

**IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND ENGAGEMENT ON DESTINATION
BRAND VALUE CO-CREATION AND THE MEDIATING ROLE OF
DESTINATION BRAND PATRIOTISM: LOCAL RESIDENTS' PERSPECTIVE IN
THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN SOUTHERN PROVINCE IN SRI LANKA**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the impact of social media brand engagement on destination brand value co-creation, while considering destination brand patriotism as a mediating variable from the local residents' perspective in the tourism industry of the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. The conceptual model proposed in this study is based on the Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) model. A quantitative research design was used, and data were collected using closed-ended questionnaires. The population of the study consists of local residents of the Southern Province in Sri Lanka who are actively engaged with social media and are connected to the tourism industry in the region, employees of Sri Lankan tourism companies, and social media users who interact with brand content related to the positioning of the destination. The sample size of the study was 384 respondents, and convenience sampling was used for this research study. Close-ended structured questionnaires were used as the primary data collection method. The numerically measured data were coded using SPSS 26 to analyze the data and present them via charts, graphs, tables, and diagrams. The findings reveal a significant and positive impact of social media brand engagement on destination brand value co-creation, with destination brand patriotism as a mediating effect. Dimensions such as attention, absorption, interaction, and identification showed a positive influence, except for enthusiasm. Notably, this study also identified a significant positive impact of social media brand engagement on destination brand value co-creation, and destination brand value which was found to have a significant and positive impact on destination brand patriotism. Additionally, this study uncovered the partial mediating role of destination brand patriotism between social media brand engagement and destination brand value co-creation. Therefore, the findings suggest that destinations can use social media to engage local residents in destination brand value co-creation as brand value co-creators, which in turn positively impacts destination brand value co-creation for destinations in the Southern Province.

Keywords: Destination branding, destination brand patriotism, social media brand engagement, destination brand value co-creation, local residents