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# Metropolitan Shopping Centers in Hong Kong: Determinants for Sustaining Competitiveness

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## Introduction

From supplying the basic necessity of living to serving a leisure activity, shopping plays prime role in Hong Kong economy for its concrete linkage with tourism, one of the important businesses. During past years, Hong Kong faced criticism of its reputation as “Shopping Paradise”, Asian Financial Crisis, outbreak of SARS, execution of Three Links and the current universal financial tsunami, both tourism and retail industry experienced considerable pressure. Under rising demand and vigorousness of the contention internally and externally, management in shopping centers become a crucial element in achieving success in the retail industry and hence sustains the standing of Hong Kong as a whole.

## Scope of Work

Among various kinds of shopping arcades, metropolitan centers are of the largest classification that draw the largest population including visitors from other places in the world and therefore strongly influence the tourism and retails in Hong Kong. Hence, focus is placed at this category.

## Goals and Objectives

This study aims to make recommendations to the shopping management of Hong Kong for enhancing the competitiveness of their shopping centers through critical comparison among three metropolitan arcades in Hong Kong launched at different time periods in terms of performance, strength and weakness. In particular, three research questions are derived from the target chosen:

1. whether the more mature the mega mall, the better they perform or vice versa;
2. What is the degree of importance of various components for sustaining competitiveness?
3. Is there any deviation among the preference of locals and tourists?

Several objectives are thereby designated to be achieved as follows:

1. to observe the development of shopping centers, particularly the metropolitan centers and the retail industry in Hong Kong;
2. to identify the issues that confront the industry by exploring the environmental factors and the intensity of the competition;
3. to identify the components that a competitive shopping arcade shall possess through conceptual literature review and studying international experience;

4. to evaluate the competence of the chosen metropolitan shopping centers through comparison with the theoretical findings;
5. to investigate the effect of the degree of maturity of a metropolitan mall to its performance;
6. to determine the difference between the preference of locals and that of overseas shoppers;
7. to draw recommendations to managers of metropolitan shopping arcades in Hong Kong by concluding the factors required to maintain their strengths.

## Retail Trades in Hong Kong

### Shopping Center and its Classification

Shopping centers of various sizes and arrangements are all designated to meet two purposes — to offer an optimum retailing environment for the tenants and to fulfill the shopping needs of shoppers. Regardless of how scholars group the arcades, in short, Hong Kong' shopping centers can be summarized in to Convenience/Street Shops, Neighborhood, Community/District/ Regional, Specialty, and Metropolitan/Megamall/Super regional.

### Development of Retail Industry

Money generated from retail trade remains an important position in the GDP component. Yet it did not come to be so crucial at the very beginning. Before 1960s, consumption to Hong Kong people was merely for meeting basic needs (exclude clothing). They spent little time and money for entertainment. In mid 1960s, demographic structure changed and industrialization created tons of employment opportunities, rising of economically independent working youths gave rise to the popularity of inexpensive entertainment. Key tourist spots were

made lying along the coast of Victoria Harbour while tourist shopping was almost about souvenirs and high end stuffs purchase. Hong Kong's transformation into financial centre in 1980s further boosted the affordability of locals who started to hunt for quality and variety. However, pegging to the US dollar and inflation levied a heavy burden upon businesses, some stores could not sustain the rising operating cost and got closed at last. In late 1990s, housing price and rental reached the summit and then crashed due to the Asian Financial Crisis. Unscrupulous practices of shops in Hong Kong tourist shopping areas provided opportunity to cities nearby to defeat Hong Kong as tourist destination. Local consuming power was further weakened by outbreak of SARS, vigorous price competition was therefore observed in Hong Kong retail trades.

### Development of Shopping Centers

While shopping mall and retail industry grow side by side, malls also went through same phases. Traffic free stalls that were solely based on basic necessities of life were built during the resettlement program introduced by the government before 1960s. They were grouped as what they sold and serve as burgeon of shopping centers in Hong Kong. In 1960s — 1970s, early form of shopping mall with 3 to 4 storeys was developed to satisfy the needs of rising population. The shift of the service target to tourists from overseas enhanced the shopping mall culture to grow. In order to capture the tourist market, the malls were concentrated close to the main hotels or along the waterfront. This followed by the arrival of Japanese department stores that brought in the one-stop shopping mode. Along side with the rising of standard of living in the 1980s, shopping

facilities were well planned to suit residents of the estate and even attracted those living nearby. Yet, in late 1990s, it was hard to find place for mall investment. Metropolitan centers continued to be heavily relied on in establishing and maintaining Hong Kong the image of popular shopping destination in Asia. Some private developer built mega mall at industrial or commercial areas to create freshness to the industry and targeted the working group in these areas.

### Competition among Shopping Centers

Though Hong Kong is flooded with shopping malls, options offered to shoppers are limited. The major cause is the similarity of the tenant mix and facilities between them leading to the fact that they are often indifferent from each other. Survey carried out by the Planning Department in 2004 showed a majority would go shopping outside their district of residence, implying cross group rivalry further magnifies the overall competition in the market. Simultaneously, Singapore, Tokyo, Shanghai, Taipei are gaining popularity in promoting themselves as shopping destination. Foreign travelers currently possess a wide variety of choices in selecting Asian countries for visit. This therefore weakens the standing of Hong Kong in the world.

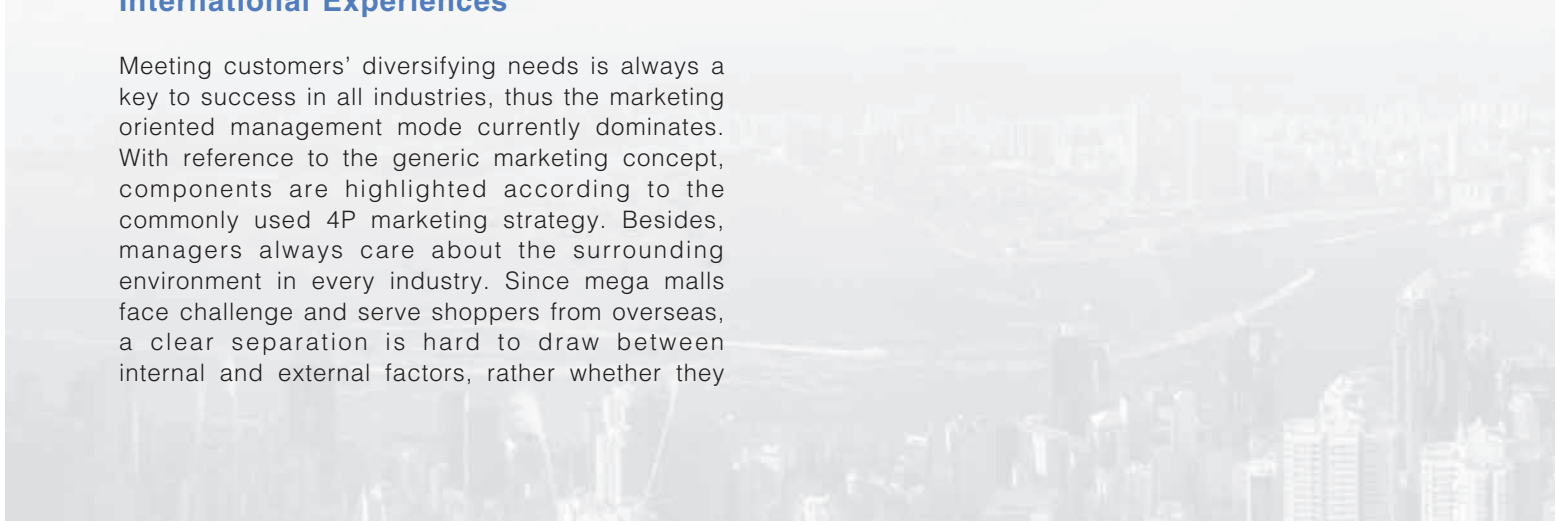
### Conceptual Literature Review and International Experiences

