

**Impact of Customer Based Brand Equity for promoting Sri Lanka as a Wedding Tourism Destination: with special reference to Southern Region**

Chaamila Rathnayake (01<sup>st</sup>), Dr. D. A. C. Suranga Silva (02<sup>nd</sup>)

**Department of Economics, Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo.**

*Published in 03<sup>rd</sup> October 2017, “International Tourism Research Symposium” / University of Colombo*

**ABSTRACT**

The wedding tourism market is comprised of destination wedding couples and their guests, as well as honeymoon tourists. Wedding tourism has increased in popularity over the past decade and is recognized as a significant market segment with an enhancing effectiveness of the industry by amalgamating two segments as one destination. Even though, wedding tourism is a growth market, an empirical study shows that there is a huge research gap in Sri Lankan context to examine the effectiveness of wedding tourism. Main research objective of this research study is to examine the impact of brand equity on promoting Southern Region as a Wedding tourism destination. Furthermore, this study examines whether customer based brand equity is an effective method in promoting wedding tourism in Sri Lanka.

The existing literature is proved that destination brand equity is a widely popular topic. It is evidenced that most of the destination brands investigated by academic scholars were coming under brand equity through cultural or event based tourism segments. However, limited number of researchers conducted on brand equity via wedding tourism. At present, there is a dynamic growth in wedding tourism in the market and thus, there is a significant demand for relevant academic studies too. The Southern region was chosen for this study due to its prominence as a wedding tourism destination. Initially this CBBE concept introduced by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), and they conceptualized the Brand equity in different ways. Furthermore, Konecnik (2005) and later Konecnik & Gartner (2007) has been developed and extended this concept as Customer based Brand Equity for Tourists

Destinations (CBBETD). In this research study it is investigated how customer based brand equity model (CBBE) can be applied to promote Sri Lanka as a wedding destination.

This study will be an academic scholarly piece to researchers and tourism marketers in branding and promoting wedding destinations. In conclusion this study, stress upon the necessity of continuous research to penetrate into new tourism market segments and of the need in diversification of hotel's portfolios with new products satisfying emerging specific tourism demand of destination wedding market.

***Key words:*** *Customer based brand equity (CBBE), Wedding tourism, Destination branding, Brand equity, destination marketing, Niche market*