

## **ABSTRACT**

The elephant tourism is a novel concept and growing sector of the tourism industry in the world. Despite the large number of attractive destinations, there is most important thing that visitors never miss the elephants in Sri Lanka since elephants have a dominant position within the country's religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and in Sri Lankan culture. Also, they have always been a symbol of power, prosperity, peace and pride. Therefore, most of the tourists come to Sri Lanka who love to see elephants. Considering the background, local community encouragement should be placed in elephant tourism sector as it creates socio-economic impacts on local community. Hence, the objectives of the study were to identify the socio-economic impacts of elephant tourism on local community in Sri Lanka and to identify the challenges and opportunities to promote elephant tourism among international tourists. This study was conducted using qualitative approach and the primary data was collected from the 16 respondents that consists of managers, accommodation providers, mahouts and residents in Udawalawa and Pinnawala area. Further, purposive sampling technique was used to formulate the sample of the study and structured direct interviews was used to collect data from the respondents. Moreover, interview transcriptions were analyzed by using thematic analysis method. The findings of this study revealed that the elephant tourism are directly affected socially and economically on local community and strong collaboration among stakeholders is very important to maximize the positive impacts. Furthermore, this study makes important recommendations; to conduct random inspections of elephant tourism organization, awareness programs, specific policy for elephant tourism to develop elephant tourism in sustainable manner. And also, there should be proper infrastructure and elephant tourism marketing strategies to promote tourism among international tourists and establishing elephant protection groups are also very important to protect this endangered species.

Key Words: Elephant Tourism, Socio-economic Impacts, Captive Elephants, Sri Lanka