

Adoption of Computerized Accounting Systems (CAS) in SMEs: A Study of Manufacturing Firms in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This paper intended to investigate and explore the practices in adopting CAS in SMEs specially focusing on practices of manufacturing firms in Sri Lanka. The study mainly focuses on the impact of accounting expertise, technological change, and cost, in relation to the adoption decision regarding adopting CAS. The study design as quantitative research using survey method in data collection connecting to manufacturing oriented SME's in Sri Lanka using the snowballing sampling method. The study identified that advanced technological capabilities and a higher level of accounting expertise significantly enhance the adoption of Computerized Accounting Systems (CAS) among SMEs in the manufacturing sector in Sri Lanka. Conversely, the high cost of implementation was found to be a major impediment to the adoption process. Additionally, the findings highlighted that adequate training and ongoing support are critical prerequisites for achieving effective CAS integration within SMEs. These insights suggest that targeted interventions, such as subsidized training initiatives, could play a pivotal role in promoting CAS adoption, thereby enhancing decision-making efficiency within these firms. The study further emphasizes the need for future research to explore the impact of varying degrees of governmental support and policy adaptations on fostering widespread CAS implementation across SMEs. This could provide valuable insights into strategies for overcoming existing barriers and leveraging technology for improved organizational outcomes.

Keywords: CAS, SMEs, adoption factors, technological change, cost, Sri Lanka.

1. Introduction

The increasing reliance on computerized systems has revolutionized accounting practices globally, offering significant improvements in efficiency, accuracy, and decision-making capabilities. Computerized Accounting Systems (CAS) have become indispensable tools for modern businesses, enabling efficient financial management, regulatory compliance, and operational streamlining (Mohamed & Ramli, 2022). Large enterprises, equipped with robust information and communication technology (ICT) systems, have successfully leveraged automation to optimize their financial functions and enhance overall productivity. However, the adoption of such technologies in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) presents distinct challenges, particularly in resource-constrained environments like developing economies.

SMEs form a strong foundation for many economies, contributing significantly to employment, innovation, and industrial growth via contributing to the national production. In Sri Lanka, the SME sector accounts for a substantial share of economic activity, with manufacturing SMEs playing a vital role (Kaluarachchi et al., 2014). Despite their importance, these enterprises often struggle with technological adoption due to limited financial resources, inadequate technical expertise, and concerns about the costs associated with implementing advanced systems. While the advantages of CAS—such as increased accuracy, time savings, and improved decision-making—are well-documented, SMEs frequently perceive these systems as complex and financially prohibitive. This raises critical questions about the small businesses' capacity of automating their financial operations with limited resources and their ability to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving business environment without such automation (Wijekumara, 2022).

Automation in financial operations is no longer a novel requirement but a necessity for businesses seeking to thrive in a competitive landscape. Nevertheless, small businesses often face barriers, such as the high initial investment required for sophisticated systems and the technical know-how needed for successful implementation (Okoye & Onyeneke, 2024). These constraints can make the adoption of CAS seem daunting. Nevertheless, there are accessible and user-friendly solutions that enable SMEs to embark on the journey of automation incrementally. Starting with basic accounting software and gradually transitioning to more advanced tools as they grow, SMEs can improve their financial operations without incurring significant upfront costs.

This study investigates the adoption of CAS among manufacturing SMEs in Sri Lanka, focusing on the key factors that influence their decisions. It examines enablers such as technological advancement, accounting expertise, and accessible training, as well as barriers like implementation costs and the need for technical support. Furthermore, the research explores strategies for overcoming these challenges, including targeted interventions such as subsidized training programs and policy support. By

addressing these issues, the study aims to provide actionable insights to enhance CAS adoption, ultimately fostering greater efficiency, competitiveness, and sustainability within Sri Lanka's SME sector. This research contributes to the broader discourse on technology adoption in the financial sector, emphasizing the critical need for tailored solutions that empower small businesses in developing economies primarily answering the following research questions

- What is the perception of small and medium-sized businesses towards adopting CAS in terms of technological change, accounting expertise and cost?
- What are the advantages of adopting CAS in small and medium-sized businesses?
- What is the impact of technological change, accounting expertise and cost in the adoption of computerized accounting systems in small and medium-sized manufacturing companies in Sri Lanka?

