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Ugbala Chukwuemeka Peter
chukwuemekap1@gmail.com

Lawal Olayide Wasiu
lawal0222001@yahoo.co.uk

Olawale Gabrie Sola
olawalegabriel@bowen.edu.ng

Emmanuel Adeniyi Oloniruha
kingemmaa2000@gmail.com

Fatokun Adesoji Musa
fatokunadesoji@gmail.com

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**APPLICATION OF WILSON'S THEORY OF INFORMATION SEEKING
BEHAVIOURAL TO PUBLIC LIBRARY AS A SOURCE OF BUSINESS
INFORMATION FOR SMEs IN NIGERIA**

Ugbala, Chukwuememeka Peter

Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria

Chukwuemekap1@gmail.com

Lawal, Olayide Wasiu

Nimbe Adedipe Library,

Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria

Lawal022001@yahoo.co.uk

Olawale, Gabriel Sola

Timothy Olagbenro University Library,

Bowen University Iwo, Nigeria

olawalegabriel@bowen.edu.ng

Oloniruha, Emmanuel Adeniyi

University Library

Confluence University of Science and Technology, Osara, Nigeria

Kingemmaa2000@gmail.com

And

Fatokun, Adesoji Musa

Department of Library and Information Studies,

AdesunOgundoyin Polytechnic Eruwa,

fatokunadesoji@gmail.com

Abstract

Business information has become a critical factor for the growth and success of small-scale business enterprises, the library as an institution responsible for information resources, sources and services to users, has indeed, become an indispensable partner in this national socio-economic growth and development drive. More typical however, is the public library because it is the only library that is open to every member of the public (SMEs owners inclusive) irrespective of background, age, status, race or creed. This paper therefore, discusses and provides useful insight on the application of Wilson's theory of Information seeking behavioural to public library as a sources of business information for SMEs in Nigeria. In a recent survey of major international research databases such as Scopus, Ebscohost and Web of Science, it was observed that there is a gap in knowledge as related to Wilson's theory of information seeking behavioural in the study related to business information and SMEs development particularly in the context of Nigeria. The present study explores the Wilson's theory of information seeking behavioural to Public library as a source of business information for SMEs in Nigeria through a literature review, the paper provides a conceptual background of public libraries and small and medium enterprises and the need for business information for SMS particularly through the public libraries. The paper contributes to knowledge in the following ways for policy formulations, and as a reference material for researchers.

Keywords: Library, Public library, Small-scale enterprises, Theories, Development

Introduction

The importance of information in effective development of business enterprises cannot be over emphasized. Information is an invaluable element and essential commodity in today's social, economic, political, industrial, and technological development. Rufaro and Dick (2008) defined information as a strategic commodity which brings value to business activities. In line with this, business information can therefore be referred to as processed data which are considered strategic and indispensable resources by business owners usually for the purpose of planning, decision-making, managing and sustaining business activities. Information need refers to an individual's or group's desire to locate and retrieve information in order to satisfy conscious or unconscious need.

In a similar vein, information needs as an imbalance which exists between what an individual knows and what he or she is supposed to know; and this arises when there is observable problematic situation or information gap in which a person's internal knowledge and beliefs, and model of environment fail to suggest a path towards satisfying his or her goals. In fact, it is an understanding that one's knowledge is insufficient to achieve an objective (Byamugisha, Ikoja-Odongo, Nasinyama and Lwasa, 2008).

Information as that which increases our awareness or understanding of a given idea, phenomenon or event. This information exists in different forms such as internal, external, physical and tacit, with characteristics as accessibility and precision. Therefore, business information needs can be described as the desire of an individual or group to locate information necessary for efficient business decision-making, management and growth of business venture for the ultimate benefits of profit. The above description helps to recognise the need for information as an important resource in business.

