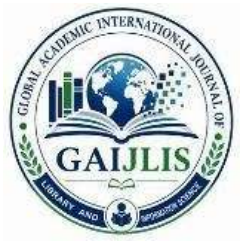
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INFORMATION NEEDS AND SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF SMALL- SCALE BUSINESS OWNERS IN ETHIOPE EAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, DELTA STATE

[1]Ukubeyinje, Ejiro Sandra [2]Akporeha, Endurance Ogheneweware
[1]College of Education, Warri. ukubeyinjesandra@gmail.com
[2]*South Delta University, Ozoro Delta State, Nigeria*

Abstract

Background and Objective: *Information is critical for the growth and sustainability of small-scale businesses. This study examined the information needs and information-seeking behaviour of small-scale business owners in Ethiope East Local Government Area, Delta State, Nigeria. Specifically, it sought to identify the types of information required, the sources utilized, their information-seeking patterns, and the challenges encountered in accessing business-related information.*

Methods*: A descriptive survey research design was adopted. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to 235 respondents selected through simple random sampling. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, simple percentages, and mean scores.*

Results: *The findings revealed that small-scale business owners have strong information needs in areas such as customer relations (M = 3.38), finance (M = 3.34), marketing (M = 3.28), and government regulations (M = 3.25). Informal sources such as customers and suppliers (M = 3.34) were more commonly used than formal and ICT-based sources (M = 3.08–3.13). Information-seeking behaviour was moderate to active (M = 3.10–3.34).*

Major challenges included high cost of information access (M = 3.32), difficulty in accessing reliable sources (M = 3.30), and limited ICT skills (M = 3.13).

Conclusion and Recommendations: *The study concludes that while small-scale business owners have significant information needs, their ability to access and utilize information is constrained by cost, source reliability, and ICT skills. It is recommended that ICT training, improved access to information services and affordable digital infrastructure be provided to enhance information access and overall business performance.*

Keywords: Information needs, Information-seeking behaviour, Small-scale business owners, ICT, Business information.

*Corresponding author(s) Ukubeyinje, E. S. & Akporeha, E.O, (2026) agree that this article remain permanently open access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License

INTRODUCTION

Information is widely recognized as one of the most valuable resources in modern society and plays a crucial role in the success of business organizations regardless of their size. In an increasingly competitive and technology-driven business environment, the ability to obtain, process, and utilize relevant information has become essential for effective decision-making and organizational growth. Information assists business owners in identifying opportunities, understanding market trends, managing risks, improving customer relations, and responding to changes within their operating environment (Orrensalo *et al.,* 2024). For entrepreneurs and small-scale

business owners, information is not merely a support resource but a strategic asset that contributes significantly to business survival, profitability, and long-term sustainability. Without access to adequate and reliable information, business owners may find it difficult to make sound decisions, resulting in poor performance and possible business failure (AlShakhs and Agarwal, 2022).

Small-scale businesses occupy a prominent position in the economic development of many countries, particularly developing nations such as Nigeria. These enterprises contribute significantly to employment generation, income distribution, poverty alleviation, rural development, and economic diversification. They serve as sources of livelihood for millions of individuals and provide goods and services that meet the needs of local communities (Selamat and Windasari, 2021). Despite their economic importance, many small-scale businesses operate under challenging conditions characterized by limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, intense market competition, and restricted access to business support services. To effectively navigate these challenges, business owners require access to a wide range of information that can guide their planning, operations, and strategic decisions. The ability to acquire and utilize such information often determines the extent to which these businesses can compete and thrive in a dynamic business environment (Dadaczynski *et al.,* 2021).

The concept of information needs refers to the realization that there is a gap in an individual's knowledge which must be filled to accomplish a specific objective or solve a particular problem. Small-scale business owners frequently experience information needs in relation to various aspects of business management, including sources of finance, investment opportunities, market conditions, customer preferences, taxation, government regulations, technological innovations, and business development strategies. As businesses grow and encounter new challenges, their information needs also evolve, making the continuous acquisition of information an essential aspect of entrepreneurship. The nature and intensity of these needs often vary according to the type of business, level of experience of the owner, educational background, and the business environment in which the enterprise operates (Zhao *et al.,* 2022).

Information-seeking behaviour refers to the various activities and processes through which individuals identify, search for, access, evaluate, and utilize information to satisfy their needs. In the context of small-scale businesses, information-seeking behaviour encompasses the methods, channels, and sources employed by business owners to obtain relevant information for decision-making and problem-solving. Business owners may seek information through formal sources such as libraries, government agencies, financial institutions, business development centres, and professional associations. They may also rely on informal sources such as family members, friends, colleagues, customers, suppliers, and personal experience. The effectiveness of these information-seeking practices largely influences the quality of decisions made and, ultimately, the success of the business enterprise (Neely *et al.,* 2021).

