

# Factors Affecting the Success of Rural Marketing in Sri Lanka; Special Reference to Small Electric Appliances

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**Abstract:** Rural markets can be identified as an underutilized market opportunity that can be capitalized through better marketing strategies. Rural marketing is a marketing strategy which involves planning and implementing marketing functions in rural areas, to attain marketing objectives. Sri Lanka consists of many rural areas and hence the intention of this study is to identify the factors affecting the success of rural marketing in Sri Lanka, with special reference to small electric appliances. When developing the research, the 4As model was identified as the theoretical model. 4As model is customer centric, while 4Ps is an organization-oriented model. Thus, this research is based on the consumer point of view. The primary objective of this research is to identify the factors affecting the success of rural marketing in Sri Lanka and to identify the most influential factor out of all, in the same context. Primary data was collected using a survey questionnaire which was finalized, following a pilot test based on a sample 16 rural consumers. The data for the final survey was collected from 125 rural consumers living in the Monaragala district via web-based questionnaires and the gathered data was analysed using the SPSS 25.0 software. According to the results of the multiple regression analysis, affordability was identified as the only factor which significantly affects the success of rural marketing. Therefore, it was concluded empirically that affordability plays a vital role in rural marketing in Sri Lanka.

**Keywords:** Rural Marketing, 4As Model.

## 1. Introduction

### A. Background of the study

“The future lies with companies who see the poor as their customers.”

— C K Prahalad The concept of rural marketing is the promotion of a company’s product in rural

areas using different strategies, than those used in the urban market. The rural marketing framework aims to provide the right products, use the most effective promotion methods, use the most appropriate distribution methods, and build a long-term relationship with the customer to market the product.

In recent times, it can be observed that sellers have recognized the importance of the rural market while the overall growth of the economy has also witnessed a significant increase in the purchasing power of the rural population. Therefore, there is a high potential to develop rural marketing within less tapped rural areas. This marketing concept will be highly beneficial in many aspects, such as the minimization of massive competition that exists within industries in the urban (Kripanithi and Ramachander, 2018). But most rural marketing projects have failed as the

marketers have been found to use urban marketing strategies for rural marketing (Kripanithi and Ramachander, 2018).

According to Central Bank reports, housing conditioning and ownership of durable goods in the rural sector remains lower than that of the urban sector, even though 77.4% of Sri Lanka's population reside in rural areas (Economic and social statistics of Sri Lanka, 2019). Rural consumers differ from urban consumers. Therefore, it is required to design specific strategies for rural consumers to successfully implement rural marketing. For that purpose, this research will provide knowledge about rural marketing in Sri Lanka not only for the marketers of durable goods industry but also to the entrepreneurs who would like to market their product all around the country.

This study focuses on identifying the factors affecting the success of rural marketing of small domestic electric appliances based on the 4As model. The factors are identified through the 4As model i.e., affordability, awareness, acceptability, and accessibility (Sheth and Sisodia, 2011) 4As is a consumer centric model. Therefore, companies can develop strategies which cater to rural consumers' requirements. This model of rural marketing drives the efforts of marketers for sustainable growth in rural marketing (Naidu, 2017). Household electric appliances which are key contributors to residential energy consumption can be categorized as a durable good. In general, these appliances are divided in to three categories namely, white goods, brown goods and small appliances. However, as aforementioned, the focal area of this study is rural marketing of small electric appliances since those are mostly used by urban people, while also creating significant competition within the industry. Small line appliances are described as those that are needed domestically to carry out small household

activities (Cabeza *et al.*, 2018). Thus, it can be reasonably stated that successful rural marketing could be a big turning point in those industries.