Yusuf (2012) argued that different people need information for different purposes such as for education and academic, political needs, job opportunities and businesses, economic purposes, social and entertainment (arts) purposes, agricultural, geographical and environmental reasons, medical and health purposes, scientific and technological reasons, religion and culture, legal and human rights, as well as international and global information needs. Adebayo and Salau (2017) further state that business information is required for controlling business activities, planning business development, outrunning competitors, scanning the environment and making business decisions. They therefore, broadly categorised the information need of small-scale business into two: financial and non-financial business information. According to them, financial information needs include information related to business taxation, sources of business funds, cash flow management, and the general finance literacy, while non-financial business information needs cover information on business training, infrastructure development, institutional supports and framework, trade, policies and legal frameworks, business plan and development. Essentially, small scale businesses need information about changes in business environment, policies and legislation capable of affecting business operation, changes in technology, and consumer tastes and preferences (Adebayo and Salau, 2017).

Several studies appear to have been carried out to identify the different business information needs of SBEs across economies. For instance, Illingworth and Marcella (2012) study to determine the

business information needs of SBEs in Quebec revealed that information needs of SBEs were largely determined by personal characteristics of individual business owners. Anwar and Tuqan (2006) equally carried a study on business information needs in Kuwait. Findings of the study revealed that the SBEs mostly need information relating to business finance, production, marketing, laws and regulations, personnel, management and administration, as well as new product development.

The study by Jiyane, Mostert, Minishi-Majanja and Ocholla (2010) on the information needs of SBEs in Hlabisa Local Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal of South Africa revealed that there are five (5) categories of information needed of SBEs. The first is the general information related to business expansion, new business ideas and business management; second consists of government related information such as on rent, free training opportunities and conducive business environment; third is market related information such as market opportunities and exhibition areas; fourth is financial information (otherwise called financial literacy) such as information on sources of loans and other forms of micro-credit; and finally, information on development such as new skills acquisition, employment opportunities, business management and techniques, strategic planning and profit making.

Jaworski's (2012) study on business information needs of small-scale business enterprises in Poland further revealed that business information needs of small-scale business enterprises bother on short-term finance. Such include information on liquidity, profitability, operation efficiency, cash flow, income, and cost of products. It equally identified other long-term financial information needs such as debt management skills, cost of capital, and net profitability of investment, business forecasting, payback period and return on investment. The study therefore concluded that both financial and non-financial information are integral to the development of small-scale business enterprises.

In Ghana, a study by Agyemang, Ngulube and Dube (2018) on the information needs of Beads Producers revealed that SBEs need business information on how to register their designs, product branding, copyright issues, production of transparent beads, credit and loan facilities, marketing strategies, health information and formation of bead making association. Similarly, Njoku (2004) carried out a study on the information needs of small-scale fishermen in Nigeria. The result showed that small-scale fishermen needs information mostly on credit facilities, skill acquisition, storage and processing facilities, marketing strategies, sea condition and location of big fish, as well as

government policies. Also, Kumar (2015) study on the information needs of small-scale farmers in Nigeria identified information on production technology which includes varieties of farm inputs, modern farming implements, fertilizer, agrochemical, weeding and harvesting, credit financing and marketing as the major areas of need for information by small-scale business farmers. The study further revealed that small-scale farmers equally need information on the available sources of loan and credit facilities, access to lending institutions, interest rates, amount of credit available and modes of repayment. Nwachukwu, Abdulsalami and Salami's (2015) study on the application of information management by small-scale business enterprises also showed the various information needs of small-scale business enterprises to include marketing, production, skill acquisition and training, finance, policy, sources of raw materials and regulation and standards. Other studies from different economies around the world such as Mchombu (2000) in Botswana, Ikoja-Odongo (2001) in Uganda, Kassim (2010) in Malaysia, Feldmann (2014) among others have all investigated the information needs of small-scale business people. Evident from their studies is that all small-scale business enterprises appear to have common information needs among which include information on business opportunities, business management and diversification, developing business plan, marketing, financial assistance, government policies and regulations. Information needs may either be recognised by the information seeker himself/herself, or by an information expert on behalf of the information seeker. The scope of business information needs covers every stage related to business development activities including start-up information, funding, operations, production, management, growth, marketing, insurance and international business among others.