Recent advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have significantly transformed the way information is generated, stored, disseminated, and accessed. The emergence of the internet, social media platforms, mobile applications, and digital communication tools has expanded opportunities for small-scale business owners to access business-related information more quickly and conveniently than ever before. Through online platforms, entrepreneurs can obtain information on market trends, consumer behaviour, funding opportunities, business regulations, and emerging technologies. Digital technologies have also facilitated networking, knowledge sharing, and collaboration among business owners across different geographical locations. Consequently, technology has become an important factor influencing the information-seeking behaviour of entrepreneurs in contemporary business environments (Zimmerman and Shaw , 2020).

Given the vital role of information in business development and the numerous challenges associated with information access, there is a growing need to examine the information needs and seeking behaviour of small-scale business owners. Understanding the types of information required by entrepreneurs, the sources they utilize, the strategies they adopt in seeking information, and the barriers they encounter is essential for developing effective support systems and information services. Such understanding can assist policymakers, librarians, information professionals, government agencies, and business support organizations in designing interventions that will enhance information accessibility and utilization among entrepreneurs. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the information needs and seeking behaviour of small-scale business owners with the aim of contributing to improved business performance, informed decision-making, and sustainable economic development.

Statement of the Problem

Information is essential for the effective operation, growth, and sustainability of small-scale businesses. Small-scale business owners require accurate and timely information on areas such as finance, marketing, customer preferences, technological innovations, government policies, and business regulations to make informed decisions and remain

competitive. However, despite the increasing availability of information through traditional and digital channels, many small-scale business owners still experience difficulties in identifying, accessing, and utilizing relevant information needed for their business activities. Factors such as inadequate information literacy skills, limited access to reliable information sources, poor technological infrastructure, financial constraints, and lack of awareness of available information services often hinder their information-seeking efforts. Consequently, these challenges may lead to poor decision-making, reduced productivity, limited business growth, and increased vulnerability to business failure (AlShakhs and Agarwal, 2022). It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the information needs and seeking behaviour of small-scale business owners in order to understand the types of information they require, the sources they utilize, and the challenges they encounter in accessing and using information for business development.

Objectives of the study

The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify the information needs of small-scale business owners.
2. Determine the types of information most frequently required by small-scale business owners for business operations and decision-making.
3. Examine the sources of information utilized by small-scale business owners.
4. Identify the challenges faced by small-scale business owners in seeking and accessing relevant information.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. What are the information needs of small-scale business owners?
2. What sources of information are utilized by small-scale business owners?
3. What information-seeking behaviours are adopted by small-scale business owners in obtaining business-related information?
4. What challenges do small-scale business owners face in seeking and accessing information?

Research Hypotheses

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between the information needs of small-scale business owners and their business operations.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between the sources of information utilized by small-scale business owners and their access to business-related information.

H_{03}: Information-seeking behaviour has no significant influence on the acquisition of business-related information among small-scale business owners.

H_{04}: The challenges faced by small-scale business owners in seeking information have no significant effect on their access to and utilization of information.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Review

Concept of Information

Information is a fundamental resource that plays a vital role in human activities, organizational management, and decision-making processes. It is often regarded as processed data that has been organized and presented in a meaningful manner to facilitate understanding and action. Information enables individuals and organizations to acquire knowledge, reduce uncertainty, solve problems, and make informed decisions. In contemporary society, information has become a strategic asset that influences social, economic, political, and technological development. The increasing complexity of modern business environments has further elevated the importance of information as a critical resource for achieving organizational goals and maintaining competitiveness (Hicks, 2022).

According to Aina (2014), information is data that have been processed into a form that is meaningful and useful to the recipient. Similarly, Oketunji (2016) viewed information as knowledge communicated or received concerning a particular fact, circumstance, or event. Information serves as a bridge between knowledge and action, providing the basis upon which decisions are made. In business settings, information assists managers and entrepreneurs in understanding market conditions, customer needs, competitor activities, financial opportunities, and regulatory requirements. The quality of decisions made by business owners often depends on the relevance, accuracy, timeliness, and reliability of the information available to them.

Information exists in various forms and can be obtained from numerous sources. It may be formal or informal, printed or electronic, internal or external to an organization. Formal information sources include books, journals, government publications, reports, and databases, while informal sources include personal contacts, discussions, observations, and social networks. The advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has significantly expanded access to information through digital platforms such as the internet, social media, online databases, and mobile applications. These technologies have transformed the way information is created, stored, disseminated, and utilized across different sectors of society (Ding *et al.,* 2022).

In the context of small-scale businesses, information is essential for planning, organizing, controlling, and evaluating business activities. Business owners require information to identify business opportunities, understand consumer preferences, monitor market trends, manage financial resources, and comply with legal and regulatory requirements. Access to relevant information enables entrepreneurs to make strategic decisions that enhance productivity, profitability, and business sustainability. Conversely, inadequate or inaccurate information may result in poor decision-making, increased business risks, and reduced organizational performance (Rainer and Prince, 2021).

