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The Effects of Sports Gambling on Young Fans' Attitudes and Behaviors in Hong Kong

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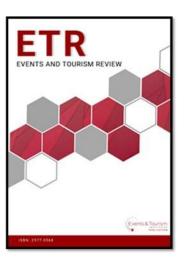
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Abstract

Sports gambling has become closely intertwined with sports. However, the effect of sports gambling on young adults have not been extensively investigated, even if it is expected that participating in sports gambling could influence young adults' attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, the purposes of the current study were a) to investigate the effects of sports gambling on young adults' attitudes and behaviors and b) to evaluate the quality of life of young adults in Hong Kong. A total of 160 young adults (80 sports gamblers and 80 non-gamblers) in Hong Kong participated in the survey. The results of t-tests revealed the differences between sports gamblers and nongamblers. Specifically, non-gamblers showed higher levels of sports fan identification, quality of life, BIRGing behaviors, prosocial behaviors, performance tolerance, and purchasing intention than sports gamblers, whereas sports gamblers had higher level of positive affect on sports spectating. Furthermore, the results of the multiple regressions indicated that sports fan identification and positive affect influenced non-gamblers' purchasing intention, while only sports fan identification had an impact on sports gamblers' purchasing intention. These results provided an empirical conformation of the effect of sports gambling on sports fan attitudes and behaviors, which contribute to our understanding of the destructive impact of sports gambling on sports fan experience.

Keywords: Food Sports Gambling; Young Adults; Fan Attitudes; Fan Behaviors; Quality of Life

Introduction

Sports gambling entails placing a wager on the predicted outcome of a sport competition. If the prediction is correct, the sports gambler will win a larger amount of money than their initial bet; however, they will lose their bet if the prediction is incorrect. Sports gambling began to spread across the world in the 1950s and remained steady until the beginning of the 21st century. However, in the last 15 years, the sports gambling industry has undergone significant changes and has become comparable to the traditional sports industry in terms of revenue generation (Turcu, Burcea, Diaconescu, Barbu, Popescu, & Apostu, 2020). The sports gambling industry has become one of the fastest-growing industries in the United States since the passage of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988 (Delaney, 2007). The advancement of online technology also has allowed bookmakers to offer people to place bets from anywhere with an internet connection. This has provided greater flexibility and variety in the types and locations of bets that can be placed, reduced the time required to place a bet, and facilitated gambling on a wide range of sports related events and competitions (Turcu et al., 2020).

The financial impacts of the gambling industry in the sports industry are significantly important to the sports industry. The gambling industry has become a significant financial supporter for many sport leagues and clubs as sports gambling provides a new source of income to the sports industry through sports sponsorship agreements (Turcu et al., 2020). For instance, Fulham became the first England Premier League (EPL) club to have a gambling company sponsor in the 2002-2003 season. In the 2019-2020 season. In the 2019/20 season, logos of gambling companies were featured

on the jerseys of half of the PL clubs. Without sponsorship and a financial relationship with the gambling industry, the sports clubs may be affected, the financial black hole may be resulted and affect the balance of the competitions (Sharman, 2022). It is expected that the sports industry would be further integrated with the gambling industry, resulting in both positive and negative effects of sports gambling on our society.

The current study was conducted in Hong Kong, where the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) is the sole legal avenue for sports gambling. In 2003, the government legalized sports betting for Hong Kong residents, recognizing their inclination to bet on international football matches to enhance their enjoyment of watching sporting competitions. Currently, the HKJC offers sports gambling platforms exclusively for two sports: football and horseracing. According to reports from the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau in 2016 and 2021, the average monthly spending on gambling activities with the HKJC has significantly increased. Horserace gambling has increased by 985%, from HK\$517 (US\$66) per gambler in 2001 to HK\$5,611 (US\$717) per gambler in 2016. Meanwhile, football gambling has increased by 129%, from HK\$700 (US\$89) per gambler in 2008 to HK\$1,599 (US\$204) per gambler in 2016. Football gambling contributes the most, with HK\$114 billion (USD14.56 billion) in 2018-2019. The lack of variety in sports gambling options provided by the HKJC has resulted in the emergence of illegal gambling in Hong Kong, as global online gambling platforms offer a wider range of sports and better odds. According to Tessler et al. (2017), the estimated revenue from illegal gambling in 2015-16 was HK\$12 billion (US\$1.53 billion), accounting for 25% of the total gambling revenue in Hong Kong, encompassing both legal and illegal gambling. Among the illegal gamblers, 21% started gambling before reaching adulthood, and 5% were between the ages of 18 and 29. Of these illegal gamblers, 84% had placed illegal bets on football matches, indicating a strong connection between illegal gambling and sports betting.