Meeting customers' diversifying needs is always a key to success in all industries, thus the marketing oriented management mode currently dominates. With reference to the generic marketing concept, components are highlighted according to the commonly used 4P marketing strategy. Besides, managers always care about the surrounding environment in every industry. Since mega malls face challenge and serve shoppers from overseas, a clear separation is hard to draw between internal and external factors, rather whether they

are controllable catches our sight. The above 4Ps are controllable factors whereas economic, demographic, political and legal, and technical are out of managers' control.

Though the paper placed focus on the metropolitan malls in Hong Kong, competition is not just happened within this small city, but internationally. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the malls in other countries. Mega malls in Asia like Taipei 101 and Parco Bugis Junction Shopping Mall while some situated outside the region e.g. Mall of America are considered and measured.

Elements for staying competitive can be therefore summarized by incorporating them into the 4Ps concept. Different indications are adopted to clarify the presentation (Environmental factors: underlined; *International experience*: Italic). Details are as follows:



	General situation	Facing Threats
<b>Works required at all time</b>	Frequent study of the trend on the economic, political and technical environment and the target customers, both internal and external including their affordability, age, nations, beliefs; Forecast accurately and response quickly	
<b>Product</b>	Tenant Mix <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— should cover different types of tenants and a bundle of anchor tenants in order to establish “one-stop shopping” for shoppers</li> <li>— <i>inclusion of features or tenants with entertaining nature</i></li> <li>— maintain balanced proportion of local and imported goods available in the mall</li> <li>— establish concrete linkage to international well known brands so as to keep high quality imported products available for shopping</li> </ul> Customer Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— <i>should be tailor-made particularly take care of tourists' needs</i></li> <li>— frontline staff should have at least bilingual or even trilingual communication skill so as to impress the tourists</li> <li>— <i>Prior information and news of the mall should be available for people in the world</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Stay flexible by regularly <u>change the mix to maintain freshness.</u></li> <li>— Keep high quality tenants</li> </ul>
<b>Price</b>	Price of Products offered by Tenants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— <u>degree of reasonability in price controls by people's affordability, product's distinguishing features, currency exchange, tax rate, travelling cost, etc.</u></li> </ul> Leasing Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— a tool to control tenants and maintain uniformity by means of lease term and requirement</li> <li>— tenant selection</li> </ul>	<u>Communications with tenants</u>
<b>Place</b>	Location and Accessibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— depends on attractiveness of the place and the requirement for entering a country or city as different <u>countries adopt differently</u></li> <li>— <i>external: near renowned travelling spots or major traffic hubs with well facilitated linkage to the mall</i></li> <li>— <i>internal: escalators, lifts, corridors</i></li> </ul> Space Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— tenant placement</li> <li>— degree of comfort render to the shoppers</li> <li>— match with the theme of mall</li> <li>— easy to understand and visualize by <i>clear zoning and directories</i></li> <li>— <i>iconic features and greenery</i></li> </ul>	
<b>Promotion</b>	Branding and Positioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— differentiated attributes should be desired by the target</li> <li>— effort is placed to sustain and strengthen these attributes</li> </ul> Advertising and Promotional Event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— continuous and ample whatever it is of sales, entertainment, cultural, community or educational in nature</li> <li>— higher participation of tenants could attain higher chance to success</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— <u>great effort on promotions that should be in line with target's taste</u></li> <li>— joint promotion</li> </ul>

Table 3.1 Components for sustaining competitiveness

## Methodology

### Analytical Framework

The study is adopting the focus-down approach to identify elements for the metropolitan ones to stay competitive in the market. The criteria below show how a mega arcade is defined as competitive with reference to the literatures. As customers' comments are crucial for their frequency and duration of visit, most criteria are customer-related.

Areas for Investigation	Measurement criteria
<b>1. Product</b>	
<i>Tenant Mix:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Types and variety of tenants especially the anchors and the entertainment providers;</li> <li>Expectation of shoppers on the kinds of tenants should be included in the mall and their choice on the tenants;</li> <li>Presence of any deviation on their expectation and the existing situation</li> </ul> <i>Customer Service:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Types of service provided;</li> <li>Shoppers' experience on using the service particularly when communicating with the frontline staff;</li> <li>Availability of prior information of the mall in terms of zoning, accessibility, types of tenants and promotional events available for those tourist shoppers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attract the most shoppers</li> <li>Create the most uniqueness</li> <li>Obtain the least deviation</li> <li>Experienced by most shoppers and get the most positive comments</li> <li>The most easement obtained by tourist shoppers</li> </ul>
<b>2. Price</b>	
<i>Price of Products Offered:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>shoppers' priority when choosing a product;</li> <li>whether they find it is reasonable to charge different kinds of goods</li> </ul> <i>Leasing Plan:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationship with tenants by looking at how often the management meets with the tenants;</li> <li>Uniformity of tenants and any deviation of tenants' facade to the theme of the mall</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Possess the most reasonably priced products</li> <li>Communicate most frequently</li> <li>Obtain the least deviation from the mall's theme</li> </ul>