Information Needs

Information needs refer to the recognition of a gap in knowledge that prompts an individual to seek information for the purpose of solving a problem, making a decision, or satisfying a particular objective. The concept is central to information science because it explains why people search for and use information. Information needs arise when individuals perceive that the information they currently possess is insufficient to accomplish a task or address a situation effectively. Consequently, the need for information serves as the primary motivation for information-seeking behaviour. The nature of information needs varies among individuals depending on their roles, responsibilities, educational background, experiences, and environmental circumstances (Soroya *et al.,* 2021).

According to Wilson (1981), information need is a subjective experience that occurs when a person recognizes a deficiency in knowledge necessary to achieve a desired goal. Similarly, Case and Given (2016) describe information needs as the requirements for information that arise from uncertainties encountered in daily activities, professional responsibilities, and decision-making processes. Information needs are dynamic rather than static, meaning that they change over time as circumstances and environmental conditions evolve. As individuals acquire new knowledge and encounter new challenges, their information needs also change accordingly.

Information needs may be classified into different categories depending on the purpose for which information is required. These include personal information needs, educational information needs, professional information needs, social information needs, and business information needs. In the business environment, entrepreneurs and business owners require information on various aspects of enterprise management, including finance, marketing, production, customer relations, taxation, legal regulations, and technological innovations. Such information enables them to make informed decisions that improve operational efficiency and enhance organizational performance (Schiller, 2024).

For small-scale business owners, information needs are particularly important because they operate in highly competitive and constantly changing environments. They require timely and accurate information to identify market opportunities, understand consumer preferences, secure funding, manage risks, and respond to economic changes. Financial information may be needed to obtain loans, prepare budgets, and manage cash flow. Marketing information helps business owners understand customer behaviour, competitors' strategies, and market trends. Regulatory information enables compliance with government policies, taxation requirements, and business registration procedures, while technological information assists in adopting innovations that improve productivity and service delivery (Chandra-Mouli and Patel, 2020).

Several factors influence the information needs of small-scale business owners. These include the size and nature of the business, level of education of the entrepreneur, years of business experience, availability of information sources, technological competence, and the business environment. Business owners operating in highly competitive sectors often require more diverse and specialized information than those in less competitive markets. Similarly, entrepreneurs with higher levels of education and digital literacy may have broader information needs due to their exposure to multiple information sources and business opportunities (Feng *et al.,* 2020).

Information-Seeking Behaviour

Information-seeking behaviour refers to the purposeful activities, actions, and processes through which individuals identify, search for, access, evaluate, and use information to satisfy their information needs. It is a fundamental concept in information science that explains how people interact with various information sources in order to bridge gaps in knowledge and support decision-making. Information-seeking behaviour is not a random activity; rather, it is a systematic response to a perceived need for information, which may arise from personal, social, educational, or professional situations. In the context of business, it reflects the strategies and channels entrepreneurs adopt to obtain relevant information for effective management and growth of their enterprises (Zimmerman and Shaw, 2020).

According to Wilson (1999), information-seeking behaviour is part of a broader information behaviour framework that includes information need, information search, information use, and information sharing. Similarly, Kuhlthau (1991) describes it as a process that involves stages such as initiation, selection,

exploration, formulation, collection, and presentation of information. These stages highlight that information seeking is often associated with uncertainty and emotional experiences, especially at the early stages when individuals are unsure of where to find relevant information or how to interpret it effectively.

Information-seeking behaviour can take different forms depending on the individual and the context. It may be active or passive, formal or informal, planned or unplanned. Active information seeking occurs when individuals deliberately search for specific information using defined sources such as libraries, databases, or the internet. Passive information seeking, on the other hand, occurs when individuals obtain information incidentally through conversations, observations, media exposure, or routine activities. In many cases, individuals combine both approaches depending on the urgency and importance of their information needs (Soong *et al.,* 2020).

For small-scale business owners, information-seeking behaviour is influenced by several factors, including education level, access to information sources, digital literacy, cost of accessing information, and the perceived usefulness of available information. Business owners with higher levels of education and ICT skills are more likely to use digital platforms such as websites, social media, and online business directories to obtain information. Conversely, those with limited access to technology or lower literacy levels may rely more on informal sources such as friends, family members, customers, and fellow traders. The availability and reliability of information sources also play a significant role in shaping how business owners seek and use information (Dahlqvist, 2021).

The information-seeking behaviour of entrepreneurs is critical to business success because it determines the quality and relevance of the information they obtain. Effective information seeking enables business owners to identify market opportunities, understand customer demands, manage financial resources, and comply with regulatory requirements. It also enhances innovation and competitiveness in the marketplace. However, ineffective or limited information-seeking behaviour may result in poor decision-making, missed opportunities, and reduced business performance (Tachie-Donkor and Ezema, 2023).