Sports gambling has become inseparable from sports in modern times. Young adults, who have recently reached the legal age for sports gambling, are the generation most familiar with the use of the internet and most active on social media platforms. However, despite their high level of attraction to sports gambling, the effects of sports gambling on young adults have not been extensively investigated. It is expected that participating in sports gambling could influence young adults' attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, the purposes of the current study are a) to investigate the effects of sports gambling on young adults in terms of sports spectating, and b) to evaluate the quality of life of young adults in Hong Kong.

Sports Fans and Sport Gambling

Sports Fan Engagement

Sport fans can be defined as "Individuals who are interested in and follow a sport, team and/or athlete" (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001, p.2). While sports spectators simply watch sports events, sports fans are more likely to actively follow the team and the sport, establishing a strong mental association with the team (Dietz-Uhler & Lanter, 2008). Therefore, the passionate fans demonstrate loyalty not only to their teams, but also to the players and the sport itself (Dietz-Uhler & Lanter, 2008). Those fans should experience more excitement when the team wins an important match and more disappointment when the team loses the critical match (Dietz-Uhler & Lanter, 2008) because they identify themselves as part of the team and share in both the triumphs and setbacks.

There are two levels of sports identity with a team: interpersonal and symbolic (Jacobson, 2003). Sport fans at the interpersonal level are often influenced by their friends, family, or local

teams that are tied to a particular area. They become fans in order to feel a sense of belonging to a group and to engage in interaction with the members. On the other hand, fans at the symbolic level become sports fans due to specific factors like team name, logo, and colors. Sports fans' engagement includes attending sporting events, watching games on television, purchasing team merchandizes, reading sports magazines and newspapers, and discussing the sport with others (Yoshida, et al., 2014). Sports fans' engagement can also be a regular, scheduled, and predictable group of people who frequently participate in and support the sports or teams (Mann, 1989).

Three good indicators can be used to measure sports fan identity: affective, cognitive, and behavioral (Dietz-Uhler & Lanter, 2008). For instance, strongly identified sports fans tend to exhibit higher blood pressure, experience more intense emotions, and derive greater enjoyment from watching sports (affective). They also demonstrate a deeper knowledge of the teams and the sport itself (cognitive). In terms of behavior, sports fans are more inclined to wear team apparel and use collective pronouns to refer to their favorite team after a victory compared to a loss (behavioral).

Sports Gambling and Sports Fan Engagement

People enjoy sports for various reasons, as it can offer them with self-esteem, an escape from everyday life, and entertainment (Jacobson, 2003). Additionally, other factors like economic benefits, aesthetics, and affiliation with family and groups can also contribute to why people love sports. Sports gambling has the potential to attract new enthusiasts and spectators to various sports. Furthermore, it can enhance the image of sports teams, improve their publicity, and foster the growth of the sports industry by attracting more sponsorships and providing financial support for sports clubs, as well as attracting fans (Turcu et al., 2020).

Sports gamblers can become sports fans because of sports gambling. For instance, sports gambling could transform individuals into avid sports fans. Sports gamblers closely monitor various factors such as point spreads, weather conditions, and injury reports during weekly football or other sporting events, much like dedicated sports fans (Delaney, 2007). However, the sport fain identity for sports gamblers is doubted. As stated by Delaney (2007), unlike genuine sports fan, who typically show high levels of loyalty, commitment, and identity, sports gamblers may not have a strong loyalty toward any particular team or sport due to the risk of financial loss associated with their betting. In other words, sports gamblers show their enthusiasm based on the spread of scores, the number of scores, and the results that they bet on. Considering the distinctions between genuine sports fans and sports gamblers, it is anticipated that sports gambling could negatively influence sports fans' attitudes and behaviors.

Sports Gambling and Quality of Life

Sports gambling has the potential to have both positive and negative psychological effects on individuals. Young people often have positive attitudes toward sports gambling as it provides entertainment, relaxation, and financial benefits (Ahaibwe, Lakuma, Katunze, & Mawejje, 2016; Goldstein, Vilhena-Churchill, Stewart, Hoaken, & Flett, 2016). Social relationship through sport gambling could have positive impacts on individual's mental health. Peer-based gambling is common, and it encourages individuals to participate in sports gambling (Ayandele et al., 2020). According to Ahaibwe et al. (2016) and Hanss et al. (2014), the peer pressure can contribute to a positive attitude toward sport gambling. Sports gamblers participate in sports gambling as their peers implant a positive attitude toward it. (Hardoon & Derevensky, 2001; Jacobs, 2000; Situ & Mo, 2016). The approval and encouragement of sports gambling by peer serve as a major motivator.