### *B. Problem statement*

Sri Lanka is recognized as a developing country and owing to the presence of many rural areas, there prevails a wide range of untapped markets in these areas. According to Census of Population and Housing (2012), housing conditioning and ownership of durable goods in the rural sector is lower than the urban sector, even though 77.4% of Sri Lanka's population resides in rural areas (*Press release*, 2020). Yet, organizations have no proper marketing strategies specifically targeted for the Sri Lankan rural market and neither can it be implemented successfully with the mindset of the urban market. Compared to consumers in urban areas, rural consumers demonstrate many differences in numerous aspects such as literacy, income level, spending level, nature of employment and attitudes etc. (Kripanithi and Ramachander, 2018). Furthermore, in recent years, the rural market has grown rapidly in terms of demand, size, consumer preferences, lifestyle of rural consumers and income levels. Therefore, it is required to identify the factors which influence the success of rural marketing, from the customers' point of view. On the other hand, there is limited research in Sri Lanka regarding rural marketing practices. Most research do not explain the factors which affect the success of rural marketing. Therefore, this research will identify as to which factors affect the success of rural marketing, based on the consumer centric 4As model.

### *C. Research objectives*

Primary objective

To identify factors affecting the success of rural marketing in Sri Lanka.

Secondary objective

To identify the most influential factor affecting the success of rural marketing in Sri Lanka.

*D. Research questions*

- I. What are the factors affecting the success of rural marketing in Sri Lanka?
- II. What is the most influential factor that affects the success of rural marketing in Sri Lanka?

*E. Significance of the study*

It can be reasonably stated that rural marketing is quite an unfamiliar concept for Sri Lanka, compared to other countries in the world like India. Relevant literature reveals that only few studies have been published regarding rural marketing in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, most of those studies haven't adequately studied the success of rural marketing in Sri Lanka, either.

Even though, more than half of the Sri Lankan population resides in rural areas, the level of implementation of this concept for the durable goods industry in Sri Lanka, cannot be treated as satisfactory (*Press release, 2020*). According to Prahalad C. K (2004) "the future lies with companies who see the poor as their customers". Further, nowadays, the tagline of some marketers is "Go Rural" (Kripanithi and Ramachander, 2018). So, for countries like Sri Lanka, rural marketing would prove to be a valuable marketing strategy, given that industries can implement it successfully, thus causing a huge revelation of this industry. Multinational companies such as Unilever and LG have become successful in the rural market with the application of the rural marketing concepts (Kripanithi and Ramachander, 2018). Moreover, rural marketing has the potential to improve and enhance people's lives in rural areas (Bhavika Pandita Hakhroo, 2020).

Therefore, in a Sri Lankan context, it is important to identify what factors may affect the success of rural marketing on small electric appliances. Domestically SEAs are mostly used by urban people while creating significant competition in the marketplace, but it seems that the use of SEAs is low among the rural population (*Press release, 2020*). Accordingly, this research focuses on small electric appliances, to study about the success of rural marketing in Sri Lanka. Findings of this study will help to develop and tailor rural marketing strategies, considering the requirements of the consumer, as these factors are viewed from the consumer's point of view.

## **2. Methodology**

*A. Research design*

The quantitative research method was adopted in this study. A survey research strategy was followed to gather data from the sample. This study does not generate new theories; hence the research approach of this study is deductive. Mono-method was used as the research choice and quantitative data was collected using questionnaires. While primary data was analysed using suitable techniques, researchers also utilized secondary data. Research philosophy refers to a system of beliefs and important presuppositions about the development of knowledge (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Philosophy of this research is positivism as the researchers interpreted the collected data in an objective way.

*B. Population*

According to Saunders et al. (2009), population refers to the full set of cases that the research sample is taken from, and it uses to the total amount of people who are related to the research subject being studied. In this research, rural consumers living in Sri Lanka were considered as the population.

### C. Sample

Based on the understanding that the sample size is largely determined by the objectives of the research, what the researchers need to know and what will be reliable (Patton, 2002), a questionnaire was distributed among a sample constituting 125 rural consumers in the Monaragala district. The sample size was determined according to the “Rule of thumb method” and the Monaragala district was selected, as it is one of most rural areas in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, Saunders et al., (2009) states that the convenience sampling method can be used when it is difficult to identify the members of the population. Thus, researchers followed the convenience sampling method under non-probability sampling to gather data for this study.

