

2008.01.14

Mixed Opinions and Less Support Persist with Hong Kong Disneyland

The last of a series of seven surveys of residents' opinions towards Hong Kong Disneyland conducted by the School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM) of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) found that residents' opinions towards the Disney theme park were still mixed, shifting more to the negative.

This longitudinal study undertaken by Associate Professor of SHTM Dr John Ap has been conducted since 2000 to monitor general perceptions and opinions towards Hong Kong Disneyland and its impacts. Telephone surveys on random samples of residents have been employed.

The latest survey included questions to address new topics and recent issues such as the Government's consideration to provide more funding to the Park, the need for new or creative attractions, and whether the adult entry fee offers value for money.

A total of 520 randomly selected residents were interviewed from 26 to 30 November 2007. The results have a margin of error of plus or minus 4 per cent.

The key findings of the survey are summarized as follows:

- Continued "support for the development of Hong Kong Disneyland" was observed, with 71 per cent of the residents in agreement with the stance. Only 9 per cent disagreed. The level of support dropped 15 per cent from the 2006 survey (86 per cent), hitting the lowest among all the seven surveys. The level of support recorded in the previous surveys ranged from 76 to 86 per cent.
- To gauge public opinions towards government officials' recent statement about providing additional funds for the Park, respondents were asked if they agreed that "The Government should provide more funding to HK Disneyland". It was found that 16 per cent of the respondents agreed with the statement while 63 per cent disagreed, including 17 per cent who strongly disagreed.
- Fourteen percent of the respondents agreed that the respective adult entry fee of \$295 and \$350 for non-peak and peak days "provides value for money", while 67 per cent disagreed. Given the price sensitive Hong Kong public and the median monthly income reported by respondents falling between \$8,000 to \$9,999, it is understandable why concerns exist if, on average, it will cost a typical family of four (two adults and two kids) approximately \$1,000, or one-tenth of one's monthly income, to enter the Park on a non-peak day.
- Regarding the statement that "New and/or creative attractions should be added to HK Disneyland", 90 per cent of the respondents concurred.
- Forty-eight per cent of the residents indicated that "the benefits of Hong Kong Disneyland would outweigh the costs". When compared to the 63 per cent in 2006, the level of agreement has dropped 15 per cent. Further comparison to the 76 per cent in 2004 when

the survey was conducted before the Park's opening reveals an overall drop of 28 per cent in agreement. The findings suggest that over the past three years the Hong Kong public has been losing confidence in the Park's ability to provide the desired benefits.

- With regard to “overall opinions towards the changes (i.e. impacts) associated with HK Disneyland”, 49 per cent of the residents indicated that they liked the changes. A 13 per cent drop from the 2006 survey (62 per cent) in positive opinions is observed. Most support was given to the social and economic impacts, including positive attitudes to tourists, cultural learning, employment, and revenue generated for the local economy. Impacts concerning the environment are the least liked, such as habitat of the Chinese white dolphins, and noise or air pollution from the fireworks.
- Regarding “the fairness of the deal with the Government providing \$13.6 billion for land reclamation and infrastructure to attract the Walt Disney Co. to Hong Kong”, 20 per cent of the residents (compared to 27 per cent in 2006) agreed that the deal was fair while 54 per cent indicated that it was not fair. The “fair” and “not fair” opinions found in the previous surveys ranged from 27 to 43 per cent and 34 to 56 per cent respectively. It is noted that there has been a downward shift in opinions on this item.
- In measuring residents’ opinions towards the current image of the Park, it was found that 55 per cent of the respondents indicated that their “opinions toward HK Disneyland have become more negative due to the problems that have been experienced since its opening.” On the other hand, almost one in five (19 per cent) indicated that they disagreed with this statement. A 15 per cent decrease from the 2006 survey (70 per cent) in the negative image of the Park is observed.
- When asked about “media coverage” on HK Disneyland, 55 per cent of the residents indicated that it was negative (compared to 61 per cent in 2006) while 10 per cent reported it as positive. In terms of the “fairness of media reporting”, 33 per cent indicated that it was fair (compared to 46 per cent in 2006) while 31 per cent thought that it was unfair (a similar result to the 2006 survey).
- With regard to the “media influence in shaping residents’ opinions”, 78 per cent indicated (compared to 71 per cent in 2006) that the media had little or no influence on them. This 7 per cent increase suggests that the media is losing influence in shaping the public’s opinions towards the Park.
- Twenty-four per cent of the residents agreed and 41 per cent disagreed with the statement that “HK Disneyland is a socially responsible company”. Compared to the respective figures of 28 and 47 per cent in 2006, the latest results suggest a slight shift in public opinions on this matter to a more neutral stance.
- As far as accountability is concerned, 90 per cent of the respondents agreed (compared to 93 per cent in 2006) that “As a publicly funded project, the management of HK Disneyland should be accountable to the HK public.”

- In addressing concerns for the management of the park, 81 per cent of the respondents agreed that “HK Disneyland’s communication with the public should be improved.” The figure is 14 per cent less than the 95 per cent in 2006, suggesting that communication with the public is improving.
- In the latest survey, 54 per cent of the residents indicated that they had visited the Park. Just under a half (48 per cent) were satisfied with the visit, while one in four (25 per cent) were not satisfied. In 2006, 31 per cent of the respondents had paid a visit, of which 56 per cent were satisfied. By industry standards, this penetration rate averaging 24 per cent per annum is acceptable, although the lower end.
- Sixty-one per cent of the residents agreed (compared to 67 per cent in 2006) that “HK Disneyland would complement rather than compete with Ocean Park”.
- Twelve per cent of the respondents agreed and 65 per cent disagreed that “most people would like to visit HK Disneyland rather than Ocean Park”. These were compared to the respective figures of 32 and 54 per cent in 2006. The 20 per cent drop in agreement with this statement indicates a loss of support for Disney.
- On the other hand, 75 per cent of respondents (compared to 79 per cent in 2006) indicated “that the opening of Disneyland would not reduce their future visits to Ocean Park.”

The latest survey findings reveal that residents are in general still supportive of Hong Kong Disneyland although the level of support falls to its lowest of 71 per cent since the surveys began. Residents recognise its contribution to the economy and the tourism industry of Hong Kong. They are concerned about the entry fee and any future financial support from the Government. Concerns about its accountability, communications, environmental impact, and the fairness of the deal to attract The Walt Disney Co. to Hong Kong raised in the previous surveys continue to persist. Hong Kong Disneyland still has a number of challenges to address and needs to appease the public over these concerns before it can gain the trust and confidence of the community.

Dr Ap concludes: “Knowing how the community perceives the benefits and costs of such a major tourism attraction as HK Disneyland is essential to the development, viability and sustainability of this joint venture. With the survey information, the HKSAR Government and HK Disneyland management can further improve this theme park project to address community concerns and to minimise its negative impacts - both actual and perceived. Sustainable support could only be attained when the community, at large, considers the arrangements are mutually beneficial.”

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