2. Literature Review

Innovations in accounting systems have revolutionized organizational operations, providing a significant competitive advantage to those who embrace these advancements. Automated accounting systems are designed to deliver accurate, dependable, and consistent financial outputs (Ismail et al., 2012). Modern computerized accounting systems (CAS) have become indispensable for decision-making, enabling management to make highly informed judgments (Day, 2000). Reliable accounting systems enhance efficiency, and their absence can adversely affect organizational performance (Ismail, 2012). CAS plays a critical role in manufacturing and other industries by streamlining financial data processing, improving overall efficiency, and supporting key decisions related to pricing, spending, and cash flow (Osinowo, 2018). These systems facilitate financial monitoring and generate periodic reports to evaluate profitability, performance, and tax compliance (P Machera & C Machera, 2017). Furthermore, CAS enhances operational performance by identifying business challenges and aiding in the preparation, monitoring, and review of firm performance (Ayoobkhan, 2018). Globally, adopting CAS is essential, especially in developing economies, for timely and accurate execution of financial tasks (Darshi, 2019). However, internal and external barriers often hinder efficient implementation in various industries (Ismail, 2012). With technological advancements, businesses increasingly prioritize sustainability, customer loyalty, and effective decision-making (Itang, 2020). Modern CAS leverages Information Communication Technology (ICT) to process financial data more efficiently and accurately compared to traditional manual methods (Ilias et al., 2009). This innovation supports business process optimization, reduces human error, and accelerates financial reporting. By implementing the appropriate frameworks, businesses can optimize gains, mitigate challenges, and ensure effective management decisions (Jayamaha & Karunananda, 2011). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), pivotal to global economic growth, benefit significantly from CAS adoption. Historically reliant on manual bookkeeping, many SMEs now utilize CAS to enhance productivity,

reduce time-intensive processes, and improve decision-making accuracy (Munasinghe & Munasinghe, 2015). In a rapidly transforming global market, CAS stands out as a critical tool for fostering innovation, efficiency, and sustainable growth.

Research highlights the significant impact of computerized accounting systems (CAS) and accounting information systems (AIS) on organizational efficiency, transparency, and financial performance. Otengo et al. (2023), emphasized the importance of CAS in enhancing risk-based internal auditing (RBIA) for accountability and transparency in Kenya's Homa Bay County. Similarly, P Machera & C Machera (2017) found that CAS improves the quality of financial reports in NGOs by ensuring accuracy and timeliness. Studies by Abdulle et al. (2019) and Biyela et al. (2024), revealed that many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) neglect sound accounting systems, often leading to poor performance. Aduamoah (2017), demonstrated that AIS improves decision-making through centralized and quality data analysis. management commitment, training, and vendor expertise are critical for AIS effectiveness and globally, it is recommended to adopt reliable AIS to improve organizational performance, supported by government policies and skilled graduates to enhance implementation (Osinowo, 2018).

Adopting Computerized Accounting Systems (CAS) reflects a global shift toward leveraging technology for enhanced financial management and organizational efficiency. Perceived ease of use and managerial support are critical for CAS adoption in SMEs, while there is a need for education on CAS benefits and regular software updates (Lanlan, et al., 2019). Similarly, Ismail (2012) found that user attitudes toward CAS are influenced by ease of use and perceived usefulness, with compliance and behavioral intention playing significant roles. Studies across regions have underscored the challenges and enablers of CAS adoption. Perceived ease of use and usefulness strongly influence CAS adoption in small businesses, and the cost, infrastructure, and government support are critical barriers in developing countries (Aduamoah, 2017). Ismail et al. (2012) highlighted CAS's role in integrating information, improving employee performance, and ensuring accurate reporting. Globally, CAS adoption is driven by technological advancements and the increasing need for accurate, timely, and efficient financial systems. Despite challenges, CAS remains vital for modern businesses aiming to optimize operations and embrace digital transformation.

