

## **Open Innovations in Apparel SMEs: Special Reference to Western Province**

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Open innovation leads firms to use external knowledge in the firm innovation process. In this dynamic environment, use of external knowledge to accelerate innovation practices is vital for organizations. Small and medium firms are facing challenges in adopting innovation practices due to the size and have limited resources for introducing the innovation effectively in the market. Even with those challenges, firms are engaging with open innovation in developing the firm innovation process. The main objective of this study was to assess the degree of applying open innovation practices within small and medium apparel firms and the sub-objective was to identify the challenges of open innovation within the small and medium apparel sectors. This research study accomplished those objectives by gathering primary data through an in-depth interview from 12 small and medium apparel firms in the Western province in Sri Lanka by using a convenience sampling method. An equal number of respondents from each district were selected and interview guidelines were used to ensure the interviews were heading in the right direction. Further, data analysis was done using the thematic data analysis method. The study found that small and medium enterprises are applying open innovation practices through customers' involvement, suppliers' involvement, competitors' involvement, and strategic alliance. Additionally, this research found the internal and external challenges of open innovation. The research fundings support creating a platform which connects with external parties and provides awareness of the open innovation practices. Further their research may identify the management involvement of practicing open innovation to develop firm innovation practices.

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