The above review showed that business information needs of small-scale business enterprises exist in two forms: financial and non-financial needs. Whichever it is, the nature of information and the degree to which it is needed vary considerably among various enterprises, cutting across every stage of business growth. However, no effort was made in the previous studies to connect the various information needs to their providers or sources, as no measures were provided on how to tackle the identified information needs. As a result, there is the need to provide a means of addressing the identified information need, if business enterprises must continue to thrive, and which is the gap that this study aims to fill. There are various ways in which SMEs can sought for business information which include public libraries.

Public libraries are social institutions, established and maintained by government with the tax payers' money to provide free and unrestricted access to information resources and services for the generality of the people in the community. Public libraries are generally established, maintained, financed and supported by governments, local communities and sometimes by non-governmental organisations to provide information services for all kinds of users irrespective of age, sex, background or educational status. Public libraries as libraries established by the government and financed with the tax payers' money which usually have legal backing. Implicit in the above definitions is that public libraries exist to serve every member of the public, unlike the other types of libraries that usually have limited scope and users.

The United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) manifesto 2004, however captured the meaning of a public library using its defining characteristics as a library financed out of public funds; which charges no fees from users, yet open for full use by the public; an auxiliary educational institution providing a means of continuing self-education; and a depository of educative and information materials offering reliable information freely without discrimination. This definition of a public library appears very elaborate and captures the very essence of establishing it which is the purpose it serves till the present (UNESCO, 2004).

Corroborating the UNESCO's definition, Rubin (2010) summed up the characteristics of a public library to include the provision of free service to all users irrespective of age, sex, background or status; support for the civic and cultural activities of the community; meeting the informational needs of all the individuals in the community; provision of materials for continuing education, vocational education and adult education; provision of rental facilities to members of the public, such as a hall for events like lecture, wedding, workshop, seminar, meetings and symposia; encouragement of users to be involved in recreational activities; provision of education sources that will enhance further formal education among others. The above services may be connected with the reason why the public library is generally regarded as "the people's university" because it is one of the institutions that offer people the opportunity to continue their education throughout their lifetime usually with the assistance of trained professionals whose jobs it is to provide access to information.

Essentially, public libraries provide a wide range of services as a way of meeting with its core mandate of serving the information needs of the entire public. To this end, it acquires a wide

spectrum of information materials ranging from books, periodicals, newspapers, magazines, museum projects, artefacts, and manuscripts et cetera, which are managed by qualified librarians employed for this purpose. It is in line with this that Aina (2004) identified the specific services of public libraries to include lending and circulation services, inter-library loan and document delivery services, reservation services, reference services, current awareness services, exhibition and display, library publications, user education, information literacy programmes, literature search, selective dissemination of information, extension and outreach services, rental and reprographic services, among others.

In recent times however, the mission, roles and services of public libraries in Nigeria have expanded to include the provision of information resources, sources and services to meet the needs of business people. This is especially evident in developed countries where public libraries are adequately funded and managed. According to Santos (2009), public libraries began providing relevant information services to the business community as far back as nineteenth century in the Great Britain and the United States of America, through what is known as the Community Information Service (CIS) of public libraries. This is in addition to the extension and outreach services whereby public libraries are required to provide information services to those who cannot come to the library for one reason or another. This was later captured in the 1996 UNESCO manifesto as the expanded mission of public libraries in providing information services relevant to the local business community. He went further to mention other countries where provision of information service to the business community has become the responsibility of public libraries to include Australia, Netherlands and Canada.