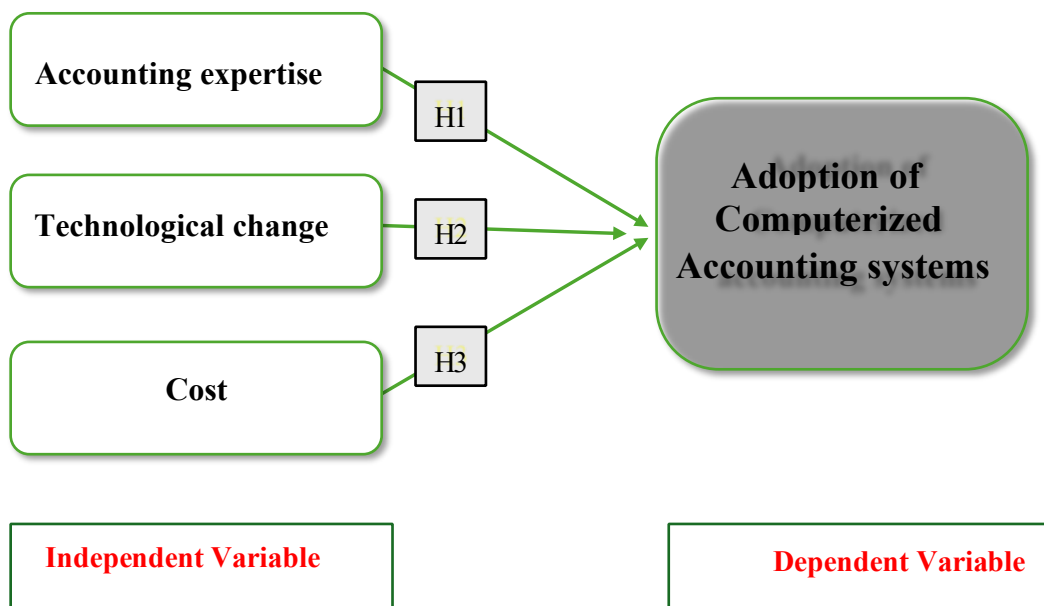
The adoption of Computerized Accounting Systems (CAS) faces significant cost-related barriers across various sectors. Aduamoah (2017) highlighted that coffee societies in Kenya struggle with high hardware and software acquisition costs, recommending zero-rated products to lower expenses. Similarly, financial resources are critical for SMEs to adopt CAS effectively and high costs prevent SMEs from maintaining proper financial records (Abdulle et al., 2019), while Kaluarachchi (2014) noted that Sri Lankan entrepreneurs face challenges in implementing systems due to financial constraints and uncertainty in selecting suitable solutions. Nworie et al. (2023) suggested tax incentives

and awareness programs to encourage CAIS adoption in Ethiopia. These studies collectively emphasize the need for financial support, incentives, and cost-effective solutions to mitigate the expense of CAS adoption, enabling businesses to leverage technology for improved efficiency and accountability.

3. Methodology

The impact of computer based accounting on small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) is assessed with the positivism approach. survey data is used for statistical analysis, and the unit of analysis of the research is the responsible party for the finance function of small and medium-scale businesses in Sri Lanka to understand their experiences with computer-based accounting systems. Each user within an SME was regarded as a unit of analysis, with emphasis on their interaction with and impact on the use of these technologies in Sri Lanka. The data related to the study was collected using a questionnaire consisting of two sections. The first section focuses on collecting demographic data of the respondents, and the second section focuses on gathering data relevant to the variables discussed in the study.

Figure 14 Conceptual Framework



H1: There is a significant impact of accounting expertise on the adoption of computerized accounting systems.

H2: There is a significant impact of Technological changes on adoption of computerized accounting systems.

H3: There is a significant impact of cost on adoption has a computerized accounting systems

4. Data presentational and analysis

4.1 Background of the data

The study sampled 383 participants with an approximately equal distribution of gender, 51.7% and 48.3% being for male and female respondents. The age distribution indicates that the majority of the respondents are younger, with 43.9% falling within the 26-34 age bracket and 36.8% within the 18-25 age bracket. Only a small percentage of respondents is over 45 years of age. Young professionals at the early and middle stages of their careers show greater use of computerized accounting systems. The majority of the respondents had attained a bachelor's degree, making about 61.6%, followed by a high school diploma at 17.5% and a master's degree at 9.9%. This portrays that higher education plays a significant role in adopting computerized accounting systems. As an example of formal education and technical expertise in the specific field showing the importance of specialized training in the field. Half the respondents have between 1 and 2 years of experience in using CAS, highlighting that most users are relatively new to the technology but at least have some familiarization. Further, 7.8% have used CAS for over six years, which would indicate that the long-term usage of such systems is not common, This trend indicates the increasing interest of the business world and their integration towards computerized accounting systems, especially among the new users. 44.1% of the respondents are positioned as accounting assistants, followed by 26.9% of Finance Managers, and 18.8% are owners. This indicates that operational-level employees in finance divisions are more in contact with CAS, and the decision-makers like finance managers and business owners also show a high engagement. Since several levels of management involvement were there, it shows that the engagement in adopting such systems was not only an operational staff requirement but also for the management level, as this is very crucial and contributes to the general business strategies.