However, it is also important to notice sports gambling could bring the negative feelings like boredom, fatigue, and upset to sports, making it a double-sided sword.

Sports gambling can also have negative consequences, such as the development of gambling disorders. Individuals who participated in football gambling in Hong Kong had a 2.7 times higher probability of developing gambling disorder (HKPU, 2017). Gambling disorder often raised as a result of using gambling as a means to manage or alleviate stress. Experiencing significant financial losses in sports gambling can drive individuals to chase after more gambling opportunities. As a result, these gamblers may borrow larger sums of money to make up for their losses, eventually leading to the development of a gambling disorder (HKPU, 2017). This can have a severe impact on all four aspects of quality of life. Considering the potential effects of sports gambling on the attitudes and behaviors of sports fans, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1a. There would be significant difference between sports gamblers and non-gamblers in sports fans attitude.

Hypothesis 1b. There would be significant difference between sports gamblers and non-gamblers in quality of life.

Hypothesis 1c. There would be significant difference between sports gamblers and non-gamblers in sports fans behaviors.

Hypothesis 2. There would be significant relationships between sports fans attitudes and purchase intention for both sports gamblers and non-gamblers.

Methodology

Participants and Procedure

The population of interest of this study consisted of young adults in Hong Kong, specifically those between the ages of 18 and 26. A convenience sampling method was used. An online questionnaire method was employed to collect data. Approval from the research ethics committee was obtained prior to the data collection. The link and QR code containing a link to the questionnaire survey was distributed on various online forums dedicated to sports gambling as well as different social media platforms. As shown in Table 1, the survey was completed by a total of 160 young adults, comparing 80 sports gamblers and 80 non-gamblers. Out of the 160 completed questionnaires, 105 (65.6%) were male and 55 (34.4%) were female. 106 (66.3%) engaged in sports during their free time, while 54 (33.8) did not. Regarding the amount of exercise, 56 (35%) exercised for 0 to 2 hours per week, 60 (37.5%) exercised for 3 to 5 hours per week, 35 (21.9%) exercised for 6 to 9 hours per week and 9 (5.6%) exercised for 10 to 15 hours per week. Among the 80 sports gamblers, 47 played sports in their free time, while 33 did not participate in any physical activities.

Table 1. Demographic Information

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	105	65.6%
	Female	55	34.4%
Type of Fan	Sport Gambler	80	50%
	Non-Gambler	80	50%
Age	18-20	55	34.4%
	21-23	66	41.%
	24-26	39	24.4%
	Total	160	

Instrumentation

The survey for the current study consisted of 58 items, including demographics (e.g., gender, age), sports gambling habit, and seven constructs: (a) sports fans identification, (b) positive affect, (c) BIRGing (basking in reflected glory), (d) prosocial behavior, (e) performance tolerance, (f) purchasing intention, and (g) quality of life. The constructs were measured using existing scales in the field of sport management with some modification for the current study. First, sport fan identification was assessed using three items from the scale developed by Trail and James (2001). Sample items included "I consider myself to be a real fan of sports" and "Being a fan of sports is very important to me." Three items from Mazodier and Merunka's (2011) positive affect scale was modified to measure positive affect for sports. A sample item was "Watching sports games makes me happy." For of BIRGing behaviors of fans, three items, developed by Trail et al. (2012), were used. Sample items included "I would like to let others know about my association with my favorite sports team when the team wins," and "I would like to publicize my connection with my favorite sports team when the team plays really well." Prosocial behavior was measured using three items from Dholakia et al.'s (2009) scale to reflect fan engagement behavior. Sample items were "I often interact with other fans to talk about issues related to my favorite sports/teams," and "I often advise other fans on how to support my favorite sports/teams." Performance tolerance measured using De Ruyter and Wetzels's (2000) scale. Sample items included "I wear apparel which represents the fans of my favorite team even if the team has an unsuccessful season," and "I display the logo of my favorite team on my clothing even if my favorite team do not perform well." For purchase intention, three items were adapted from behavioral intentions scale from Yoshida et al (2013). Sample item was "The probability that I will attend an event of my favorite sports/teams is very high." Finally, overall quality of life was assessed using a single item "How would you rate your quality of life?" While quality of life was assessed by using a 5-point Likert scale, all the other items were assessed by using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The results

of reliability tests (Cronbach alpha) in this study ranged from .901 (purchasing intention) to .978 (BIRGing behaviors), which exceeded the recommended benchmark of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994)