Sources of Information for Small-Scale Business Owners

Sources of information refer to the various channels, platforms, or means through which individuals obtain the information needed to satisfy their information needs. For small-scale business owners, these sources are crucial because they provide the knowledge required for decision-making, business planning, problem-solving, and overall enterprise development. The effectiveness of any business operation is often influenced by the quality, reliability, and accessibility of the information sources utilized by the business owner. In today's dynamic business environment, information is derived from a combination of formal, informal, and digital sources, each playing a unique role in supporting entrepreneurial activities (Tuffour *et al.,* 2022).

Formal sources of information are structured and institutionalized channels that provide verified and reliable business-related information. These include libraries, government agencies, business development centers, financial institutions, trade associations, chambers of commerce, and published materials such as books, journals, reports, and newspapers. These sources are generally considered credible because the information they provide is often reviewed, documented, and regulated. For example, government agencies provide information on taxation policies, business registration procedures, and regulatory frameworks, while financial institutions provide information on loans, grants, and investment opportunities. Formal sources are particularly important for small-scale business owners who require accurate and authoritative information for compliance and strategic planning (Meressa, 2020).

Informal sources of information, on the other hand, are less structured and are based on personal interactions and social networks. These include friends, family members, customers, suppliers, colleagues, and fellow traders. Informal sources are widely used by small-scale business owners because they are easily accessible, cost-effective, and often provide quick responses to immediate information needs. For instance, business owners may rely on customer feedback to understand market demand or seek advice from fellow entrepreneurs on pricing strategies and supplier relationships. Although informal sources are convenient, the information obtained from them may sometimes lack accuracy or reliability, as it is not always verified (Ncoyini *et al.,* 2022).

In recent years, digital and online sources of information have become increasingly important for small-scale business owners due to advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). These sources include the internet, social media platforms, mobile applications, online business forums, e-commerce platforms, and digital databases. Through these platforms, entrepreneurs can access real-time information on market trends, product prices, customer preferences, advertising strategies, and global business opportunities. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) are also widely used for marketing

and customer engagement. Digital sources offer convenience, speed, and a wide range of information; however, they also present challenges such as information overload, misinformation, and difficulties in verifying the credibility of online content (Tuffour *et al.,* 2022).

Information Needs of Small-Scale Business Owners

Information needs of small-scale business owners refer to the specific types of knowledge and data required by entrepreneurs to effectively manage, sustain, and grow their business enterprises. These needs arise from the daily challenges and responsibilities involved in running a business, and they represent the gap between what business owners know and what they need to know in order to make informed decisions. In a competitive and dynamic business environment, small-scale business owners rely heavily on relevant information to reduce uncertainty, identify opportunities, solve operational problems, and improve overall performance (Rahman *et al.,* 2020).

Small-scale business owners require different categories of information depending on the nature of their business activities. One of the most important is financial information, which includes access to loans, credit facilities, interest rates, budgeting techniques, taxation policies, and financial management strategies. This type of information is essential for ensuring proper financial planning, capital management, and business sustainability. Without adequate financial information, many small-scale enterprises struggle with poor cash flow management and limited access to external funding (Meressa, 2020).

Marketing information is another critical need for small-scale business owners. This includes information about customer preferences, market trends, pricing strategies, demand and supply conditions, and competitor activities. Such information enables entrepreneurs to position their products or services effectively within the market and attract more customers. In many cases, business success depends on how well the owner understands the target market and responds to changing consumer demands (Pomeroy *et al.,* 2020).

Operational and technological information is also important for the smooth running of small-scale businesses. This includes information on production techniques, product improvement, inventory management, and the use of modern technologies in business processes. With the increasing role of digital tools in business operations, entrepreneurs also require information on how to use ICT tools such as mobile payment systems, social media marketing platforms, and online business applications to enhance productivity and efficiency (Gofwan, 2022).

In addition, small-scale business owners require legal and regulatory information to ensure compliance with government policies and business regulations. This includes information on business registration procedures, taxation requirements, licensing, environmental regulations, and labor laws. Access to such information helps entrepreneurs avoid legal penalties and operate within the framework of established regulations (Ncoyini *et al.,* 2022).

Information-Seeking Behaviour of Small-Scale Business Owners

Information-seeking behaviour of small-scale business owners refers to the patterns, strategies, and actions they adopt in identifying, searching for, accessing, evaluating, and using information needed for effective business operations and decision-making. It describes how entrepreneurs respond to their information needs and the methods they employ to obtain relevant business-related information. In the context of small-scale enterprises, information-seeking behaviour is a critical determinant of business success, as it influences the quality of decisions made and the ability of the business owner to adapt to changing market conditions (Orrensalo and Nikou, 2021).