4.2 Advantages experienced using CAS

Regarding the advantages of using CAS it is highlighted that CAS have been able to manage a large set of transactions with speed and accuracy. The efficiency aspect is very important for an organization, mostly for SMEs, since a large set of financial data would take more time, and the probability of error will also increase in the case of a manual system. Other features of computerized accounting systems include their ability to adapt to the increase in the number of transactions. In addition, as a business grows, so do the transactions. Computerized systems are programmed to operate within expansion with the least lag, which is one of the major plus points when compared with manual systems. According to the respondents' ideas, the most valuable feature of computerized accounting systems is on-demand reporting. Whether financial summaries, tax-related documentation, or performance metrics, the systems ensure real-time access to key data. This narrows decision-making processes because stakeholders can access and act on current information. In the computerized system, accounting records

may be maintained easily as compared to manual systems. The digital records maintained will be more organized and may be retrieved with ease; in addition, they can be updated or modified with minimal effort. This simplification of keeping records boosts better financial management generally for those businesses dealing with voluminous data. Computerized systems also make updating, correcting, and handling errors easier. In manual systems, correcting becomes a slow process that may give more room for further mistakes to arise. On the other hand, the computerized accounting systems check automatically to identify and correct such errors quicker with accuracy. The data depicted that the computerized accounting system has numerous advantages in managing transactions, flexibility, generating reports, record-keeping, and error handling. All these factors culminate in increasing efficiency and accuracy, which are highly instrumental to the success of SMEs adopting these systems.

Users' accounting expertise and knowledge significantly influence the adoption of Computerized Accounting Systems (CAS). Familiarity with accounting software empowers users to adapt to new systems, integrating them smoothly into workflows. Practical knowledge of accounting applications and features reduces resistance, making implementation more seamless. Additionally, knowledge of accepted accounting standards and procedures is crucial for aligning systems with regulatory and financial requirements, ensuring optimal use. However, the complexity of training (AE4) can hinder adoption, as complicated programs slow implementation and frustrate users. Finally, computer literacy (AE5) is a critical barrier; employees unfamiliar with basic computing concepts struggle with CAS, necessitating additional training costs. The findings highlight that expertise in accounting, standards, and software usage plays a pivotal role in CAS adoption, with user training and literacy levels directly impacting implementation success.

4.3 Perception about the technology change, accounting expertise and cost in relation to CAS implementation

Technological advancements have significantly influenced the adoption of Computerized Accounting Systems (CAS). Respondents highlighted that technological innovation drives automation, efficiency, and systemic changes, necessitating restructured business processes and incurring costs for integration, training, and equipment. Technology advancements have enhanced accountants' ability to analyze complex datasets quickly and competently, improving financial decision-making. Integrating networked computers and internet-based systems facilitate real-time data sharing, cloud accounting, and streamlined operations across organizational branches, ensuring connected and efficient accounting practices. Moreover, technological change has raised awareness and efficiency within accounting firms, making CAS adoption a strategic necessity for competitiveness. Respondents emphasized that technological improvements enhance system capabilities, data analysis, and business operations, ultimately transforming accounting practices into more effective and efficient processes.

Cost-related factors significantly impact the adoption of Computerized Accounting Systems (CAS). High implementation costs, including hardware, software, and infrastructure expenses, deter many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) despite the potential long-term benefits. Training costs also influence adoption, as employee preparation requires both time and financial investment, which SMEs often find challenging. Frequent servicing and maintenance costs add to the financial burden, making CAS adoption a cumbersome process for smaller firms. Additionally, firms weigh the cost-benefit aspect, considering long-term returns like accuracy, scalability, and efficiency. A perception of low returns often leads to hesitation in adopting the system. Installation costs, including system integration, customization, and infrastructure build-up, further discourage adoption due to their high initial outlay. Respondents emphasize that businesses must evaluate these costs against potential benefits to determine if CAS implementation is financially viable.

4.4 Multiple regression analysis

The summary of the model gives insight into the degree of fit of the regression model. In regression analysis, the R^2 value is, the square of the correlation coefficient gives the explanatory power of a model concerning how well variations of independent variables explain a dependent variable. According to Uma Sekaran & Roger Bougie, 2016, an R^2 above 0.3 explains good explanatory power, while below 0.3 explains weak explanatory power. Between 0.4 and 0.5, the strength of the explanatory power is considered moderate, and levels above 0.5 reflect high explanatory power.

