

# **Influence of Perceived Tourism Impacts on Community Engagement in Tourism in Udawalawa, Sri Lanka: The Moderating Role of COVID-19**

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## **Abstract**

Tourism impacts and its influence on community engagement in tourism is well researched in the literature. However, situational factors can distort the link between tourism impacts and community engagement in tourism. The purpose of this study is to understand the perceived tourism impacts and its influence on community intention to engage in tourism during the COVID-19 by measuring the moderating effect of COVID-19 on the influence of tourism impacts on tourism engagement. Data were collected in December 2020 using a structured questionnaire with 7-point Likert scaled items from the surrounding community of the Udawalawa National Park applying a purposive sampling technique in which the people engaging in tourism were focused. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted with a sample size of 200, and based on that, seven independent variables were identified namely positive environmental impact, negative environmental impact, positive social impact, negative social impact, positive cultural impact, negative social impact, and positive economic impact. Multiple regression analysis revealed that all the positive forms of tourism impacts have significant effects on intention to engage in tourism while the effects of negative forms of tourism impacts are found to be insignificant. The testing of the moderation effect of COVID-19 discovered that the effect of positive economic impacts of tourism on intention to engage in tourism is negatively moderated by COVID-19. According to the results, it can be concluded that the positive tourism impacts perceived by the community still encourage them to engage in tourism. However, the COVID-19 situation has reduced the intensity of perceived economic benefits on tourism engagement showing that the people are now unconfident in tourism as a livelihood. Furthermore, the findings add to the existing literature of tourism impacts by giving more insights regarding situational factors like COVID-19. In terms of managerial implications, the results can help formulate plans to regain the tourism industry in new-normal.

*Keywords:* Community engagement, COVID-19, tourism impacts, tourismengagement