### D. Data collection and analysis

Primary data was collected via a self-administrated structured questionnaire based on a sample of 125 rural consumers. Secondary data was gathered from sources such as journals, books and websites. Researchers used the SPSS 25.0 software for analysing the primary data, by appropriately coding all data. Variables of this research were measured using correlation and multiple regression analysis to identify the impact of independent variables towards the dependent variable. Prior to the analysis, the collected data were screened and purified by conducting tests for normality, linearity, and reliability.

### E. Conceptual framework

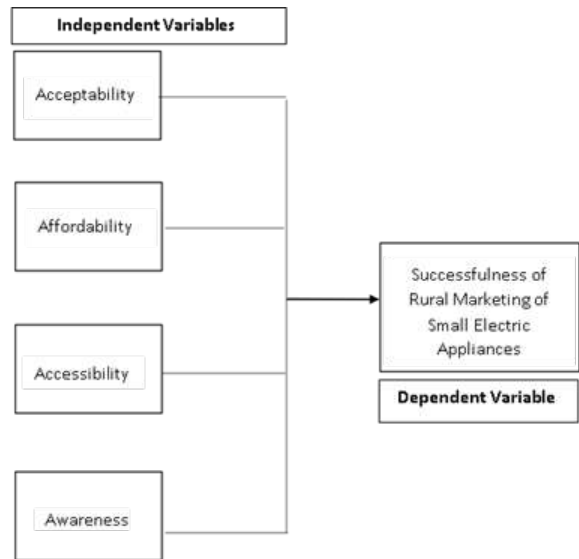


Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework

Source: Authors (2021)

### F. Research hypotheses

H1a -There is an impact of consumer perceived acceptability on the success of rural marketing.

H1b -There is an impact of consumer perceived affordability on the success of rural marketing.

H1c -There is an impact of consumer perceived accessibility on the success of rural marketing.

H1d -There is an impact of consumer perceived awareness on the success of rural marketing.

### G. Operationalization of the conceptual framework

Table 2.1: Operationalization

Variables	Indicators	Sources	Measurements
Acceptability	Expectation towards features of the product Expectation towards performance of the product Subjective attributes of the product	(Sheth & Sisodia, 2011) (Kripani thi & Ramachander, 2018)	Five-Point Likert Scale
Affordability	Sufficient economic resources Perception of the value	(Sheth & Sisodia, 2011) (Naidu, 2017)	Five-Point Likert Scale
Accessibility	Supply of the product Easiness in acquiring the product	(Sheth & Sisodia, 2011) (Naidu, 2017)	Five-Point Likert Scale
Awareness	Conventional media Non-conventional media Marketing campaigns	(Kripani thi & Ramachander, 2018) (Shah & Desai, 2013)	Five-Point Likert Scale
Success of rural marketing of small electric appliances	Purchase intention Recommendation Attitude of customer Financial Worthiness	(Morwitz, 2014) (Jayakrishnan & Kumar, 2015) (Bishnoi, 2007)	Five-Point Likert Scale

Source: Authors (2021)

### 3. Data Analysis and Discussion

#### A. Data presentation

##### 1) Introductory question:

Purchase intention Recommendation Attitude of customer financial worthiness

As introductory question researchers asked from respondent Do you know what small electric appliances are? 93.6% of the respondents knew about small electric appliances. 6.4% of the respondents did not have an idea as to what small electric appliances are. However, from responses given to the remaining part of the questionnaire, researchers identified that although the term SEA was not known, the respondents commonly use SEAs for their household activities.

##### 2) Demographic Information of the sample tested:

According to the age of respondents, 53.% of respondents are between the ages 21-30, and 20.8% of respondents are between the ages 31-40 while 25.6% are between 41-50 and above 50.

##### 3) Occupation of the respondents:

Out of 125 respondents, Majority of the respondents are private sector workers and minority of the respondents were found to have no occupation and 13.6% respondents don't belong to any of the occupations mentioned above.

