Coopetitive behaviours in an informal tourism economy

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A B S T R A C T
In the business literature, coopetition is defined as simultaneous cooperative and competitive activities among actors. In the informal economy, norms and trust take the place of formal contracts among actors and may allow these actors to move from engaging in competition to cooperation easily suggesting that patterns of coopetition in this context might be different to that in the formal economy. This research explores coopetition among informal tourism economy actors using the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework and the concept of shared resources. The results of qualitative case studies of pedicab drivers and street vendors in Yogyakarta indicate that simultaneous coopetition occurs when the actors share multiple resources while sequential coopetition occurs in the context of a single shared resource.

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Introduction

Since the 1970s, the term informal economy has been used to describe people, usually in less developed and developing countries, who are engaged in work that is not contracted employment or self-employment (Todaro & Smith, 2012). These workers are generally poor, unskilled and disadvantaged and work in the informal sector for a variety of reasons including an inability to access formal employment markets. Their work is often casual and the wages generally lower than those in similar positions in the formal sector (Hart, 2006). Yet, in spite of the conditions, for the poor or disadvantaged, such employment may be the only opportunity for survival (Meagher, 2005; Rakodi & Lloyd-Jones, 2002). Informal activities are often found in tourist spaces, and can include street vendors who cluster around tourist coaches and try to sell their goods, and beach boys who try to befriend tourists as guides (Bah & Goodwin, 2003). Street food vendors, market holders and local transport providers may also work within the informal economy in some countries. In some destinations, informal economic activities such as market vendors may become iconic attractions (Kermath & Thomas, 1992) and a key part of the destination’s tourism product.

The tourism-related income from informal activities can benefit a community significantly (Cukier, 2002; Ketchen, Ireland, & Webb, 2014; Slocum, Backman, & Robinson, 2011). However informal economy workers face challenges including government regulations that constrain their access to resources, such as capital and retail space (Bhowmik, 2005; Donovan,
Coopetition originated in game theory, recognizing competition with others as a zero-sum game and cooperation as a positive-sum game that emphasizes mutual benefits (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1995; Padula & Dagnino, 2007; Palmer, 2000). Coopetition is a variable-positive-sum game that presents mutual gain, but does not necessarily bestow fair benefits on partners (Dagnino & Padula, 2002). Coopetition is a complex strategy as the partners have to cooperate without ignoring their own interest, and compete without eliminating their competitors (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996).

Previous studies have identified patterns of coopetition based on the types of relationships that exist among actors. For example, horizontal relationships are commonly found in the manufacturing industry and involve simultaneous direct competitive and cooperative interactions among members of a product(s) value chain (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000). An example of cooperation is that of Sony and Samsung in developing television technology while concurrently competing for customers (Gnyawali & Park, 2011). Vertical relationships emphasize the value creation network of various actors including competitors, complementors, buyers or sellers (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996; Walley, 2007) as is also the case for destination marketing (Belleflamme & Nysen, 2009; Kylänen & Rusko, 2010; von Friedrichs Grängsjö, 2003; Wang & Krakover, 2008).

A qualitative case study was employed to examine pedicab drivers and street vendors in the informal economy in Yogya-karta, Indonesia. Yogyakarta was chosen as the context for this research because this city is one of the main tourist destinations in Indonesia, and a significant informal tourism economy exists in this destination (Dahles & Bras, 1999; Hampton, 2003; Timothy & Wall, 1997; van Gemert, van Genugten, & Dahles, 1999). Data included semi-structured interviews, naturalistic observation, as well as document analysis.

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