The advent of public libraries in Nigeria can be traced to the establishment of Tom Jones libraries in 1910 (Nwofor and Ilorah, 2015). The turning point in the history of public libraries in Nigeria came from the seminar that was organized by the UNESCO which is basically for the development of public libraries in the Africa. The conference took place at the University of Ibadan in the year 1953 (Abubakar, 2017). The seminar among others recommended the establishment of public libraries in Nigeria and other Africa countries (Opara, 2008). In Nigeria, the public library which is commonly called State libraries with normally has branches which are usual called Divisional libraries. The public libraries in Nigeria are being managed by State Library Boards in which the administrative head is usually referred to as the Director of Libraries Services. Extant literature indicates that the supervisory Ministry of Public libraries in Nigeria is the State Ministry of

Information. The public libraries in Nigeria usually performed the basic functions of public libraries all over the world which include provision of facilities, necessary resources and services in various forms in order to meet the information needs of the users.

Statement of the problem

One of the mandates of public libraries is to provide timely and accurate information to its users in Nigeria. However, it has been observed that public libraries in Nigeria lack necessary structured that will assist in the provision of business information for business particularly among SMEs in Nigeria. Unlike what is happening in the developed countries such as Canada and Netherland where public libraries have seen the provision of business information as part of their mandates (Gichohi, Onyancha and Dulle, 2015). Studies revealed that public libraries are supporting educational system in Nigeria (Okafor, 2020, Akanwa, 2013 and Aiyebelehin, Onyam, and Akpom, 2018). While there a paucity of literature on application of Wilson theory of information seeking behaviour to study public library as a source of business information in the context of Nigeria. A search on Ebscohost database was employed to examine the number of articles that were published in peer review journals between the years 2010 -2020 on Wilson theory of information seeking behaviour as related to the public libraries. The result revealed that between the aforementioned years no article as employed the theory in the context of public libraries and SMEs while research has been done on the topic in Kenya and South Africa respectively.

However, this study seeks to extend the frontier of knowledge by addressing the paucity of literature on the need why researchers should be encouraged to employ the use the theory particularly in promoting public libraries as one of the sources for providing business information for SMEs not only in Nigeria but the entire world at large. The study focuses on this gap, by providing insightful literature on the need to employ the theory in underpin the study that are related to the use of public libraries as a source of business information.

Methodology for the literature review

The study is a qualitative method that anchors on content analysis through the review of literature. Nazrul and Mohammed (2000), argues that a literature review is the selection of available documents from published and unpublished sources which contain information ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfill certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the research or topic and ways in which it will be investigated and the effective evaluation

of these documents in relation to research being processed. Literature review is very important for any scientific research. However for the purpose of this study, a literature review that synthesizes published studies on application of relevant theories and business information was conducted.

There is general review of the relevant publications on the topic and it was not limited to specific years or specific journals. In order to identify relevant publications addressing the subject matter of the research a structured approach suggested by Webster and Watson (2000) was applied which suggested the following: (1) using keyword to search in relevant journal databases; (2) selection of relevant publications with matching criteria; and (3) intensive reading of identify publications. The literature search for the study was undertaken between 2010 and 2020. For the purposes of the review, the SCOPUS, EBSCO Host and Google Scholar were used. Various search strings were used to get relevant information from the data bases which include Public libraries and business information.

Theories Relevant to the Study of Public Libraries

Theoretical framework is an essential aspect of research exercise aimed at establishing a link between the subject matter under investigation with an existing general postulation. According to Ikoja-Odongo and Mostert (2006), a theory is defined as a proposition of ideas or rules that are intended to explain certain phenomenon or facts based on general principle. There are several theories relevant to this study. Some of them include Fourie Model of information behaviour (2004); Ellis Behavioural Model of Information Seeking (1989), Kuhlthau's Information Search Process (ISP) Model (1991 and 1993).

Wilson's general model of information behaviour

In order, to promote the information seeking behaviour research among various people and professionals. Wilson developed various models that are related to information seeking behaviour between year 1981 and 1999. Wilson's 1981 theory of information seeking was able to set precedent in terms of viewing feedback as significant in information seeking process. However, the model was later improved in 1999 particularly as related to the field of Library and information studies (Wilson, 2000).