Areas for Investigation	Measurement criteria
<b>3. Place</b>	
<p><i>Location and accessibility:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— reasons for choosing to visit and to shop in Hong Kong by the tourist shoppers;</li> <li>— investigate both internal e.g. design of corridor, escalators, stairs, etc and external like connection to the transportation hubs and any hotels, travelling spots nearby means of transportation;</li> </ul> <p><i>Space Planning:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— shoppers' impression on tenant placement and zoning, facilities provided;</li> <li>— presence of any difficulties and insufficiency in getting to shops or places they want;</li> <li>— shoppers' impression on iconic features (if any)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— The least entry barriers of the city</li> <li>— Possess the most convenient and most linkage</li> <li>— Obtain the most positive comments</li> </ul>
<b>4. Promotion</b>	
<p><i>Branding and Positioning:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Shoppers' impression on the malls and reason for they visit the mall;</li> <li>— Existence of any deviation from the brands or positions established by the mall</li> </ul> <p><i>Promotional events:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Events held in the year;</li> <li>— Participation of tenants and shoppers;</li> <li>— Shoppers' satisfactory level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Obtain the least deviation</li> <li>— Obtain the most participation and satisfactory level</li> </ul>

Table 4.1 Factors considered in the study



### Target of the Study

By considering the year of opening, size and occupancy rate, three metropolitan shopping centers, Harbour City, Times Square and Elements are chosen to be the investigating target of the study aiming to determine if maturity make better performance and the trend of Hong Kong mega malls.

### Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Data are generally obtained in the two ways, Direct Observation and Personal Interview. On-site visits to the 3 malls are performed to observe their facilities and space planning etc. Besides, interviews are done to both shoppers and tenants of the 3 malls during weekends and questions are designed according to the framework established above. The interviewees are picked randomly by convenient sampling. The target response in each mall for shoppers and tenants are 80 with half locals and half of tourists, and 10 respectively.

Data is then gathered, compared and evaluated. Since the study is qualitative in nature, analysis lays particular stress on descriptive information with the help of chart and table. Hence, their strength, weakness and deviation of customers' expectation to the actual situation are determined.

### Limitations

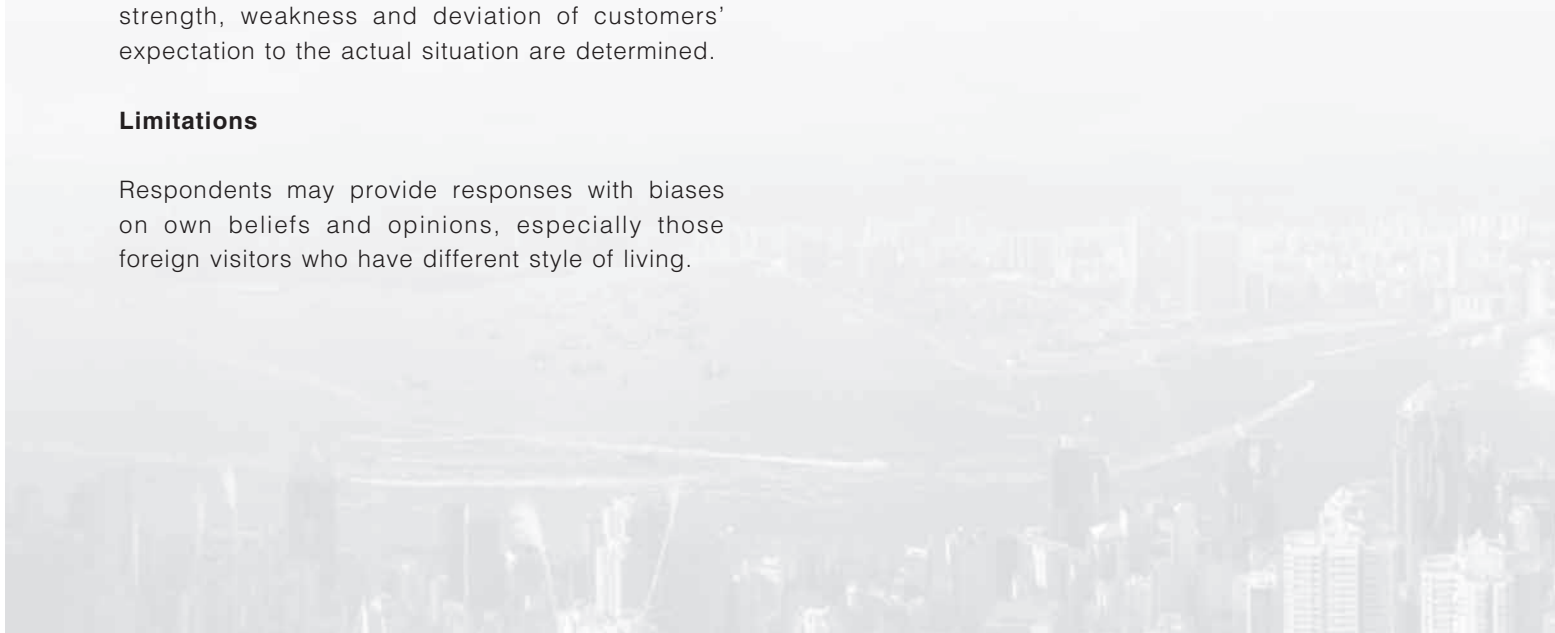
Respondents may provide responses with biases on own beliefs and opinions, especially those foreign visitors who have different style of living.

### Findings and Evaluation

Before individual evaluation of the malls, uncontrollable environments based on the literature review are taken into account first. Due to the coverage of worldwide customers, demographics are too board to focus and thereby neglected in the study, leaving the remaining three factors and are discussed one by one.

#### Economic Factor

During the study, Hong Kong, like other Asian cities, starts to get rid from the shadow of Lehman Brothers and financial tsunami, "the worst is over" stressed in the economic Focus by Hang Seng Bank (2009), where the pace of the global contraction is found easing. Though the whole world is shocked, new construction of retail property covering a total of 530,000 sq. ft. was completed in Hong Kong in 2008 with a growth of 2.7% from 2007 (Knight Frank, 2008). While China suffered relatively less and because of the currency advantage, most people own stronger purchasing power and continuously serve as target of metropolitan malls in the world.



Reasonable Price	23 19.17%
Diversity of Products	<b>47</b> <b>39.17%</b>
Special features of Products	29 24.17%
Tax free	36 30.00%
Low Currency Rate	31 25.83%
Others	0 0.00%

Table 5.1 Reasons for choosing Hong Kong to go shopping

In Table 5.1, survey on 120 overseas shoppers concerning their rationale for shopping in Hong Kong shows that the diversity of products (39.17%) wins most of their heart followed by the tax free (30%) and currency rate (25.83%). This implies both advantages greatly affect the affordability and budget of the tourists.