Small-scale business owners exhibit different information-seeking behaviours depending on their personal characteristics, business environment, and level of access to information sources. Some entrepreneurs engage in active information-seeking behaviour, where they deliberately and systematically search for specific information needed for business improvement. This may involve visiting government offices, consulting financial institutions, attending business seminars, or searching online platforms for market and financial data. Others may adopt passive information-seeking behaviour, where information is obtained incidentally through daily interactions with customers, suppliers, friends, or through exposure to media content without a deliberate search effort (Halder *et al.,* 2020).

The information-seeking behaviour of small-scale business owners is also shaped by their level of education, digital literacy, and exposure to information and communication technology (ICT). Entrepreneurs with higher educational backgrounds and ICT skills are more likely to use digital platforms such as the internet, social media, and mobile applications to access timely and diverse business information. In contrast, those with limited education or low technological competence tend to rely more on informal and interpersonal sources such as friends, family members, and fellow traders. This variation in behaviour highlights the influence of socioeconomic

and environmental factors on how information is sought and utilized (Yap *et al.,* 2020).

Stages of information-seeking behaviour among business owners often follow a logical process. It begins with the recognition of an information need, followed by the identification of possible sources, the search for relevant information, evaluation of the information obtained, and finally, the application of the information to solve business problems or make decisions. However, this process is not always linear, as entrepreneurs may revisit earlier stages depending on the adequacy and reliability of the information obtained (Jjuuko *et al.,* 2025).

Several factors influence the information-seeking behaviour of small-scale business owners. These include accessibility of information sources, cost of obtaining information, time constraints, perceived usefulness of information, and trust in the source of information. In many cases, business owners prioritize sources that are easily accessible and cost-effective, even if they are less reliable. This is particularly common among small-scale enterprises operating with limited financial and human resources (Peter *et al.,* 2022).

Challenges to Information Seeking Among Small-Scale Business Owners

Small-scale business owners often face numerous challenges in their efforts to seek, access, and utilize relevant information for effective business operations. Although information is essential for decision-making, business growth, and sustainability, the process of obtaining it is frequently hindered by several personal, institutional, and environmental constraints. These challenges limit the ability of entrepreneurs to fully benefit from available information resources and may negatively affect business performance and competitiveness (Ashiru *et al.,* 2022).

One major challenge is inadequate access to reliable information sources. Many small-scale business owners operate in environments where libraries, business development centres, and formal information institutions are either unavailable or difficult to access. In rural and semi-urban areas, the scarcity of structured information services further worsens the situation, forcing entrepreneurs to rely heavily on informal sources, which may not always provide accurate or up-to-date information (Ogunsola and Babalola, 2020).

Another significant challenge is low level of education and poor information literacy skills. Many small-scale business owners may not have the necessary skills to effectively identify, interpret, evaluate, and use information. This limits their ability to make proper use of formal and digital information sources such as books, online databases, and government publications. As a result, they may depend more on verbal communication and personal experience rather than verified information (Ugbala *et al.,* 2020).

Financial constraints also play a major role in limiting information-seeking behaviour. Accessing certain types of information, especially through professional services, internet subscriptions, business seminars, or consultancy services, often requires money. Many small-scale business owners operate with limited capital and prioritize operational expenses over information acquisition, making it difficult for them to invest in quality information resources (Madukoma *et al.,* 2022).

Technological barriers further hinder effective information seeking among small-scale business owners. Although Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has greatly improved access to information, not all entrepreneurs have access to digital devices, internet connectivity, or the skills required to use them effectively. Poor infrastructure, unstable electricity supply, and high cost of data services also contribute to limited use of digital information sources (Orrensalo *et al.,* 2024).

Relationship between Information Needs and Information-Seeking Behaviour of Small-Scale Business Owners

There is a strong and direct relationship between information needs and information-seeking behaviour, as the existence of a need for information is the primary trigger for engaging in information-seeking activities. Information needs represent the gap between what an individual knows and what is required to solve a problem or make a decision, while information-seeking behaviour refers to the actions taken to bridge that gap. In the context of small-scale business owners, this relationship is particularly important because their daily business operations depend heavily on timely and relevant information for decision-making, problem-solving, and strategic planning (Yap *et al.,* 2020).

When small-scale business owners identify a specific information need, such as understanding market demand, accessing financial support, or complying with government regulations, they are motivated to seek information through various channels. The nature and urgency of the information need often determine the intensity and direction of the information-seeking behaviour. For example, urgent financial needs may push entrepreneurs to actively consult banks, online platforms, or business development agencies, while less urgent needs may be satisfied through informal discussions with colleagues or customers (Orrensalo and Nikou, 2021).