Table 35 Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.710^a	.507	.503	.22647
a. Predictors: (Constant), C, TC, AE				

The R-squared is 0.507; that shows that the independent variables Cost (C), Technological Change (TC), and Accounting Expertise (AE) explain 50.7% of the variance in the dependent variable. As such, the estimated model may be said to have a medium to high explanatory power. An adjusted R^2 , which takes account of the number of predictors in a model, stands at 0.503, hence a very good fit of the model. This gives a standard error of the estimate of 0.22647, which defines the average distance the observed values would fall from the regression line. Overall, the results of the analysis are that the predictors strongly influence the dependent variable because over half of the variance accounted for, signifying a strong model fit.

The analysis uses ANOVA to establish the fitness and statistical significance of the model. A significant result obtained in the ANOVA means that the model is a good fit and, therefore, an important relationship exists between the dependent and independent variables.

Table 36 ANOVA Table

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	19.777	3	6.659	129.834	.000 ^b
	Residual	19.439	379	.051		
	Total	39.416	382			

a. Dependent Variable: A

b. Predictors: (Constant), C, TC, AE

In the model significance testing, the following hypotheses are employed:

H0: Model Not Significance

H1: Model significance

For hypothesis testing the selected alpha level is 0.05 and the P-value is 0.000, so there is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis and infer that this model is statistically significant

Table 37 Coefficients Table

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.367	.059		6.207	.000
	AE	.245	.052	.260	4.668	.000
	TC	.331	.046	.3645	7.144	.000
	C	.166	.055	.176	3.017	.003

a. Dependent Variable: A

The below table shows a summary of hypothesis testing with alpha values with their respective significance levels and an accepted/ rejected status.

Table 38 Hypothesis Analysis

Hypothesis	Beta value	Sig Value	Accepted/Rejected
H1-There is a significant impact of accounting expertise on the adoption of computerized accounting systems.	0.244	0.000	H1 Accepted
H2: There is a significant impact of Technological changes on adoption of computerized accounting systems.	0.330	0.000	H2 Accepted
H3: There is a significant impact of Cost on the adoption of computerized accounting systems.	0.166	0.003	H3 Accepted

H1: There is a significant impact of accounting expertise on adoption of computerized accounting systems.

Beta = 0.244, Sig. Value = 0.000, Accepted

Accounting expertise will definitely play an important role in successfully implementing and adopting computerized accounting systems. Indeed, previous studies have indicated that persons with an accounting background are more likely to appreciate the benefits accruing from computerization: 'more accurate, rapid output of higher quality; improved decision-making facilities'. The professionals in accounting are better placed to perceive the functionality of the system and its place within a greater framework of financial management. It indicates that a firm with more accounting expertise can make more appropriate use of these systems; hence, there is a positive relationship between expertise and adoption.

H2: There is a significant impact of Technological changes on adoption of computerized accounting systems.

Beta = 0.330, Sig. Value = 0.000, Accepted

Technological change is one pivotal factor that acts as a driver toward the adoption of computerized accounting systems. With the ever-changing nature of technology, businesses must keep up the pace with innovations to maintain competitive advantages and efficiency. The adoption of computerized accounting is most likely to be taken up by those organizations that easily embrace technological changes, such as the introduction of advanced software systems. Literature has proven that companies which adapt to technological innovations face smooth processes, lower operation costs, and higher accuracy in financial reporting. This alignment of technology with organizational processes is one of the most influencing factors in the adoption of computerized systems.

H3: There is a significant impact of Cost on adoption of computerized accounting systems.

Beta = 0.166, Sig. Value = 0.003, Accepted

The study explores the factors influencing the adoption of Computerized Accounting Systems (CAS) in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the manufacturing sector in Sri Lanka. Cost emerged as a significant factor, with a Beta value of 0.166 and a p-value of 0.003, indicating a statistically significant positive impact on adoption. Although the effect size is moderate, it highlights that cost considerations play a crucial role in decision-making processes for SMEs. The findings suggest that while cost is not the dominant determinant, it cannot be overlooked, as the affordability and perceived value of CAS influence adoption rates. SMEs often operate under resource constraints, making initial investment and maintenance costs critical barriers. These results underscore the need for affordable and scalable CAS solutions tailored to SMEs, as well as potential government subsidies or incentives to encourage wider adoption in the manufacturing sector.