#### Political and Legal Factors

The government intervention that touches the scope of the paper is the entry requirement

and the attraction of Hong Kong as a shopping destination. As raised earlier, there is strong linkage present between retail and tourism, Hong Kong's attractiveness and immigration requirements exert direct influence to both industries. According to the Tourism Board (2009), nationals of most countries do not require visas and can be stay for periods varying 7 to 180 days. Also, the title of the fourth busiest international passenger airport in the world proves the ease of accessing this small city from worldwide.

Shopping	31 25.83%
Work/Business	27 22.50%
Diversity of Foods	<b>33</b> <b>27.50%</b>
Scenic Spots	11 9.17%
Visit Relatives/Friends	18 15.00%
Others	0 0.00%

Table 5.2 Reasons for tourists to visit Hong Kong

As shown in Table 5.2, most tourists are found to stick to either the diversity of food or shopping for travelling to Hong Kong. Continuous effort of the Tourism Board in promoting Hong Kong constitutes the major source of this survey result. Notwithstanding such contribution is apparently not relating to the operation of shopping malls, participation of malls and shops is of certain importance to give rise to its promotion especially those held in district basis.

### Technical Factors

Internet dominates in preceding decades for its instant and convenience characteristics. But to a mega mall, the key is to make use of this mean of information transfer and merge into its facilities that in turn contribute in attracting and providing easement to the shoppers. Based on the observation carried out, some facilities and services of the three malls are summarized as below:

Service/Facilities	Harbour City	Times Square	Elements
Wifi/Internet Service	Wireless Internet Service	Free Fixed Internet Service	Nil
Parking	Octopus incorporated	Octopus incorporated and self-serve payment system	Octopus incorporated and self-serve payment system
Lift/Elevator	Elevator used mostly	Elevator and Lift adopted; Two cross-floors elevators installed and functioned in October	Elevator used mostly
Entertaining Facilities	Cinema	Cinema	Cinema
Guide/Directories	Basic Directories on each floor with video showing	Basic directories on each floor	Basic Directories on each floor and zone with video showing
Others	Video wall	Video wall and Belfry	Indoor fountains

Table 5.3 Services and facilities with technical means of the three target malls



In response to the change in technical environment, the three malls are found to take some advantages to enrich its portfolio. However, whether they can help them to stand out from the pool is questionable because of similarity among them. At the same time, it is believed that technology is a useful tool to let countries overseas to know your mall and had been widely adopted

in other places of the world. But according to the survey, Table 5.4 shows the internet means of advertising the mall is far less effective than information offer by leaflet and tourist guide. It is probably because of the attractiveness of their web sites and the effort of government in promoting these malls. Individual assessment is performed deeply in later sections.

	Harbour City	Times Square	Elements	Total
told by Friends/Relatives	11 9.17%	7 5.83%	6 5.00%	24 20.00%
Tourist Guide/Leaflet	26 21.67%	26 21.67%	22 18.33%	74 61.67%
Magazines/News	3 2.50%	4 3.33%	5 4.17%	12 10.00%
Forum/Discuss Board	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	7 5.83%	7 5.83%
Official Web Sites	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%
Discover when walk in the district	0 0.00%	3 2.50%	0 0.00%	3 2.50%

Table 5.4 How tourists know the mall

Owing to the above opportunity and threats arose from the environment, the performance of the three malls are then examined in accordance to their adoption to react.



## Malls Performance

Malls under study represent various stages of shopping center's life. Harbour City, a mall at maturity, continues to stand at the top. Its image has permeated through the people especially foreigners (with 60% support, see Table 5.5), not merely because of the length of operation, its continuous improvement in details of mall e.g. design of guide and directories (mean score above 3, See Table 5.6), tenant selection ("Diversity of Goods" wins 42.5% support, See Table 5.7), also help in boosting its ranking to the highest among

tourist interviewees. Being a mature mall, Harbour City obtains an advantage for owning a number of renowned brands to invest and occupy its place as these firms aim to attain the favorable return from the standing of the mall. Yet, maturity does not guarantee success. When comparing with the recently launched malls, freshness is the most important ingredient and obstacle, a mature one have to retain and get over. Some may choose to carry out renovation, while some may enrich its tenant mix or revise details of the service provided. In past years, Harbour City undergoes these steps and maintains its standing.

	Locals	Tourists	Total
Harbour City	14 35.00%	<b>24</b> <b>60.00%</b>	38 47.50%
Times Square	<b>20</b> <b>50.00%</b>	11 27.50%	31 38.75%
Elements	6 15.00%	5 12.50%	<b>11</b> <b>13.75%</b>

Table 5.5 Preference of the malls

	Harbour City			Times Square			Elements		
	Locals	Tourists	Total	Locals	Tourists	Total	Locals	Tourists	Total
No. of Access Channel Available:									
Public Transport	3.56	3.45	3.51	4.36	3.55	3.95	3.30	3.70	3.50
Car Parking Space	3.43	4.00	3.48	3.94	no comment	3.94	3.36	3.00	3.31
Interior Design of the mall									
Zoning of Different Types of Shops	3.38	3.18	3.28	3.53	3.25	3.38	<b>2.73</b>	<b>2.85</b>	<b>2.79</b>
No. of Stairs/ Escalators/Lifts/ Passageway	3.40	3.08	3.24	3.46	3.00	3.23	3.08	3.00	3.04
No. of Signage/ Directory	3.21	2.83	3.01	3.32	3.05	3.18	2.85	2.48	2.66
Clearness of Signage/ Directory	3.20	<b>3.10</b>	<b>3.15</b>	3.32	2.55	2.92	<b>2.53</b>	<b>2.33</b>	<b>2.43</b>

(1: Poor; 5: Excellent)

Table 5.6 Mean score of other attributes of the mall

	Harbour City			Times Square			Elements		
	Locals	Tourists	Total	Locals	Tourists	Total	Locals	Tourists	Total
Easy and convenient to get there	10 25.00%	8 20.00%	18 22.50%	<b>19</b> <b>47.50%</b>	7 17.50%	26 32.50%	0 0.00%	5 12.50%	5 6.25%
Diversity of goods	9 22.50%	<b>17</b> <b>42.50%</b>	<b>26</b> <b>32.50%</b>	<b>12</b> <b>30.00%</b>	9 22.50%	21 26.25%	0 0.00%	4 10.00%	4 5.00%
Spacious and comfortable	12 30.00%	15 37.50%	27 33.75%	4 10.00%	6 15.00%	10 12.50%	5 12.50%	5 12.50%	10 12.50%
Goods I want can only be found there	4 10.00%	6 15.00%	10 12.50%	2 5.00%	4 10.00%	6 7.50%	1 2.50%	1 2.50%	2 2.50%
Plenty of events e.g. sales, cultural, etc.	6 15.00%	0 0.00%	6 7.50%	2 5.00%	0 0.00%	2 2.50%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%
Reasonable price	2 5.00%	4 10.00%	6 7.50%	<b>11</b> <b>27.50%</b>	10 25.00%	21 26.25%	0 0.00%	3 7.50%	3 3.75%
Entertainment features e.g. ice court, cinema etc.	0 0.00%	2 5.00%	2 2.50%	0 0.00%	5 12.50%	5 6.25%	6 15.00%	2 5.00%	8 10.00%
External design	1 2.50%	3 7.50%	4 5.00%	0 0.00%	6 15.00%	6 7.50%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%
Others: zoning	1 2.50%	0 0.00%	1 1.25%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%