The relationship between information needs and information-seeking behaviour is also influenced by several intervening factors such as education level, digital literacy, accessibility of information sources, cost of information, and past experiences. These factors can either facilitate or hinder the extent to which an individual engages in effective information-seeking behaviour. For instance, a business owner with strong ICT skills is more likely to translate information needs into active online searches, while one with limited skills may rely on passive or informal means of obtaining information (Meressa, 2020).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of information-seeking behaviour determines how well information needs are satisfied. When appropriate sources are used and relevant information is successfully obtained, business owners are better able to make informed decisions that enhance productivity and competitiveness. However, when information-seeking behaviour is ineffective, due to barriers such as poor access to reliable sources or lack of information literacy, information needs may remain unmet, leading to poor decision-making and reduced business performance (Soong *et al.,* 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Wilson's Model of Information Behaviour (1981/1999) and Kuhlthau's Information Search Process (ISP) Model (1991). Together, the two models explain both the factors that influence information seeking and the process through which it occurs.Wilson's Model posits that information-seeking behaviour is triggered by a perceived information need arising from a problem situation. However, this need does not directly lead to seeking. It is influenced by intervening variables such as psychological factors, demographics, environmental conditions, and barriers including cost, accessibility, and time (Wilson, 2020). For small-scale business owners, information needs often arise in areas like finance, marketing, and operations. Yet their ability to seek information is frequently constrained by limited ICT skills, poor access to reliable sources, and financial limitations. The model thus provides a framework for understanding the relationship between needs, barriers, and actual seeking behaviour among entrepreneurs (Montazeri, 2025).Kuhlthau's ISP Model complements this by explaining how information seeking unfolds. It describes the process as having six stages: initiation, selection, exploration, formulation, collection, and presentation. Each stage is marked by specific cognitive and emotional states, ranging from uncertainty and confusion at the beginning to clarity and confidence when relevant information is applied (Okhakhu et al., 2026). This is particularly relevant to small-scale business owners who often begin with uncertainty when identifying sources for market opportunities, funding, or regulations, but gradually refine their search and use the information for business decisions. The model therefore highlights both the process and the emotional-cognitive challenges involved (Mai Tsawm et al., 2025).In summary, Wilson's model explains why and what influences information seeking, while Kuhlthau's model explains how the process takes place. Together, they provide a comprehensive lens for examining the information needs, influencing factors, and seeking behaviour of small-scale business owners in Ethiope East LGA.

Empirical Reviews

Ogunsola and Babalola (2020) examined the relationship between business information use and performance of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Ibadan, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design using 120 MSME operators selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using correlation techniques. The findings revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between business information use and customer satisfaction as well as overall business performance. The study concluded that MSME owners are aware of the importance of business information but do not fully utilize it effectively. It recommended improved access to business information sources and training on information utilization skills for entrepreneurs.

Ugbala *et al*. (2020) investigated public libraries as sources of business information for small-scale business enterprises in Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive survey design covering 240 small-scale business owners across selected states in Southwestern Nigeria. Data were gathered through questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study found that small-scale business owners require information mainly on funding, taxation, and market opportunities, while public libraries serve as important but underutilized sources of business information. The researchers concluded that although libraries provide valuable business information, awareness and usage among entrepreneurs remain low. They recommended increased outreach and information literacy programmes to improve library utilization by small-scale business owners.

Madukoma *et al*. (2022) studied information-seeking behaviour as a determinant of performance among rice milling small and medium enterprises in North-Central Nigeria. The study used a survey design involving 248 SMEs selected through random sampling. Findings showed that most SMEs relied heavily on informal information sources such as friends and suppliers, while fewer used formal ICT-based sources. The study also revealed that information-seeking behaviour significantly influences

business performance. It concluded that effective information seeking improves decision-making and productivity. The study recommended training SMEs owners on digital information literacy and better access to ICT facilities.

Ashiru *et al*. (2022) examined how emerging digital communication technologies influence resilience among Nigerian SMEs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study used a mixed-method approach involving interviews and survey data. Findings revealed that SMEs that adopted digital communication tools such as social media platforms and online business applications were more resilient during economic disruptions. The study concluded that digital technologies significantly enhance access to information and business continuity. It recommended that SMEs should adopt digital tools and government should improve ICT infrastructure to support small businesses.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to systematically examine the information needs and seeking behaviour of small-scale business owners in Ethiope East Local Government Area, Delta State. The design was appropriate for describing existing conditions, opinions, and practices without manipulating variables. The population of the study comprised 570 small-scale business owners across 6 categories: retail/provision stores, food vendors, tailors, hairdressers/barbers, phone accessories dealers, and artisans. The population figure was estimated from records of local business associations and market leaders due to the absence of a centralized database. A sample size of 235 respondents was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula for finite populations. Proportional stratified simple random sampling was used to ensure fair representation across all business categories. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire covering demographics, information needs, sources, seeking behaviour, and challenges. The instrument was administered personally by the researcher with the aid of trained assistants to ensure high response rate. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics: frequency counts, simple percentages, and mean scores. A mean criterion of 2.50 was used as the decision benchmark. Results were presented in tables for clarity.