Data Analysis

First, descriptive statistics were calculated to assess overall demographics, fan team identification, positive attitude toward sport, quality of work, BIRGing, prosocial behavior, performance tolerance, and purchasing intention. Next, a series of t-tests were conducted to examine the differences between non-gamblers and sports gamblers to test hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c. Following the t-tests, multiple regression analyses were performed separately for non-gamblers and sports gamblers to investigate the relationship between fan attitudes and fan's purchasing intention.

Results

Differences of Fan Attitudes and Quality of the Life

As shown in Table 2, the results of t-tests found that there were significant means difference between sports gamblers and non-gamblers for sport fan identification and positive affect (p<0.01), which supported hypothesis 1a. Non-gamblers (mean = 4.59) had higher level of sport fan identification than sports gamblers (mean = 3.04), while sports gamblers (mean = 6.06) had higher level of positive affect on sport spectating than non-gamblers (mean = 5.11). In terms of overall quality of the life, the results also found that there was a significant means difference between sports gamblers and non-gamblers in general quality of life (p=<0.01), which supported hypothesis 1b. Non-gamblers (mean = 4.08) had higher level of sport fan identification than sports gamblers (mean = 2.42).

Variable	Group	Mean	SD	t	p
Quality of Life	Sports Gamblers	2.42	0.84	-14.75	< 0.01
	Non-Gamblers	4.08	0.55		
Sports Fans Identification	Sports Gamblers	3.04	1.93	-4.86	< 0.01
	Non-Gamblers	4.59	2.09		
Positive Affect	Sports Gamblers	6.06	0.77	3.98	< 0.01
	Non-Gamblers	5.11	1.98		

Differences of Sport Fan Behaviors

The results of t-tests found that there were significant means difference between sports gamblers and non-gamblers for sport fans' behaviors (e.g., BIRGing behaviors, prosocial behaviors, performance tolerance, and purchasing intention) as shown in table3, which supported hypothesis 1c. Non-gamblers (mean = 4.65) had higher level of BIRGing behaviors than sports gamblers (mean = 2.81). Non-gamblers (mean = 4.27) had higher level of prosocial behaviors than sports gamblers (mean = 2.74). Non-gamblers (mean = 4.29) had higher level of performance tolerance than sports gamblers (mean = 2.03). Non-gamblers (mean = 4.43) had higher level of purchasing intention than sports gamblers (mean = 2.14). In fact, all behavioral constructs indicated that non-gamblers showed higher levels of the constructs than sports gamblers.

Table 3. Differences of Fan Behaviors

Variable	Group	Mean	SD	t	p
BIRGing.	Sports Gamblers	2.81	1.98	-5.74	< 0.01
	Non-Gamblers	4.65	2.07		
Prosocial Behavior	Sports Gamblers	2.74	1.92	-4.79	< 0.01
	Non-Gamblers	4.27	2.13		
Performance Tolerance	Sports Gamblers	2.03	1.71	-7.28	< 0.01
	Non-Gamblers	4.29	2.19		
Purchasing Intention	Sports Gamblers	2.88	2.00	-4.73	< 0.001
	Non-Gamblers	4.43	2.14		

Relationships between Fan Attitudes and Purchasing Intention

Separate equations regressing fans' team identification and positive affect on purchasing intentions were calculated for sports gamblers and non-sport gamblers (Table 4). First, the overall model for the sport gamblers group was significant, [F (2, 77) = 74.861, p < .001, Adjusted R^2 = .65], indicating that 65% of the variance in purchase intention was explained by team identification and positive affect. The Standardized Coefficient (β) indicated that team identification (β = .530, p< 0.001) had contributed to purchasing intentional, while positive affect (β = -.216, p=0.26) did not. Second, the overall model for the non-sport gamblers group was significant, [F (2, 77) = 246.71, p < .001, Adjusted R^2 = .86], indicating that 86% of the variance in purchase intention was explained by team identification and positive affect. The Standardized Coefficient (β) indicated that team identification (β = .642, p< 0.01) had a higher contribution than positive affect (β = .367, p< 0.01) to purchasing intention. The results of two regression analyses found significant relationships between sports fans attitudes and purchase intention for both groups, which supported hypothesis 2.