Table 5.7 Reasons for shoppers' preference on malls



But to the local customers, accessibility, reasonableness of price and degree of comfort are key determinants for their preference. In particular, the accessibility of Times Square becomes the major rationale for most locals (See Table 5.7) like it the best (with 50% local supporter, See Table 5.5). When people start to familiar with and comfortable with its settings and ways it operates,

some may be bored, so this growing center in the lot focuses much on promotional events (See Table 5.8 and over 80% positive response See Table 5.9) and renowned tenants' introduction in order to upgrade its status. At the same time, its rather strong relation with the tenants (See Table 5.10) also helps to establish better control in pricing (Obtain the highest mean score in most items, See Table 5.11) that also is welcomed by tourists.

	Harbour City	Times Square	Elements
Festival	New Year Countdown, Lunar New Year, Easter, Valentine's Day, Father's Day, Mother's Day, Halloween, Christmas	New Year Countdown, Lunar New Year, Easter, Valentine's Day, Father's Day, Mother's Day, Halloween, Christmas	Christmas, Easter, Lunar New Year
Artistic	七小福 Photo Exhibition	Art Exhibitions of Jimmy's (幾米), Hung Tunglu, Yue Minjun, Carrie Chau, Chocolate Rain, Sui Jianguo	
Cultural	Sichuen Festival, Silk Road Art Exhibition	御馬金鞍	
Sales/Roadshow	Carshow, Beauty Care Brands' Roadshow, Mega Sales	Mega Sales, Different brands' roadshows	Dinning Redemption Scheme
Community	Workshop for kids	Love to Sichuen, Carnival with ECSAF	
Others		Bloc Mickey, Sunshine Beach, Hong Kong Film 100 years, Top 10 News	Lucky draw for Mainland visitors

Table 5.8 Promotional events held in the malls

	Harbour City	Times Square	Elements
Fair	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	2 12.50%
Average	4 28.57%	2 11.11%	7 43.75%
Good	7 50.00%	<b>7</b> <b>38.89%</b>	7 43.75%
Excellent	3 21.43%	<b>9</b> <b>50.00%</b>	0 0.00%
no Comment	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%

Table 5.9 Impression on the events that participated

	Harbour City	Times Square	Elements	Total
never	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%
yearly	4 40.00%	1 10.00%	1 10.00%	6 20.00%
half-yearly	3 30.00%	3 30.00%	4 40.00%	10 33.33%
quarterly	3 30.00%	<b>4</b> <b>40.00%</b>	3 30.00%	10 33.33%
monthly	0 0.00%	<b>2</b> <b>20.00%</b>	2 20.00%	4 13.33%
more than monthly	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%

Table 5.10 Frequency for meeting with mall's manager/landlord

	Harbour City			Times Square			Elements		
	Locals	Tourists	Total	Locals	Tourists	Total	Locals	Tourists	Total
Electrical	2.45	2.84	2.66	<b>2.75</b>	<b>2.93</b>	<b>2.84</b>	2.64	2.88	2.76
Fashion	2.05	2.69	2.37	<b>2.59</b>	<b>3.13</b>	<b>2.87</b>	2.47	3.08	2.78
Luxury	1.63	2.45	2.07	<b>1.86</b>	2.72	<b>2.30</b>	1.78	2.74	2.27
Food and Beverage	2.40	2.53	2.46	<b>2.56</b>	3.05	<b>2.81</b>	2.38	3.20	2.80
Sports	2.62	2.84	2.73	<b>2.81</b>	3.11	<b>2.96</b>	2.67	3.24	2.96
Household	2.28	2.60	2.44	<b>2.47</b>	<b>2.81</b>	<b>2.63</b>	2.44	2.78	2.59
Books, CDs, DVDs	2.49	2.91	2.66	2.56	3.00	2.67	2.68	3.08	2.78

(1: Too high, unacceptable; 4: Lower than expected)

Table 5.11 Mean score of reasonableness of product's price

Lastly come to the newly built Elements. Newly launched shopping center provides room for developer to test new features and allows public to expect. Regardless of Elements' least preference by interviewees (See Table 5.5), it had brought in new items and ways in operating a mall. Its multiplex cinema successfully caught locals' sight (with 30% of local supporters, See Table 5.12) while its idea in zoning and inclusion of art pieces

in different zone is also appreciated. Nevertheless, freshness cannot last forever in today's world and some features might not be admired by public. Elements' tenant grouping and unclear signs are some examples that hinder its growth in popularity (the least mean score among all, See Table 5.6). As time goes by, with a few fine-tuning on these details and the rising of familiarity among shoppers, Elements can be more competitive.

	Harbour City			Times Square			Elements		
	Locals	Tourists	Total	Locals	Tourists	Total	Locals	Tourists	Total
Electrical	6 15.00%	11 27.50%	17 21.25%	4 10.00%	12 30.00%	16 20.00%	4 10.00%	8 20.00%	12 15.00%
Luxury	1 2.50%	16 40.00%	17 21.25%	1 2.50%	10 25.00%	11 13.75%	1 2.50%	13 32.50%	14 17.50%
Food and Beverage	15 37.50%	4 10.00%	19 23.75%	13 32.50%	0 0.00%	13 16.25%	12 30.00%	0 0.00%	12 15.00%
Fashion	13 32.50%	7 17.50%	20 25.00%	21 52.50%	16 40.00%	37 46.25%	7 17.50%	14 35.00%	21 26.25%
Books, CDs, DVDs	2 5.00%	0 0.00%	2 2.50%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	4 10.00%	0 0.00%	4 5.00%
Sports	2 5.00%	2 5.00%	4 5.00%	1 2.50%	2 5.00%	3 3.75%	0 0.00%	5 12.50%	5 6.25%
Household	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%
Others	1 2.50% Toy	0 0.00%	1 1.25%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	<b>12</b> <b>30.00%</b> <b>Cinema</b>	0 0.00%	12 15.00%

Table 5.12 Product preference

## Recommendations

After investigating the metropolitan malls in Hong Kong and overseas, common weaknesses and opportunities are identified. In view of the diverse catchment of a megamall, whose coverage extends to worldwide, such tactics ought to suit the shoppers overseas as well. A brief summary is hereby drawn in the following paragraphs.