##### 4) Income of the respondents

According to the income of the respondents, most of the respondents have income above Rs.30,000 and 19.2% of respondents have less than Rs.5,000 income. Equal number of respondents have income between Rs.15,001-Rs.20,000 and income between Rs.20,001-Rs.25,000.

##### 5) SEA information

The questionnaire of the study is asked, what are the small electric appliances used by respondent from given list. A majority of the respondents' own blenders, rice cookers and irons. Small electric appliances like knife sharpeners, electric grills, microwave ovens

and mixers are only owned by a small number of respondents. Other small electric appliances used in the questionnaire such as toaster, hair drier, beater, electric water heater, and electric kettle are owned by average number of respondents.

#### *B. Preparation of data for analysis*

##### 1) Accuracy and completeness

Data was collected from 150 respondents. However, 25 incomplete responses were removed bringing down the total number of responses to 125. Furthermore, a boxplot analysis was conducted for the purpose of detecting outliers. However, no outliers were identified. Therefore, there was no need to delete any data and 125 responses were considered for further analysis.

##### 2) Missing Data

Missing data is defined as lost values stored for interested observations and variables. It can occur during data collection and in the process of data entry (Hair Jr *et al.*, 2009). According to the missing data analysis, researchers confirmed that there is no missing data for any variable.

#### *C. Testing for parametric assumptions*

##### 1) Normality Test

The normally distributed variable should have skewness and kurtosis value which are less than three times of stranded error of their values (Hair Jr *et al.*, 2009). Kurtosis values explains that the variables are normally distributed or not. The accepted skewness value is between -1 and +1, and the accepted value for kurtosis should be between -3 and +3. Researchers checked for skewness and kurtosis to test the normality of variables. Here it is observed that all the coefficients of skewness are between -1 and +1. Therefore, the data are approximately normally distributed. In contrast to kurtosis, all the

absolute values of variables are less than three times of stranded error of kurtosis (Hair Jr *et al.*, 2009). While the visual check based on a histogram, confirmed that the data was normally distributed. Accordingly, it can be deduced that the data are normally distributed (Hair Jr *et al.*, 2009).

##### 2) Linearity

In this study linearity was tested between success of rural marketing and the four independent variables of acceptability, affordability, accessibility, and awareness. The R-Squared value refers to the amount of variation, and it ranges from 0 to 1, with a higher value indicating more variation (Almquist, Ashir and Brännström, 2010). In this study researchers find out values between 0 and 1 indicating higher amount of variation. Therefore, it can be interpreted that all direct relationships show a linear relationship. Furthermore, a scatter-plot analysis was carried out to gain an understanding of whether it is a linear relationship, an independent relationship or if there is no-relationship.

#### *D. Testing for validity and reliability*

##### 1) Validity

The term validity refers to whether or not a variable measures what it claims to measure and it is the degree to which the results of a measure accurately reflect the variable for which they were designed (Field, 2009). Validity in this research was ensured in several ways. Scholars have stated that expert validity can be confirmed with the support of experts who can evaluate the refined criteria by offering suggestions and revisions (Yang and Chan, 2008). Accordingly, the researchers provided the questionnaire to their supervisor and confirmed expert validity. As well as researchers carried out correlation test using

SPSS software to measure the construct validity.

## 2) Reliability

The term reliability refers to a measure's ability to constantly reflect the construct it is measuring. When all other factors are equal, a researcher should receive the same score on a questionnaire if it was completed at two different points in time (Field, 2009). Furthermore, researchers conducted a pilot study by distributing the questionnaire to 16 rural consumers of small electric appliances in the Monaragala district to test the research tools and to ensure the overall representativeness of the questionnaire. According to Hamid et al. (2017) Cronbach's alpha should usually be greater than 0.7 to be interpreted as acceptable reliability. However, Hair et al. (2009) identified even a lower acceptance threshold of 0.6 to 0.7. As a result of reliability test, the study's measures are consistent with the construct that is being measured.

