

Internet Adoption and Rural Communities in Sri Lanka

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The Internet was introduced to the Sri Lankan information and communication system in 1990. However the Sri Lankan Internet user percentage has lingered at a mere 18.3% (World Bank Report, 2013). Thus it is intriguing to examine why the Sri Lankan rural community is lagging behind in Internet adoption. The aim of this study is to identify the issues hindering Internet adoption among rural communities in Sri Lanka. The objectives are to determine the relationship between Internet adoption and infrastructure facilities, the adopter characteristics of rural communities, the characteristics of technology and affordability. 260 questionnaires were distributed and 213 questionnaires were received within one week, but only 200 questionnaires were usable and thus analyzed. A survey using questionnaires was employed to obtain data from 200 respondents in Buttala, Monaragala district. The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20.0). The results show that Internet adoption among the rural communities was low due to a lack of infrastructure facilities and problems of affordability. Adopter characteristics and technology characteristics have strong significant positive relationships with Internet adoption. The majority of people in rural areas remain largely separated from the facilities provided by the Internet due to social, economic, human and technological factors. The Internet has the potential to bridge the digital divide among urban and rural communities in Sri Lanka. Therefore the government and non-government organizations should introduce practical policy frameworks, ICT policies and effective Island wide projects to change the attitudes and behavior of rural communities in Sri Lanka. Without overcoming issues such as infrastructure facilities and affordability the benefits of the Internet will not be fully experienced. Therefore this study suggests that attention should be given to the highlighted variables in order to increase the Internet adoption.

Key words: ICT Policies, Internet Adoption, Rural Communities, Sri Lanka, Infrastructural Development