

A STUDY ON COMMUNITY PERCEPTION TOWARDS TOURISM IMPACTS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN MEEMURE AREA

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INTRODUCTION

In development circles around the world, community-based tourism is gaining popularity as a way to support rural development and to reduce poverty. With untapped tourism potential in rural regions, community-based tourism development in Sri Lanka has seen both successes and disappointments (Sriyani, 2022). Rural tourism is considered a new concept in Sri Lanka, and the investment for rural tourism development from 2013 to 2016 was about 90 million LKR (Gunathilaka & Kalpani, 2018).

Meemure village is one of Sri Lanka's most well-liked rural tourist destinations (Jayasooriya et al., 2019), which is a small, remote village in the Knuckles Mountain Range that has become very popular as a tourist destination recently. However, the village is not well-planned for the purpose of developing the tourism industry. Numerous empirical studies contend that the village of Meemure has significant tourism potential for promoting tourism and enhancing local rural lifestyles. Since the local community plays a crucial role in the development and sustainability of tourism in a destination (Chandralal, 2010), where tourism activities have a close connection to the local communities, tourism can encourage change in social, cultural, environmental, and economic dimensions (Eshliki & Kaboudi, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial to understand how the community in Meemure is influenced by tourism due to the sudden change of activities caused by the influx of visitors in this rural village.

Previous scholars have explored the community perception of tourism impact in tourism destinations such as Pasikuda (Gnanapala & Karunathilaka, 2016), Dambulla (Chandralal, 2010), and Mount Lavinia (Madawala, 2017). However, very few studies have examined the community perception of tourism impacts on tourism destinations in rural communities (Gnanapala & Karunathilaka, 2016). Based on this background, this study examines the community's perception of tourism impacts in the Meemure area and examines the relationship between perceived tourism impacts and the community support for tourism development in the study area.

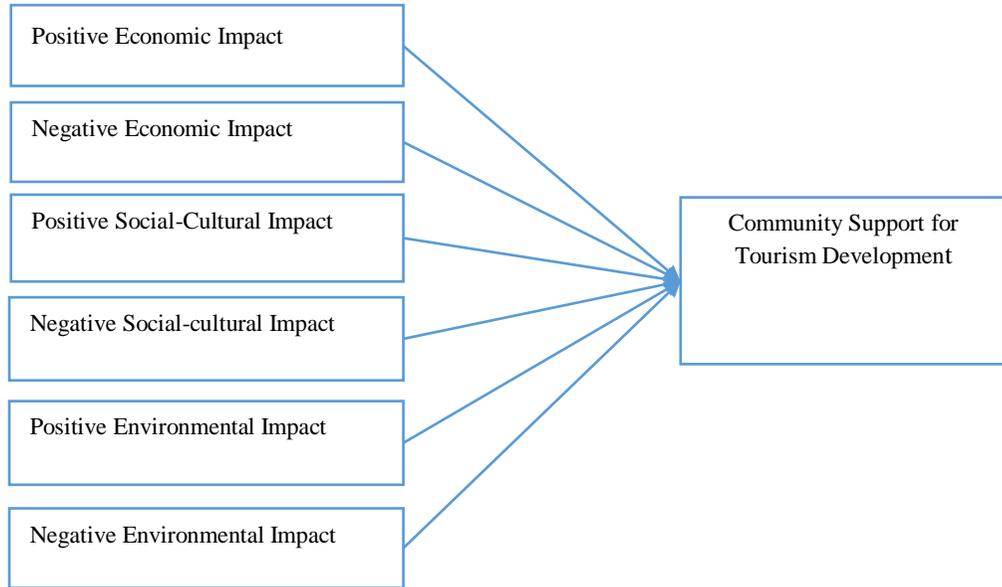
METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research approach to examine the relationship between perceived tourism impacts and community support for tourism development in the Meemure area. The dependent variable of the study is community support for tourism development. Positive economic impact, negative economic impact, positive social-cultural impact, negative social-cultural impact, and positive and negative environmental impact are the independent variables of the study. The conceptual framework of the study is presented in Figure 1.

The population of the current study is the community of Meemure Village. 120 families are living in Meemure village. The current study utilized a Simple Random Sample approach as the sampling technique, with the sample size comprising 92 community members from Meemure, Sri Lanka. The researcher personally collected data by visiting the area. The sample

size was calculated using the formula: $n = \frac{[z^2 * p * (1 - p) / e^2]}{[1 + (z^2 * p * (1 - p) / (e^2 * N))]}$. Here, 'n' represents the sample size, 'z' is the standard average value corresponding to the desired confidence level, 'p' denotes the estimated proportion of the population, 'e' stands for the desired margin of error, and 'N' represents the population size. The Primary data was collected from the respondents using a structured questionnaire developed based on the literature review. The Collected data were analyzed using descriptive and correlation analysis.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to achieve the objectives of the study. The Cronbach's Alpha value of the variables was more than 0.7, which ensured the reliability of the variables.

