents to display friendly attitudes toward tourists and to maintain hospitality toward the visitors. These in turn allow the investor to maintain market share, profitability, and destination competitiveness. In this case, both the residents and the tourism developer hold high levels of power and this leads to a balanced exchange because both parties share in the benefits and costs of development (Ap, 1992). In such a case, residents are likely to view the industry positively and endorse future tourism development in their community.

Power of actor 'B' (e.g. resort developer)

		High	Low
		Quadrant 1	Quadrant 2
Power of actor 'A' (e.g. community)	High	Balanced social exchange <i>Both actors benefit from tourism development</i>	Unbalanced social exchange <i>Actor 'A' advantaged and Actor 'B' disadvantaged</i>
	Low	Quadrant 3 Unbalanced social exchange <i>Actor 'A' disadvantaged and Actor 'B' advantaged</i>	Quadrant 4 Balanced unrewarding social exchange

Figure 1. Exchange Outcome Matrix based on Ap (1992)

Quadrants 2 and 3 illustrate a situation of unbalanced social exchange where either one party in the exchange process has a comparatively lower power over the other. The exchange may be advantageous or disadvantageous depending on the level of power of the actors. It is advantageous for the actor with greater power and disadvantageous for the one with lower power and in the latter case, the exchange is considered to be unfair. For example, if a destination has strong and well established environmental regulations and management control measures, it is in a power-advantage position because the tourism operator attempting to develop tourism in this destination is placed in a weaker position because it has to comply with these regulations while developing its product (Ap, 1992). If the operator perceives these controls to be unreasonable but still proceeds with the project, it is likely that the developer loses control over decision-making and feels a sense of dominance by the local

community. In this circumstance, the operator may develop negative attitudes toward these arrangements and may ultimately withdraw the project from the destination. This situation is illustrated by Quadrant 2.

It is also possible for residents of a destination not to benefit from tourism development in a destination (Quadrant 3). In this case, the residents have a comparatively lower level of power compared to the resort developer. This is typically true in the case of enclave types of tourism where the facilities, services, and the physical location of the resort fail to take into account the needs of the local communities (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996). Such resorts are normally controlled by outside developers and this leads to foreign domination by monopolistic control exerted by transnational corporations over ownership of resources and the organizational structure of the tourism industry (Brohman, 1996). Loss of local control over resources may adversely affect the social, economic, and ecological well being of the host community. Local population often find themselves in an economy with foreign domination where they cannot exercise control over local resources (Lim and Cooper, 2009). These lead to a situation of unbalanced social exchange, with the residents being in a disadvantaged situation. They ultimately display negative perceptions of tourism and become unsupportive of tourism development.

Quadrant 4 illustrates a situation where both actors in the exchange process possess low levels of power. In this circumstance, the resources used in the exchange process have little or are of limited value. This leads to an unrewarding exchange for both actors because they both derive only a little benefit from the exchange. In a host-tourism exchange process, this is unlikely to happen as it is usually normal for either one of the actors to have a comparatively higher level of power in comparison to the other actor. Thus, in normal circumstances, the scenario depicted by quadrant 4 is likely not to be applicable in the context of understanding residents' perceptions of tourism.

Using the power concept as a component of the SET, a few researchers have investigated residents' perceptions of tourism development. Madrigal's (1993) study on two Arizona communities indicates that residents' positive perceptions of tourism was positively related to perceived personal influence over tourism development, but negatively related to perceived business influence over tourism. Kayat's (2002) research on the island of Langkawi, Malaysia also suggests that powerful residents had favourable perceptions and were supportive of future development. Nunkoo and Ramkissoon's (2011) study on Grand-Baie, Mauritius also reveals that powerful residents were positively disposed toward tourism compared to less powerful ones. Although results of existing studies on power and residents' perceptions tourism have generally been conclusive, further research into residents' power with respect to tourism development under different contexts and forms of development should be carried out. Furthermore, the concept of power should also be integrated with the construct of trust which is another key construct of the SET.