### Packaging of the mall

For efficient resources allocation, it is wise for the metropolitan mall's manager to organize functions or events in hand with the popular promotional campaign by the Tourism Board and HKTDC. With Government's help, name of the mall can be presented overseas. Developing a good fame for a mall is also recommended that requires the matching up of the fittings and furnishings of the mall, such that a spacious, comfortable and fresh impression can be rendered to shoppers. According to the survey, diverse choice of food is always the selling point of Hong Kong, mega mall is suggested to theme with its wide variety of food offered and take dining as its principal features.

### Knowing the catchment

Affordability of patronage catches the major sight of running a mall. Price reduction is usually welcomed but variation in price produces better outcome when it happens in line with some promotional events, particularly during jointly preferential price cutting when two or more tenants can be benefited. Besides, some tenants might attract more foreigners while some are targeting the locals. Tenant placement and facilities can also be designed according to this profile.

### Customer Care

Routine meeting with tenants serves as the best way to know shoppers' feelings and needs yet time consuming. Therefore, managers are advised to make use of internet and adopt the e-bulletins or e-news letters to broadcast information and interact with tenants. Also, random site inspection ought to be done to get more direct and instant feedback from both customers.

To a mature mall, when it is hard to differentiate with the upcoming malls with more advanced features, upgrading in customer service is one way to defense without much investment required. Ambassadors are suggested to act aggressively help those who seems to be in need and those overseas shoppers, and in turn their friendly manner helps in establishing the professional and considerate image of the mall. Metropolitan mall can imitate the practice in other countries to include parcel sending service or tour package offerings etc specially dedicate to overseas customers.

### Creating Uniqueness

Being a mega mall, the manager should be familiar with the trend basically. What's more is they are not just being a follower, but a trend creator. Incorporating iconic features which are difficult to follow and the quicker the installation can enhance pulling effect. One may consider adding social factors and hot items to draw the whole world's attention.

Coopting specific tenants is another way to sustain distinctiveness. During incorporating renowned brands to start its flag store at the mall, rather than blindly searching, attractiveness of particular kind of product in some countries ought to be determined in advance. Other than enriching the tenant mix, manager could aim to transform the mall into a retail entertainment destination by owning not just a multiplex theater, but merry-go-round or aquarium, etc.

## Conclusion

This paper concentrates the attention on metropolitan shopping centers in Hong Kong for their considerable contribution to retail and tourist industries, pillar to Hong Kong GDP. Three metropolitan arcades, Harbour City, Times Square and Elements, are selected to be investigated in more detailed manner. Among all, Harbour City recorded the most supporters owing to its wide product choice and spacious environment. However, maturity does not imply competitiveness. Common weakness of unable to maintain unique is derived from the survey result, though all three are performed on average. Indifference in tenant mix, unclear zoning with insufficient signs, lacking of memorable features, limited communication with tenants and customer care service lowers the attractiveness of these shopping centers.

Recommendations directing to these loopholes are finally pointed to the managers. They include packaging of mall, knowing the patronage, customer care and creating uniqueness. In particular, newly developed arcade ought to emphasize on theme presentation and its packaging to build up popularity, whereas the mature one is suggested to put more concern on customer care so as to obtain more opportunity to improve and differentiate from others in much less spending of time and money. The remaining two strategies are of the most importance that shall be adopted throughout the whole life of the mall instead. With the sensitive and creative mind, metropolitan shopping center's manager can turn the arcade into a well known shopping spot in Hong Kong.

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# A Study on the Relationship between the Housing Management Mode, Residents' Participation and Sense Of Community in Hong Kong

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## Introduction

Sense of community (SOC) defines communities' and individuals' lives, and influences their psychological and physical health (Long & Perkins, 2003; Sarason, 1974). However, the role of housing management mode in SOC has long been overlooked. Given the different building management mode in Hong Kong, the studies and references from the West deem unable to explain the situation in Hong Kong thoroughly. Based on the conceptual framework of various theories on SOC and participation, the relationship between residents' SOC and participation under direct management and the third party management modes, and the role of Property Management Agents (PMAs) in Hong Kong will be discussed.

## Literature Review

### Community

Gusfield (1975) suggested two concepts of "community", territorial concept of community and

relational perception. People in communities would involve communal relationships and that the two concepts should not be separate notions (Gusfield, 1975; McMillan and Chavis, 1986).

### Sense of Community

Sarason (1974) was the first to conceptualize the ideas of psychological SOC as *"the sense that one belongs in and is meaningfully a part of a larger collectivity, or among different groups in the collectivity"* (Sarason, 1974, p.41) and further identified that the ingredients of SOC involved *"the perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects for them, the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure"* (Sarason, 1974, p.157). A empirical research of McMillan and Chavis (1986) subsequently proposed membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs and shared emotional connection were four critical elements for the definition of SOC (McMillan, & Chavis, 1986; Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Rovai, 2002; Unger & Wandersman, 1985; Talen, 1999; Townley & Kloos, 2009).

These elements were later developed into the Sense of Community Index (SCI) to measure SOC (Perkins et al., 1990). The SCI comprises twelve items, reflecting the perception of each of the four elements of SOC. Assessment to the items was either by true-false format (Perkins et al., 1990) or Likert-type scale (Peterson et al., 2006; Mak et al., 2009) or a combination of both (Chipuer & Pretty, 1999).

### Limitations of SCI

Despite the wide use of the SCI, particularly in empirical studies, it was frequently criticized on its adequacy of psychometric properties and its validity (Chipuer & Pretty, 1999; Long & Perkins, 2003; Obst & White, 2004; Townley & Kloos, 2009). Chipuer and Pretty (1999) claimed that the items in the SCI appeared to be loaded on multiple

scales in the factor analysis, and the index could only support weak reliabilities for both overall SCI scale and the 4 subscales in their research on youth and adult's SOC in relation to geographic and relational communities. In other words, there was no dimensional consistency to the SCI both empirically and theoretically (Chipuer & Pretty, 1999).

However, SCI was not revised until Long and Perkins (2003), who re-evaluated the original SCI and argued that the confirmatory factor analysis would be more appropriate than the exploratory factor analysis to examine the fit of the theoretical structure to the empirical data of the SCI. They also agreed with Chipuer and Pretty's (1999) findings on adopting the one-factor scale instead of the four-factor scale of SCI to avoid the confusion in loading on multiple scales in the confirmatory factor analysis (Long & Perkins, 2003; Peterson et al., 2006).