Results

Presentation of Data

This section presents the data collected from the respondents on the information needs and seeking behaviour of small-scale business owners in Ethiope East Local Government Area, Delta State. A total of 235 questionnaires were distributed and all were retrieved and found useful for analysis, representing a 100% response rate. The data are presented using tables, frequency counts, and simple percentages in line with the research questions.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	102	43.4
	Female	133	56.6
	Total	**235**	**100**
Age	18–25 years	38	16.2
	26–35 years	74	31.5
	36–45 years	69	29.4
	46 years and above	54	23.0
	Total	**235**	**100**
Education Level	No formal education	41	17.4
	Primary	62	26.4
	Secondary	86	36.6
	Tertiary	46	19.6
	Total	**235**	**100**

The demographic data show that female respondents (56.6%) are slightly more than male respondents (43.4%), indicating that women are actively involved in small-scale businesses in the study area. The age distribution reveals that most respondents are within the active working-age groups of 26–45 years, suggesting that small-scale business ownership is dominated by economically active individuals. In terms of education, the majority of respondents have at least secondary education, which implies that most business owners have basic literacy that may

influence their ability to seek and use information effectively.

Table 4.2: Information Needs of Small-Scale Business Owners

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1	Financial information is needed for business decisions	120	85	20	10	3.34
2	Marketing information is required to increase sales	110	90	25	10	3.28
3	Information on government regulations and taxes are needed	105	95	25	10	3.25
4	Information on customer preferences and demand is needed	130	80	15	10	3.38

The results indicate that small-scale business owners have strong information needs across key business areas. Financial and customer-related information recorded the highest mean scores, showing that respondents highly depend on such information for decision-making and business sustainability. The responses further suggest that marketing and regulatory information are also important, although slightly less emphasized compared to financial and customer needs.

Table 4.3: Sources of Information Used

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1	Friends and colleagues are often used as information sources	115	90	20	10	3.30
2	Internet and social media are often used for business information	100	85	30	20	3.13
3	Information are obtained from customers and suppliers	125	80	20	10	3.34
4	Government offices and business associations are often used	90	95	30	20	3.08

The findings show that small-scale business owners rely more on informal sources such as customers, suppliers, friends, and colleagues compared to formal sources. Customers and suppliers recorded the highest mean score, indicating their strong influence on business-related information. Although digital sources such as the internet and social media are used, their relatively lower mean suggests that they are not yet fully maximized, while government and institutional sources are the least utilized.

Table 4.4: Information-Seeking Behaviour

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1	Business information are always sorted for when needed	120	85	20	10	3.34
2	I rely on both formal and informal sources	110	90	25	10	3.28
3	I use ICT tools to seek business information	100	80	35	20	3.10
4	I often depend on experience and intuition	130	70	25	10	3.30

The results indicate that respondents demonstrate moderate to high information-seeking behaviour. Most business owners actively search for information when the need arises and rely on a combination of formal and informal sources. However, the relatively lower mean score for ICT usage suggests limited adoption of digital tools in information seeking, while reliance on personal experience remains a common practice among respondents.

Table 4.5: Challenges faced in Information Seeking

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1	I face difficulty accessing reliable information sources	115	90	20	10	3.30
2	Lack of ICT skills affects my access to information	100	85	30	20	3.13
3	High cost of accessing information limits me	120	80	25	10	3.32
4	Time constraints affect my information seeking	110	85	25	15	3.25

The findings reveal that small-scale business owners face several challenges in accessing and using information. High cost of accessing information and difficulty in obtaining reliable sources are the most significant challenges. The results also indicate that limited ICT skills and time constraints negatively affect their ability to seek and utilize information effectively, thereby influencing their business decision-making processes.

4.2 Test of Hypotheses

This section presents the test of hypotheses formulated in Chapter One of the study. The hypotheses were tested using the mean scores from the responses of small-scale business owners in Ethiope East Local Government Area, Delta State. The decision rule is that the null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted when the mean score is less than 2.50 and rejected when the mean score is equal to or greater than 2.50.

Hypothesis One (H_{01})
There is no significant relationship between the information needs of small-scale business owners and their business operations.

Table 4.6: Test of Hypothesis One

Item	Statement	Mean	Decision
1	Financial information is needed for business decisions	3.34	Accepted
2	Marketing information improves business operations	3.28	Accepted
3	Regulatory information supports compliance	3.25	Accepted
4	Customer information influences business decisions	3.38	Accepted
	Grand Mean	**3.31**	**Rejected H_{01}**

Decision:
Since the grand mean of 3.31 is greater than 2.50, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that information needs have a significant relationship with business operations of small-scale business owners.