5. Conclusion

This analysis of the study reveals that the p-value is 0.000, and that the beta value is 0.244, indicating that accounting expertise significantly affects the implementation of computerized accounting systems. What this means is that when users become more skilled and knowledgeable in the accounting field, they are also in a better position to use computerized systems more effectively to enhance operational efficiency. However, a low level of accounting expertise will hinder the effective implementation of such systems. The research instrument had measured this aspect at an average score of 2.15, with the individual score of the lowest at 1.9, proving that the respondents do possess different levels of expertise. The highest deviation, 0.630, was from questions relating to software navigation skills, which means a subset of its users might face challenges in relation to the technical requirements of the computerized systems. The third hypothesis of this study therefore investigates the impact of accounting expertise on system adoption in SMEs in Sri Lanka. This hypothesis, H1, was therefore tested: "There is a significant impact of accounting expertise on the adoption of computerized

accounting systems in Sri Lanka.". The results pointed out a positive relationship, as depicted in previous studies such as Beke (2010) and Kaluarachchi (2016), who echoed that accounting knowledge enhances the use of the system and decision-making. This also confirms various global findings on the critical role of accounting expertise in technology adoption, with a beta of 0.139 and a significance value of 0.001.

This analysis of the study reveals that technological change and adoption of computerized accounting systems are significantly related; its beta value is 0.330 and the p-value is 0.000 which goes to say that the technological changes have a positive significant effect on their adoptions. Finding of the aforementioned fact means that those businesses that can cope with rapid technological innovations are more likely to result in the integration of computerized systems more effectively. Whereas the more adaptive persons will feel at ease in their implementation, the less adaptive ones may struggle. The average score regarding technological change from the survey is 2.35. However, on updating questions about the systems, the average score stands at 1.95, indicating variation in adaptation. The highest deviation, 0.710, showed variations in responses over new technologies being applied at ease. The third objective of this study aimed to investigate the effect of technology change in adopting the system. Thus, the hypothesis was H2: "There is a significant effect of technological change on the adoption of computerized accounting systems in Sri Lanka." These findings support the hypothesis and go in tandem with prior studies by such authors as Otieno (2015) and Amanamah et al. (2016), who mentioned that keeping pace with technological changes increases efficiency within organizations and improves the accuracy of financial reporting.

This study showed that the cost factor and the use of computerized accounting systems are significantly related, with a beta value of 0.166 and a p-value of 0.003, indicating that cost is an important deterrent to adoption. This result would point out that the high initial costs of setup, training, and maintenance costs persuade SMEs from fully embracing computerized systems. Where there is an adoption, firms sometimes weigh against these costs the advantages that will be realized through long-term benefits. For the questions relating to the cost factors, the average score came to 2.45, while questions about maintenance fees had a lower average of 1.95, reflecting the diversity in the financial capabilities of the respondents. The highest deviation, 0.720, has been reported for questions on set-up costs, showing disparities in the preparedness or financial abilities between firms for adoption. Therefore, this hypothesis on the objective to assess cost impacts was stated as follows: "There is a significant impact of cost on the adoption of computerized accounting systems in Sri Lanka." This hypothesis, as will be seen, is supported by the findings and is, in essence, similar to other studies, such as that by Otieno et al. (2013) in their study that affordability is one of the key factors which affects its adoption in SMEs.

In this regard, the present study identifies the most important factors that affect the adoption of computerized accounting systems by SMEs in Sri Lanka and centers around accounting expertise,

technological alteration, and cost. Research findings show that accounting expertise is an effective factor in adopting and using CAS. Knowledgeable users would, therefore, understand and use these systems more effectively. Technological change also plays an important role, as SMEs moving in step with innovation are better positioned to gain from the efficiencies and accuracy that computerized systems can offer. Cost, however, is on the opposite side of the coin, with high initial and recurring expenses posing a serious deterrent.

Such suggestions include financial support to the businesses in set-up costs, government incentives, and the promotion of cheap training and software. This will further help the SMEs to reduce their financial burden, ensuring better system utilization and thereby improving the accuracy and efficiency related to financial management. The study, therefore, concludes by recommending that stakeholders in government bodies, financial institutions, and technology providers must collaborate to ease CAS adoption among SMEs, to contribute toward their growth and resilience against stiff business competition.

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