The sample comprises 54.3% male and 45.7% female respondents. Most respondents fall within the age brackets of 25-36 (28.3%) and 36-56 (23.9%). A significant majority reported a monthly household income below Rs.10,000. The education level was predominantly secondary (57%), with a small proportion holding higher degrees (4.3%). In terms of employment, 48.9% were engaged in tourism-related occupations, 33% had jobs unrelated to tourism, and 19% were unemployed. An overwhelming 80% of the respondents had resided in the Meemure area for over 20 years, signifying a strong community connection. A descriptive analysis of the responses provided insights into the perceptions of the community depicted in Table 1.

According to the results of the descriptive analysis, the mean value indicates that the respondents generally agreed on the positive economic and socio-cultural impacts of tourism in the Meemure area. However, they disagree that tourism provides positive environmental benefits to the community. Conversely, the respondents moderately agreed on the negative economic and socio-cultural impacts of tourism, as well as the negative environmental impacts. Overall, the respondents expressed support for tourism development in the community, as the mean value ranges from 3.8 to 4.0.

Table 1
Descriptive Analysis

Variable	Item	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Positive Economic Impacts	Tourism increases income	3	5	4.30	0.707
	Tourism is one of the most important industries supporting the local economy.	2	5	4.25	0.807
	Our standard of living has increased considerably because of tourism	1	5	3.90	0.915
	The quality of public services in the area is now better due to tourism investment.	1	5	3.83	1.075
Positive Social Cultural Impacts	There is more communication between residents and tourists	1	5	3.87	0.904
	Poverty will be reduced through tourism	2	5	3.67	0.927
	Tourism has increased residents' pride in the local culture in this area	1	5	3.72	1.132
	Tourism has improved residents' overall quality of life	1	5	3.55	1.073
Positive Environmental Impacts	Tourism has improved the area's appearance (visual and aesthetic).	1	5	3.07	1.014
	Tourism has contributed to the preservation of the natural environment and the protection of the area	1	5	2.87	1.040
	Tourism provides an incentive for the restoration of historic buildings.	1	5	2.72	1.093
	Tourism has improved the ecological environment of the area	1	5	2.88	1.047
Negative Economic Impacts	Tourism benefits only a small group	1	5	3.70	0.822
	The prices of goods and services are likely to increase because of tourism	1	5	3.75	0.847
	Seasonal tourism has created high-risk, under-or unemployment issues	1	5	3.45	0.732
	The cost of developing tourist facilities is too much	1	5	3.92	0.855
Negative Social Cultural Impacts	Tourism causes changes in community culture and traditions	1	5	3.74	0.936
	Tourism damages the local culture.	1	5	3.55	0.930
	It is becoming increasingly difficult to find a quiet place for	1	5	3.59	1.007

	recreation around here because of tourists.				
	Tourism may disturb the community's peace and harmony	2	5	3.48	0.920
Negative Environmental Impacts	Environmental resources are overused by tourism	1	5	3.57	0.987
	Tourism harms the environment	1	5	3.66	0.998
	Tourism causes crowd problems	1	5	3.32	1.016
	Tourism destroys destination ecological values	1	5	3.47	0.943
Community Support for Tourism Development	I would like to see more tourists in this area	1	5	3.95	1.042
	The government should increase its efforts to provide infrastructure to support tourism development in this area	1	5	4.02	1.099
	I am willing to be a part of tourism planning for this area in the future	1	5	3.80	1.225
	support tourism as having a vital economic role in this area	1	5	3.99	1.153

Correlation analysis was conducted to test the relationship between the variables. Table 2 depicts the results of the correlation analysis. The results indicated a significant positive relationship between positive economic impact and community support for tourism development, positive social-cultural impact and community support for tourism development, and positive environmental impact and community support for tourism development. Conversely, a negative significant relationship was observed between negative economic impact and community support for tourism development, negative social-cultural impact and community support for tourism development, and negative environmental impact and community support.

Table 2
Correlation Analysis

Independent Variable	Correlation with Community Support for Tourism Development
Positive Economic Impact	0.354**
Positive Sociocultural Impact	0.422**
Positive Environment Impact	0.211
Negative Economic Impact	-0.244
Negative Sociocultural Impact	-0.209
Negative Environment Impact	-0.215

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The focus of this study was to examine the relationship between perceived tourism impacts and community support for tourism development in the Meemure area. To achieve the objective, the researcher selected 92 families as a sample in the Meemure in Sri Lanka. The primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire analyzed using the SPSS software. The study's findings suggest that there is a positive relationship between the positive economic impacts, sociocultural impacts, and environmental impacts of tourism and community support

for tourism development. And also, there is a negative relationship between the negative economic impacts, negative socio-cultural impacts, and negative environmental impacts of tourism and community support for tourism development. Based on the findings, it is noted that the community in Meemure has expressed that they are willing to support the tourism development of tourism in the area; in order to maximize their support, it is important to increase the economic, social, and environmental benefits of the tourism to the community while reducing the negative impact of tourism.

Keywords: Community perception, community support, rural tourism, tourism development, tourism impacts

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