Hypothesis Two (H_{02})
There is no significant relationship between the sources of information utilized by small-scale business owners and their access to business-related information.

Table 4.7: Test of Hypothesis Two

Item	Statement	Mean	Decision
1	Friends and colleagues are used as information sources	3.30	Accepted
2	Internet and social media are used for business information	3.13	Accepted
3	Customers and suppliers provide business information	3.34	Accepted
4	Government offices and associations provide information	3.08	Accepted
	Grand Mean	**3.21**	**Rejected H_{02}**

Decision:
Since the grand mean of 3.21 is greater than 2.50, the null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that sources of information significantly influence access to business-related information.

Hypothesis Three (H_{03})
Information-seeking behaviour has no significant influence on the acquisition of business-related information among small-scale business owners.

Table 4.8: Test of Hypothesis Three

Item	Statement	Mean	Decision
1	I actively search for business information when needed	3.34	Accepted
2	I rely on both formal and informal sources	3.28	Accepted
3	I use ICT tools to seek business information	3.10	Accepted
4	I depend on experience and intuition	3.30	Accepted
	Grand Mean	**3.26**	**Rejected H_{03}**

Decision:
Since the grand mean of 3.26 is greater than 2.50, the

null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that information-seeking behaviour significantly influences acquisition of business information.

Hypothesis Four (H_{04})
The challenges faced by small-scale business owners in seeking information have no significant effect on their access to and utilization of information.

Table 4.9: Test of Hypothesis Four

Item	Statement	Mean	Decision
1	Difficulty accessing reliable information affects seeking	3.30	Accepted
2	Lack of ICT skills affects information access	3.13	Accepted
3	High cost limits access to information	3.32	Accepted
4	Time constraints affect information seeking	3.25	Accepted
	Grand Mean	**3.25**	**Rejected H_{04}**

Decision:
Since the grand mean of 3.25 is greater than 2.50, the null hypotheses is rejected. This shows that challenges significantly affect access to and utilization of information among small-scale business owners.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that small-scale business owners have strong information needs in areas such as finance, marketing, customer preferences, and government regulations. This implies that entrepreneurs require continuous access to relevant business information to support decision-making and business sustainability. This finding is consistent with the study of Madukoma *et al*. (2022), which reported that SMEs in Nigeria have high information needs, particularly in financial and market-related areas essential for business survival.

The study found that small-scale business owners rely more on informal sources such as customers, suppliers, friends, and colleagues compared to formal sources like government offices and business associations. Although digital sources such as the internet and social media are also used, their utilization is still moderate. This finding aligns with Ogunsola and Babalola (2020), who observed that MSME operators in Nigeria depend heavily on interpersonal networks for business information, even when formal sources are available.

The results showed that small-scale business owners demonstrate moderate to active information-seeking

behaviour, with many relying on both formal and informal sources when the need arises. However, ICT-based information-seeking behaviour was found to be relatively low compared to traditional methods.

This finding is supported by Ashiru *et al*. (2022) who found that SMEs that adopt digital tools for information seeking tend to perform better and show greater resilience.

The study revealed that small-scale business owners face several challenges in information seeking, including difficulty accessing reliable sources, high cost of information, limited ICT skills, and time constraints. These challenges significantly affect their ability to obtain and use relevant business information. This finding is in line with Ugbala *et al*. (2020), who identified inadequate access to formal information sources and low information literacy as major barriers faced by small-scale entrepreneurs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that small-scale business owners in Ethiope East Local Government Area, Delta State have significant and diverse information needs, particularly in the areas of finance, marketing, customer relations, and government regulations. The study also established that while entrepreneurs make use of different sources of information, informal sources remain the most dominant, with limited utilization of formal and ICT-based sources. Furthermore, the information-seeking behaviour of small-scale business owners is moderate, with many relying on personal experience and informal networks rather than structured information systems. The study also revealed that several challenges such as limited ICT skills, high cost of information access, and difficulty in accessing reliable information sources significantly affect effective information seeking. Overall, it is evident that effective access to and use of information is essential for improving the performance and sustainability of small-scale businesses in the study area.

5.2 Recommendations

1. Government and business development agencies should organize regular training programmes and workshops to improve the information literacy and ICT skills of small-scale business owners, enabling them to effectively access and use digital information sources.
2. Libraries, business centres, and relevant institutions should strengthen outreach programmes to raise awareness among entrepreneurs about available formal information services and how to utilize them for business development.
3. Affordable and accessible ICT infrastructure, including internet services, should be improved in Ethiope East Local Government Area to enhance easy access to timely and relevant business information.
4. Small-scale business owners should be encouraged to diversify their information sources by combining informal, formal, and digital channels in order to improve the accuracy and reliability of the information they use for decision-making.

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