### E. Testing for multicollinearity and common method variance

#### 1) Multicollinearity

Multicollinearity is situation when there is an exact or closely exact relationship between two or more predictor variables (Nwakuya and Biu, 2019). The VIF points out whether a variable has a strong relationship with the other variable(s). In this research multiple regression analysis was employed to measure multicollinearity between predictor variables. According to Field (2009), acceptable tolerance levels should be greater than 0.1 and the value of VIF should be less than 10. The 0 level of tolerance is described as perfect multicollinearity. In addition, a tolerance level of 1 indicates that there is no multicollinearity. According to the results all the VIF values are less than 10 and tolerance values are greater

than 0.1. Thus, it can be deduced that there is no multicollinearity between the predictor variables of this study.

#### 2) Common method variance

This is important when both the dependent and explanatory variables are cognitive measures derived from the similar respondent (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Common method variance is a variation that can be attributed to the method of measurement. These results in the Table 4.7 shows that there is no common method bias in the data.

### F. Regression analysis

Multiple regression model was used to test relationship between acceptability, affordability, accessibility and awareness with success of rural marketing.

Table 3.1: Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.311 <sup>a</sup>	.097	.066	.518	1.756

Source: Authors (2021)

Table 3.1 provides the results of the model summary. The R squared value indicates how much of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables' variance. The value should be ideally between 0 and 1 (Almquist, Ashir and Brännström, 2010). R squared value of this study is 0.097 and this explains that acceptability, affordability, accessibility and awareness, only explain 9.7% percent of the variation in success of rural marketing. Even previous studies suggest that in researches related to social sciences, a lower R squared might be obtained due to the potential inability of including all relevant predictors to explain

an outcome variable. Hence the ANOVA result is significant, and the regression model is valid. Durbin-Watson test statistic should be between 1.5 and 2.5 (Taylor and Li, 2008) and in this study it is 1.756. Thus, the regression model can be claimed to be valid, since residuals are predictors.

Table 3.2: ANOVA table

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3.439	4	.860	3.205	.015 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	32.193	120	.268		
	Total	35.632	124			

Source: Authors (2021)

Table 3.2 demonstrates the results of the ANOVA of regression model. Accordingly, F value is equal to 3.205 and the significance value is less than 0.05 at a confidence level of 95%. Therefore, overall regression model is significant. It means the model is appropriate to take the decisions while all independent variables jointly influence the success of rural marketing of SEAs.

Table 3.3: Coefficients table

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	1.834	.574		3.194	.002
	Acceptability (IV1)	.101	.094	.097	1.071	.286
	Affordability (IV2)	.224	.090	.220	2.492	.014
	Accessibility (IV3)	.048	.103	.043	.471	.639
	Awareness (IV4)	.119	.085	.128	1.406	.162

Source: Authors (2021)

The individual effects of acceptability, affordability, accessibility and awareness on success of rural marketing was tested using the results displayed in the above coefficients Table 3.3. to have a linear relationship among the independent variables and the dependent variable, the significance value should take a value lesser than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ) with the confidence level of 95% (Almquist, Ashir and Brainstorm, 2010). Accordingly, as observed in Table 3.3, the p value of acceptability, accessibility and awareness is not less than 0.05 and p value of affordability is less than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant impact from acceptability, accessibility, and awareness on the success of rural marketing while there is a significant impact from affordability on the success of rural marketing of SEAs, in a Sri Lankan context.

#### g. Discussion

The below mentioned objectives of this research as previously mentioned in chapter one, are mentioned again, to the lay the foundation of the discussion.

1. To identify factors affecting on the success of rural marketing in Sri Lanka (Primary objective).
2. To identify the most influential factor affecting on the success of rural marketing in Sri Lanka (Secondary objective).

Four hypotheses were formulated to achieve these objectives based on the conceptual framework developed. Accordingly, this chapter disclosed the extent to which the independent variables of acceptability, awareness, affordability, and accessibility have impacted the dependent variable of, success of



rural marketing of small electric appliances. However, the results of this study are interpreted in light of the limitations such as the sample size and nature. Therefore, it is understood in advance that results may contradict the findings of extant research.

