

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING EFFORTS ON DESTINATION'S BRAND EQUITY: A STUDY AMONG INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS ARRIVING TO SRI LANKA

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.abstract - The aim of the study is to investigate the impact of social media marketing efforts on the creation of brand equity of Sri Lanka as a destination for international tourists. The other specific objectives are; to explore the social media marketing efforts of Sri Lanka as destination brand, to investigate the brand equity of Sri Lanka as destination and to recommend suggestions to improve the social media marketing efforts for Sri Lanka as destination brand. Results reveal that all factors under the social media marketing efforts namely entertainment, customization and eWOM are positively contributing to the brand equity of Sri Lanka as a destination. However, the other two factors of social media marketing efforts such as interaction and trendiness are negatively impacting on the brand equity of Sri Lanka as destination. Therefore, it is recommended that destination marketers of Sri Lanka need to give more attention on the interaction and trendiness of the social media marketing efforts.

Keywords: Social media marketing, brand equity, destination, eWOM

INTRODUCTION

People all over the world use smartphones, tablets, iPad, desktop computers for their daily transactions and for getting insights into the tourist destinations. Destination marketing organizations in the world use social media which include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Blogs etc. to communicate about the destinations and tourism products to the tourists in the world. Many companies irrespective of the product marketing or service marketing, engage in

social media marketing. The creation of social media in the world paves the way to the companies to communicate and reach their customers, which is one of the new way of interacting with customers [1].

In marketing tourism of Sri Lanka, social media is also playing vital role in communicating Sri Lanka as destination and tourism products of Sri Lanka to the international tourists all over the world. Presently, Sri Lanka's destination marketing organizations and Sri Lanka government have taken measures to communicate the Sri Lanka tourism in the world. While engaging in the social media marketing of Sri Lanka tourism, it is paramount to study about the social media marketing efforts on the brand equity of Sri Lanka as destination. Reference[2] defines customer based brand equity as *"the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing that brand"*. According to [2], brand awareness and brand image are the major dimensions of the brand equity.

Although destination marketing organization engages in social media marketing in order to communicate Sri Lanka as one of the tourists' destination in the world, it is important to investigate the efforts of social media marketing focuses on the creation of brand equity which includes brand awareness and brand image. This will also give an idea about the outcome of the social media marketing efforts taken by the government and other private organizations in Sri Lanka. Moreover, although many studies address about the destination marketing organizations in Sri Lanka, it is very hard to find any studies on the brand equity of Sri Lanka and its social media marketing efforts. Therefore the research question is that

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