2.1.2 Trust, Social Exchange, and Residents' Attitudes to Tourism

Trust is an important relationship and interpersonal construct (Leonidou, Talias, and Leonidou, 2008). Many researchers (e.g. Blau, 1964) emphasize on the role and importance of trust in social exchanges. Trust is important for building relationships that underlie economic development, legitimacy of government institutions and promoting outcomes which are in the best interests of the society (Gilson, 2003). Trust can be defined as "expectations that an exchange partner will behave benignly, based on the attribution of positive dispositions and intentions to the partner in a situation of uncertainty and risk" (Molm et al., 2000, p. 1402). Actors involved in a social exchange evaluate relationship in a behavioural context and look beyond short-term inequities and concentrate on long term benefits (Luo, 2002). Thus, social exchange is based on enduring long-term relations (e.g. between the host community and the tourism industry) as opposed to one-shot transactions in a market context (Cook, 2000) and unlike economic transactions which are conditioned by the legal framework, the persistence of social exchanges are dependent on trust between the partners. A partner's trustworthiness can be demonstrated when exchanges occur without any obligations to return the benefits or explicit 'quid pro quo' of transactions where returns are contractual and binding. Return of benefits should therefore be voluntary for trust between the exchange partners to emerge and develop as Blau (1964) notes:

.....the nature of the returns cannot be bargained about but must be left to the discretion of the one who makes it..... Since there is no way to assure an appropriate return for a favour, social exchange requires trusting others to discharge their obligations (p. 93-94).

For the purpose of this discussion, residents' exchange partner in the tourism development process is the government who wields high power in tourism policies and planning. Government intervenes in tourism because of political, environmental, and economic reasons (Nyaupane and Timothy, 2010) and controls development through formal ministries, departments, or councils (Elliot, 1996). Thus, trust is conceptualized as residents' trust in government institutions involved in tourism. Citizens' trust in government institutions is commonly referred to as 'institutional trust', defined as "confidence that political institutions will not misuse power" (Luhiste, 2006, p. 478). Trust in an exchange partner remains a fundamental concept in the emergence and maintenance of social exchanges between two parties (Blau, 1964). Trust stimulates cooperation (Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande, 1992), creates goodwill that preserves the relationship (Kumar, 1996), decreases fear and greed (Hwang and Willem, 1997), reduces risk in the transaction (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), and enhances satisfaction and commitment to the exchange (Anderson, and Narus, 1990).

The extent to which a partner has proven to be reliable in previous social interactions with another actor determines the level of trust the latter places on the former. Trust between exchange partners can be generated in two ways: (1) through regular discharge of obligations and (2) through the gradual expansion of exchanges over time (Blau, 1964). Trust is also determined by the expectations of one partner (e.g. residents) from another (e.g. government) in a social exchange relationship (Lewicki and Bunker, 1994) and the extent to which a partner (e.g. government) appear benign (Yamagishi and Yamagishi, 1994). A partner uses several cues such as benevolence, positive, and negative outcomes to assess the trustworthiness of another partner (Bhattacharya, Devinney and Pillutla, 1998). Positive economic and social outcomes resulting from an exchange increase partners' trust on each other and the commitment to maintaining the relationship (Blau, 1964). Farrell (2004) argues that the economic and non-material benefits resulting from an exchange relationship influence the level of trust between the actors. Citrin (1974) suggests that cumulative outcomes between political authorities on one hand and citizens on the other hand determine the level of public trust in government institutions. He further argues that institutions create policies and in exchange, they receive trust from citizens who are satisfied with these policies and cynicism from dissatisfied residents.

A number of studies highlight the role of public trust in regulatory institutions in determining the benefits and costs of an activity as well as its acceptability (e.g. Bronfman, Vazquez, and Dorantes, 2009). Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2011) argue that low trust in tourism institutions may hinder residents' acceptability of tourism development in a region. Using the SET as the theoretical basis of their study on the residents of Grand-Baie, Mauritius, their findings suggest that residents with high levels of trust in tourism planning institutions view tourism positively while those with lower levels of trust are negatively disposed toward the industry. The results of their study reiterate the importance of the concept of trust in social exchanges between residents of a community and the tourism industry. Thus, the construct of trust is a promising one and deserves further consideration by researchers investigating residents' perceptions of tourism.

3. Conclusion

Research on residents' attitudes to tourism has proliferated during the past years because of the importance of community involvement in the tourism industry. While the majority of studies on this topic have been of an atheoretical nature, some researchers have also made use of a priori conceptualization. The SET has been one of the most widely used theories to investigate the topic. However, despite its wide application by researchers and scholars, important constructs such as power and trust which underpin the SET have not been given enough attention in the literature. Although some studies have considered the role of residents' power to explain their perceptions of tourism, residents' trust in tourism actors and how it positively or negatively influences their dispositions to tourism have been completely ignored by researchers and scholars. This paper highlights the importance of trust and power as two important concepts of the SET. Integrating the two constructs together may provide researchers with a good theoretical understanding of why residents are, or are not positively disposed toward tourism development. The paper argues that these constructs deserve wider investigation by researchers if this field of research is to be advanced theoretically and a more accurate analysis of residents' attitudes to tourism development is to be made.

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