In this study, only one factor out of the four factors were found to significantly affect the success of rural marketing of small electric appliances in Sri Lanka. This was confirmed based on the researchers' understanding that significance value is a factor which allows data to occur in a random event, and if not present that the null hypothesis becomes true. The significance level of the coefficient should be less than 0.05 at a confidence level of 95%, for the independent variable to have an impact on the dependent variable (Almquist, Ashir and Brännström, 2010)

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

##### *A. Conclusion*

Rural marketing aims to provide the right products, use the most effective promotion methods, use the most appropriate distribution methods, and build a long-term relationship with the customer, to market the product. In the Sri Lankan context, the rural marketing concept is rapidly growing, but the most of organizations often neglect it, because implementing rural marketing is more of a challenge, especially compared to urban marketing. However, these challenges can be translated into opportunities if it's implemented tactfully in the right manner.

Hence, this research aimed to identify factors affecting the success of rural marketing in Sri Lanka and to identify the most influential factor among them from the customer point of view. Therefore, the researchers used the 4As model incorporating acceptability, availability, awareness and affordability as the theoretical model of the research. Researchers used small

electric appliances as special reference to narrow down the research scope. Based on the quantitative data analysis the results indicate Affordability is the only factor and the most influential factor which affects the success of rural marketing in Sri Lanka. The data was collected from Monaragala, one of the most rural areas in Sri Lanka.

Contrasting to extant research, this study empirically demonstrated that affordability is the only significant factor which impacts the success of rural marketing in Sri Lanka. However, this difference can be attributed to the difference in the research samples as most of the extant findings discussed were from research based in India.

According to the empirical findings derived based on the analysis of data collected from the sample, it can be concluded that markets should pay more attention to the price and quality of the product other than conducting marketing campaigns, promoting different brands under the products, high-cost packaging of the products etc. Furthermore, it is understood that the marketers should understand consumer expectations and try to fulfil their needs through offering products and services as per their requirements, instead of capitalizing on urban market strategies even if they have been proven to be successful.

##### *B. Limitation and directions for future research*

The empirical findings of this study will have to be interpreted considering certain barriers that can be addressed in future studies. To begin with, the researchers faced a barrier to data collection, due to the pandemic thus limiting the data collection methods to only a web page-based questionnaire. Another limitation was the use of language, due to the questionnaire being drafted in Sinhala to suit the literacy level of the rural community. The lack of research in this area in Sri Lanka was also a limitation in this study since there are

limited Sri Lankan research papers regarding this research topic. Moreover, this research was conducted as a quantitative research and qualitative aspects related to this research problem were not considered, whilst data were gathered only from rural consumers in the Monaragala district. However, a more rounded viewpoint would have been produced, had there been a geographical coverage of respondents with a better representation of the entire Sri Lankan rural consumer population.

Further research could be conducted using qualitative research methods, as well as a mixed-methods study, by collecting data from every rural district in Sri Lanka with a larger sample size. Considering mediator or moderator variables, this study could also be performed with more efficiency. Collecting data from marketers would also be more helpful in deriving better a discussion and conclusion.

### *C. Recommendations*

In this study looked, the affordability of a rural consumer when purchasing a product, was considered in terms of the product price, comparison with their income, availability easy payment methods and the provision of a favourable and reasonable time for payment. Therefore, as a recommendation, it can be stated that rural marketing can be successful if the companies sell quality products within the income level of the rural consumer and within their affordable price range. The reason is that the rural consumers have very low disposable income, which is also seasonal. Therefore, if they are given a reasonable and favourable time to pay for the purchase of the product, they will focus on the fact that they are affordable, as they would like to purchase the product. Also, some concessions can be made if marketing companies coordinate with banks to develop a loan facility system for rural

consumers. Furthermore, selling products at a fair discount would also increase the rural consumers purchase intention towards the product. Considering all this, the concept of marketing in rural areas will be successful by companies selling quality products within affordable prices to rural consumers.

### **Abbreviations**

SEA – Small Electric Appliances

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