

Creator Economy: A Study on the Emerging Phenomenon of Content Creators and Brand Collaborations

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The creator economy is expanding rapidly worldwide, and its emergence in Sri Lanka presents unique opportunities and challenges. This study explores Sri Lankan content creators' perspectives on brand collaborations, focusing on their roles, revenue dependence, creative freedom, audience engagement, and success metrics. It aims to bridge the knowledge gap regarding how brand collaborations influence the personal and professional lives of content creators and contribute to the growth of Sri Lanka's creator economy. By applying Co-Creation Theory and the Match-Up Hypothesis, the study provides insights into how alignment between creator personas and brand values fosters audience engagement, trust, and authenticity in brand partnerships.

A qualitative research approach was adopted, utilizing in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure diversity in perspectives across different content categories. The study followed an interpretivist paradigm to explore the subjective experiences of participants, using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and insights. This methodology allowed for a holistic understanding of the Sri Lankan creator economy, capturing a range of viewpoints from content creators.

The findings highlight that brand collaborations play a crucial role in content creators' career development, offering opportunities for professional networking, exposure, and creative expression. However, challenges such as restrictions on creative freedom, delayed payments, and unclear contractual agreements were identified as significant barriers. Many creators reported frustration over the lack of formal recognition of content creation as a profession and the absence of a structured monetization mechanism within Sri Lanka. These limitations hinder the industry's growth, making it difficult

for creators to sustain a stable income. Despite these challenges, the study reveals that Sri Lanka's creator economy holds significant potential for innovation and economic expansion in digital marketing.

The study is limited to the Sri Lankan context and does not account for variations in creator-brand collaborations in other regions or industries. The reliance on qualitative data, while valuable for depth of understanding, limits the generalizability of findings. Future research could incorporate a mixed-methods approach to further validate insights and explore the evolving nature of creator-brand partnerships over time.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of research on influencer marketing by centering content creators' experiences, an area often overlooked in brand-focused studies. Practically, the findings offer actionable recommendations for content creators, policymakers, and brands. Policymakers should develop institutional support structures and enable platform-based monetization opportunities to legitimize content creation as a viable career. Brands should foster transparent, equitable partnerships that respect creative freedom, ensuring mutually beneficial collaborations.

This study provides valuable insights for stakeholders in the digital marketing ecosystem, highlighting the complexities of brand collaborations in Sri Lanka's emerging creator economy. By addressing key challenges and opportunities, this research advances academic understanding while paving the way for practical advancements in sustainable creator-brand partnerships.

Keywords: *Brand Collaborations, Creator Economy, Content Creators, Sri Lanka*