In addition, Peterson et al. (2006) suggested that the factor structure of SCI failed to fit its data and the lack of psychometric properties might be attributed to the systematic error induced by the use of both positive and negative wordings. Although the mixing of positive and negative wordings was frequently designed to avoid respondents' bias and tendency to agree in researches, it could be problematic with studies of factor structures, because the positive and negative wordings would correlate differently with the measure of factors. As such, any negatively worded item in these studies is not advised (Peterson et al., 2006).

Moreover, the true or false response format of SCI was criticized to be over-generalized, leading to the lack of sensitivity, variability and reliability of the data (Long & Perkins, 2003; Townley & Kloos, 2009). With regards of the shortcomings of SCI as mentioned above, new measuring indexes, such as Brief Sense of Community Index (BSCI) (Long & Perkins, 2003) and Sense of Community Index — Revised (SCI-R) (Obst & White, 2004) were introduced.

### Development of BSCI

To enhance the psychometric properties of the new index and avoid complex weighting system of substantial community-focused cognitive constructs and behaviours, Long and Perkins (2003) diminished the factors that are generally regarded as closely related to yet distinct from the SOC in the new index. These factors include behavioural constructs (such as participation and neighbouring) and other cognitive-affective-perceptual constructs (such as community satisfaction, place attachment, and collective efficacy).

However, unlike the SCI, Long and Perkins's BSCI did not correspond directly with McMillan and Chavis's 4-component theoretic framework, but introduced 3 new factors, namely social connection, mutual concerns and community values (Long & Perkins, 2003; Long & Perkins, 2007)., which three-factor structure had demonstrated good fit across all fit indices in the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Long & Perkins, 2003; Obst & White, 2004).

Although Long and Perkins (2003) did not choose to use the 4 factors of McMillan and Chavis's framework, their new factors actually encompassed the concepts of membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs and shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). For example, Social Connection included some items on the Membership and Influence; and Mutual Concerns covered aspects of influence and integration and fulfillment (Long & Perkins, 2003; Obst & White, 2004).

As a result, an eight-item BSCI was derived partly from the SCI (Perkins et al., 1990), where 5 out of the 12 items in the SCI were adopted with an addition of 3 questions to rate the importance of people watching out for each other and if there is a quantity of SOC.

Nevertheless, BSCI was also criticized on its true or false response format, which decreases its variability and sensitivity (Long & Perkins, 2003). Besides, Obst and White (2004) claimed that there was little theoretical justification to support the new three-dimension structure on McMillan and Chavis's (1986) theoretic framework. The 3-factor structure of BSCI was also inconsistent with the 4-dimensional structure of SCI, making it difficult to compare previous and new studies using SCI (Obst & White, 2004).

### **Factors Affecting the Sense of Community**

Western researches suggested that SOC was related to numerous behavioural, demographic, external and psychological variables, yet literatures recognizing the same phenomena in Hong Kong were limited.

#### ***Behavioural Factors — Participation***

Long and Perkins (2003) considered participation, as a behavioural construct, closely related to yet distinct from the SOC. It was found that member's voluntary participation in community affairs had a relationship with the sense of ownership and satisfaction and cohesion of the community (Brodaky et al., 1999; Chavis & Wandersman, 1990).

However, there is no consolidated consensus on the relationship between participation and SOC. Heller (1989) ascribed SOC to participation, while some scholars proposed the opposite that residents with higher degree of SOC are more willing to participate in community affairs, such as being a member of the community association, attending and giving opinion in meetings, (Hunter, 1975; Wandersman & Giamartino, 1980; Florin, & Wandersman, 1984; Garcia et al., 1999; Itzhaky & York, 2000) especially when the community is facing some major difficulties or problems (Bachrach & Zautra, 1985).

#### ***Behavioural Factors — Neighbouring***

Neighbouring behaviour refers to some "*informal mutual assistance and information sharing among neighbours*" (Perkins & Long, 2002, p. 295), which could enhance the understanding of each other and get together to share views about problems in the community (Unger & Wandersman, 1985). SOC was found to be strongly associated with the degree of neighbouring (Farrell et al., 2004; Skjaeveland et al., 1996; Unger & Wandersman, 1985). Neighbouring also affects the tendency of resident to participate in the community affairs (Unger & Wandersman, 1983).

#### ***Other Factors***

Apart from the behavioural factors, demographic and socio-economic characteristics, such as gender (Prezza et al., 2001), education level (Prezza et al., 2001), home ownership (Perkins & Long, 2002), and years of residence (Chavis et al., 1986; Skjaeveland et al., 1996; Prezza et al., 2001), and psychological factors such as social support, quality of life (Farrell et al., 2004) and daily hassles (Mak et al., 2009) also affect the SOC of residents.

In view of the situation of Hong Kong, Mak et al. (2009) found no significant relationship between SOC and demographic and socio-economic factors. This discrepancy may be attributed to the unique cultural and socio-economical backgrounds (Sagy et al., 1996; Sonn & Fisher, 1996; Forrest et al., 2002; Mak et al., 2009;), geographical setting, housing form, urbanization (Mak et al., 2009), physical setting of housing estates and the heterogeneous nature of resident composition (Unger & Wandersman, 1982).

### **Analysis**

To identify the relationship among SOC, participation and the housing management mode (with or without a PMA), 52 questionnaire samples were collected from participants living in 16 private

single block buildings in To Kwa Wan, Wong Tai Sin and Yau Tsim Mong districts. Among these 16 buildings, 4 were managed by external PMAs and the others were self-managed.

A 24-item questionnaire was designed to measure residents' SOC by a modified BSCI, to investigate the degree of resident participation and whom the residents would rely on when dealing with problems regarding building affairs, and to understand how different variables affect residents' SOC.

The levels of SOC of the respondent were measured by the sum of the scores of the eight items of BSCI, with a total rating of 40. Resident's participation in community affairs was assessed from four aspects with maximum scores of 20 as each of the four questions was answered with reference to a five-point Likert scale.

Statistical analyses, namely, regression model and t-test were applied to test the relationships between SOC and participation, between management mode and SOC, and between management mode and participation.

The results of the survey and statistical analysis are summarized as follows:

- The total BSCI scores of respondents ranged between 13 and 40 and the average was 23. Among the three subscales of BSCI, average rating on community value was the highest (3.37), followed by mutual concern (3.13) and the lowest was social connection (2.29). In general, respondents desired to feel a SOC with the people in the same building although this expectation might not be satisfied at the present time.
- The results for resident's participation ranged between 4 and 17 and the average score was 10.7. Respondents were more likely to pay attention to notice and updates of the buildings than attending meeting or participating in discussion or decision making of the building affairs.