Table 4. Effect of Fan Attitudes on Purchasing Intention

	Variable	В	Adjust R^2	t	p
Sport Gamblers	Team Identification	0.87	0.65	11.63	< 0.01
	Positive Affect	-0.22		-1.14	0.26
Non-Gamblers	Team Identification	0.64	0.86	8.28	< 0.01
	Positive Affect	0.37		4.48	< 0.01

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to obtain a deeper understanding of the effects of sports gambling on young adults by examining its effects on their level of sport engagement and overall quality of life. Given the growing integration of sports and gambling, it is critical to understand the effect of sports gambling on young adults. Therefore, this study utilized a conceptualized model of fan engagement to assess and compare the effects of sports gamblers on various aspects of fan engagements including sports fans identification, positive affect, BIRGing, prosocial behavior, performance tolerance and purchase intention between sports gamblers and non-gamblers.

Effects of Sports Gambling on Sports Fans' Attitudes

The findings of the current study indicated that sports gamblers showed a lower level of

sports fans' identification, suggesting that sports gambling might reduce the sense of sport identification among young adults. These findings were consistent with Delaney's (2007) research, which also found that sports gamblers had low loyalty, identification, and commitment to consistently favorite sports and teams due to the experience and possibility of financial loss by wagering on their favorite sports and teams. In other words, sports gamblers prioritize winning bets over their genuine passion for the games, indicating a diminished sense of being true sports fans.

The results revealed that sports gamblers had a higher positive effect on spectating sports games than non-gamblers. The findings suggested that sports gambling might enhance young adults' positive affect since they become more excited and more pleasurable while watching sports games. According to Killick and Griffiths' (2020) research, sports gambling could increase sports gamblers' interest and excitement of sports spectating. It is because it could increase gamblers' engagement with the games and provide a feeling of excitement. For example, a sports gambler who has wagered on a particular team would closely follow the game, collect more information regarding the game, analyze relevant statistics, and pay more attention to the teams, which leads to an increased interest and excitement level while spectating.

Effects of Sports Gambling on Sports Fans Behaviors

In terms of sports fans' behaviors, the results revealed that sports gamblers exhibited lower levels of BIRG behaviors, prosocial behavior, performance tolerance, and purchasing intention than non-gamblers, suggesting that sports gamblers can be regarded as spurious sports fans as their main interest lies on the outcomes their bets rather than the wins of their favorite teams (Delaney, 2007). For example, they may not experience the same level of happiness and excitement, even if their team performed well or won, if they lost their bets. In this study, sports gambling had a detrimental effect on all the behaviors of young adult sports fans and their identification, except for positive affect, which may lead to the decline of true sports fans and spectators as the outcomes of sports gambling. Considering the significance of young fans and spectators in supporting the sports industry and generating revenue for sports clubs (Da Silva & Las Casas, 2017), the findings indicate that sports gambling may have a negative impact on the long-term growth and future of the sports industry.

Relationships Between Sports Fans Attitudes and Purchase Intention

First, the results showed that sports fan identification significantly contributed to purchase intention for both groups, while positive affect had a significant association with purchasing intention for non-gamblers. Although sports fans' identification could increase purchase intention, the results of t-test revealed sports gamblers had significantly lower sports fan identification than non-gamblers. Second, although the results of t-test revealed that sports gamblers exhibited higher level of positive affect, the results of multiple regression showed that the high level of positive affect did not contribute to purchasing intention. This suggests that the high enjoyment derived from sports spectating is not primarily driven by a genuine interest and commitment to the sport or team, but rather by the bets that young adults place. Therefore, for sports gamblers, sports gambling may not foster loyalty and long-term commitment, although the increasing excitement may provide them with temporary pleasure in the sports and teams.

Limitations and Future Studies

Whereas the current study provides valuable insights into the impact of sports gambling on young sports fans' attitudes and behaviors in Hong Kong, there are several areas that future research

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should consider for more comprehensive understandings. First, future studies should examine the effect of sports gambling on different levels of sport fans, distinguishing between high sports gamblers and low sports gamblers, which can allow for a more nuanced analysis of the variations in attitudes and behaviors within the sports gambler groups. Second, the future research should enlarge its sample size to provide more reliable results on sports gambling since this study had a relatively small sample size of 160 participants, which may have limited the utilization of more advanced statistical analyses. The enlarged sample size could increase the reliability and generalizability of the findings. In addition, qualitative approaches such as individual or focus group interviews could be utilized to provide a more in-depth and realistic findings of sports gambling on young adults.

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