- The regression results indicated a positive relationship between the SOC and participation at 5% significance level.
- The t-test analysis suggested that residents living in buildings managed by PMAs have significantly (at 5% level) stronger SOC than those living in self-managed buildings.
- Also, residents living in buildings managed by PMAs were significantly (at 5% level) more participative than those living in self-managed buildings.
- Socio-demographic factors were found statistically insignificant in this study. One tailed t-tests suggested insignificant relations between gender and SOC and resident participation respectively ( $P = 0.13$  for SOC and  $0.36$  for participation,  $\alpha = 0.05$ ). In addition, other factors such as length of residence, household size, income, education level, age and employment status deemed statistically insignificant to explain the occurrence of residents' SOC and participation in regression model.

## Discussion

### Reciprocal Relationship between SOC and Resident's Participation

The survey found that the overall level SOC and participation among the respondents are average. In the recent decades, the continuous improvement in socio-economic condition encourages the emphasis on living quality and personal privacy while weakened the need for social connection. Also, urbanization and advancement of transportation networks increase mobility of the residents, so they do not need to rely on the local community for social support (Mak et al., 2009). The social connection further reduced by the lack of communal recreational facility within the selected buildings, such as club house. Unlike the early public housing estates, sanitary facilities

and kitchens are now furnished within the housing units. The opportunity of meeting other residents is largely reduced.

The degree of mutual concern between resident may be affected by the management mode and heterogeneous in resident composition (Unger & Wandersman, 1982). If there is PMA or management party in the estate, residents tend to leave the problems and management issues to them. And if they do not know their neighbours, it is less likely for them to know others' needs and value, and watch after each other and render help to neighbours.

In this study, the items of participation were focused on the concern and decision making on community affairs in formal occasions such as owners meeting. Among the four aspects, residents tended to limit their participation in reading notices which might have immediate influences to their daily life rather than attending meeting.

In view of individual SOC and participation, the regression model revealed a positive relationship between them. The feeling of being part of the community raised residents' concern and contribution to community affairs like sharing their views and attending meeting. On the other hand, through participation in these meeting and updates of the buildings, residents could know other residents in the building, express their own needs, increase mutual understanding, and solve problems together. The positive experience from these interaction and fulfillment of needs through discussion and problem solving could enhance the feelings of ownership of the community (Hunter, 1953), reinforce the social connection and mutual concern and develop a shared community value within the community.

#### **PMAs Stimulated Residents' SOC in Private Residential Buildings in Hong Kong**

The statistical result suggested that PMAs played an important role in enhancing SOC among residents in the same building. PMAs strived to

provide variety of services and activities in the managed buildings for enhancing their image in the industry, maintaining a quality assurance among the practitioners, as well as strengthening the connections between the residents and encouraging them to help each other.

In buildings managed by PMAs, the majority would rely on PMAs to solve the problems arise. This showed that the residents recognized the function and capacity of PMAs for improving the building welfare and were more willing to pass the responsibilities of maintaining the building in good condition to PMAs, and reduced direct participation.

Contrarily, given there was no available assistance from specified agents in buildings without PMAs, residents could only rely on themselves or neighbours when problems arose. It may appear that interaction among residents was encouraged, yet this does not guarantee a higher SOC, as other factors should also be considered. Residents from these buildings would also seek help from the managing parties, such as Incorporated Owners (IOs), Owner's Committee (OC) and the mutual aid committees. However, some residents were uncertain of whom they could seek help from. This uncertainty might suggest that the management bodies were not properly introduced to the residents, or they were rarely involved in the building management affairs. These residents may develop a sense of helplessness and detachment from the community, which would further decrease their SOC.

Alternatively, the result might also be explained by the negative performance of PMAs. If a PMA did not perform satisfactorily, residents would take collective action to attain their expected services. In this case, residents would express their views and reject the PMA's ideas in OC meetings, and try to gain support from others to consolidate their powers in passing or rejecting resolutions in meetings. Thus, residents' SOC was developed.

### PMAs Stimulated Residents' Participation in Private Residential Buildings in Hong Kong

With the support of PMA in terms of professionalism in property management, residents were more willing to participate in building issues. Meanwhile, residents living in self-managed buildings were not eager to voice out their needs and monitor building matters due to liability issues. If IOs were the managing party of the building, residents would recognize their experiences in managing the building instead of their professionalism in property management. Since IOs obtained no knowledge of property management and were afraid of their own faults in any building affairs, they were less likely to participate in building affairs, avoiding possible legal liability.

### Conclusion

The survey suggested that most respondents thought that feeling a SOC with people in the building was important. However, the average rating of actual feeling of the SOC with others in the building was lower than their expectation, implying that there was a gap between their need and attainment of SOC. The gaps in samples without PMAs were greater than that with PMAs. The lower average participation score of the residents from non-PMA buildings might suggest the absence of participation platform for residents. As SOC is related to resident participation, in order to reduce the gap between residents' need and attainment of SOC, resident participation, especially in non-PMA buildings should be encouraged through the establishment of other managing parties. In this regard, the government should encourage and reinforce the establishment the IO in buildings, especially for the buildings without PMAs.

Furthermore, most residents recognized PMAs' function in maintaining and improving the building environment when problems arose. However, even though the PMAs were highly involved in the building affairs, they did not have a

close relationship with the residents. From the participants' response, residents only had vague impression of PMAs' existence. PMAs should try to build up a more noticeable image through more proactive interaction with the residents.

Relationship between residents' participation and SOC under direct and third party management modes was also studied. The linkage between SOC and residents' participation, as shown in the statistical test, reciprocates by varying the degree of sense of belonging, fulfillment and mutual understanding of the residents. The result also indicated that the existence of external management agency had a positive effect on both SOC and participation. Since SOC and residents' participation affect each other, the influence of PMA on SOC and residents' participation may be exerted directly or indirectly via the other as illustrated in figure 1.

PMAs could enhance residents' participations by providing more meeting channels, but their existence may also discourage residents to express opinions and leave the responsibility of problem solving to them. On the other hand, PMAs organize various kinds of recreational activities to bring residents together and help cultivating the social network and the SOC.

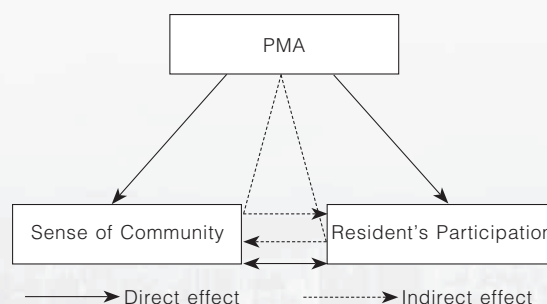


Figure 1: Interactions between PMA, SOC and residents' participation

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