In addition, Wilson (1999) notes that after the 1948 Royal Society Scientific Information Conference, there were high increase in the research that was focusing on user needs, information needs and at the same time information seeking behaviour. However, Wilson presented his general

models that are relevant to information behaviour which incorporated extensive variety of information seeking behaviour pattern.

WILSON'S THEORY OF INFORMATION BEHAVIOURAL

Wilson's first model recognized factors that lead to information seeking and the barriers that bar the action. It was "based on an understanding of human information seeking behaviours that are better understood as three interwoven frameworks: The user, the information system, and the information resource" (Wilson, 2010).

Wilson (1981) indicates the factors that influence information seeking and at the same time various challenges facing the action. It was "based on an understanding of human information seeking behaviours that are better understood as three interwoven frameworks: The user, the information system, and the information resource" (Wilson, 2010 and Wilson, 1981). According to Wilson's 1981 theory, it identifies various ways in which information can be obtained. These include

- Search by users who lack access to information systems of sort but use the environment they are in and their personal knowledge;
- Search paths that involve an intermediary or information system;
- Search strategies used by the intermediary to satisfy the user's demands in order to accomplish the stated goal,
- Strategies employed using ICT by the user or intermediary.

Wilson's model notes three views of information seeking, which are the context, the system and the information sources (Wilson, 2006). Later Wilson adopted the Ellis's stage of information seeking in order to include personal circumstances of users, their social role in the person's work life and the environment (that is, political, economic and technological).

By this incorporation, the model thus eventually recognized that an information need is not a need in and of itself, but rather one that branches from a previous psychological need. Wilson further observed that the factors that drive needs can also frustrate an individual's search for relevant information.

Wilson's 1996 Information Seeking Behaviour model, building on the 1981 model, successfully incorporated more elements that facilitated the stages experienced by an individual in the particular context when seeking information. These elements encompassed a midway stage between the recognition of a need and the instigation of an action to meet that information need (Wilson, 1997). In this model, 'intervening variables' were introduced to show that there can be helpful or hindering obstacles in the way of the user (Wilson, 2010). This was further seen to evolve for the better, and was improved in the 1999 model, since it captured research questions in a better way than the ones it preceded. It also encompassed parts of Leckie, Pettigrew and Sylvain's 1996 model. However, the 1996 model encompassed various disciplines and knowledge that are related to decision making which include psychology, communication, healthcare and host of others (Wilson, 1999). He goes further to say that goal orientation which related to problem-solving that can be seen in the 1996 model which dealt the need to identify problem recognition, solving of problem and solution statement which are all in his model as a whole.

According to Wilson 1999 model, the model lists three important issues that are related to information seeking which include the "context of the information seeker, the information channel (electronic or manual) and the information resource itself." The model gave a description of relationship that exist among variables is tied to the existing realm. In addition, the 1999 model integrated the information need, information seeking, information exchange and information use. Wilson's 1999 model regards information seeking as a problem-solving activity, and for this reason, it is better suited to the group under study. Wilson in the area of information behaviour articulated the model in 1999 evolving from the other previous models. It pointed out a series of nested fields, in which information behaviour was included as the general area of investigation, with information-seeking behaviour as its sub-set, and information searching behaviour as a further sub-set (Wilson, 1999).

This theory is adjudged to have been commonly used in the field of Information Science to explain information needs and the manner in which users go about satisfying them (Gichohi, 2016). According to this theory, information seeking behaviour is usually informed by perceived information needs of users, which then results in demand either upon formal or informal sources or channels. These demands for information may either result in success or failure in finding relevant information. If the process is successful, the users' information needs are satisfied; and if

it fails, the user becomes dissatisfied and would be prompted to adopt different information system to continue his or her search. The model is presented below to demonstrate the relationship among various phenomena in addressing information needs.

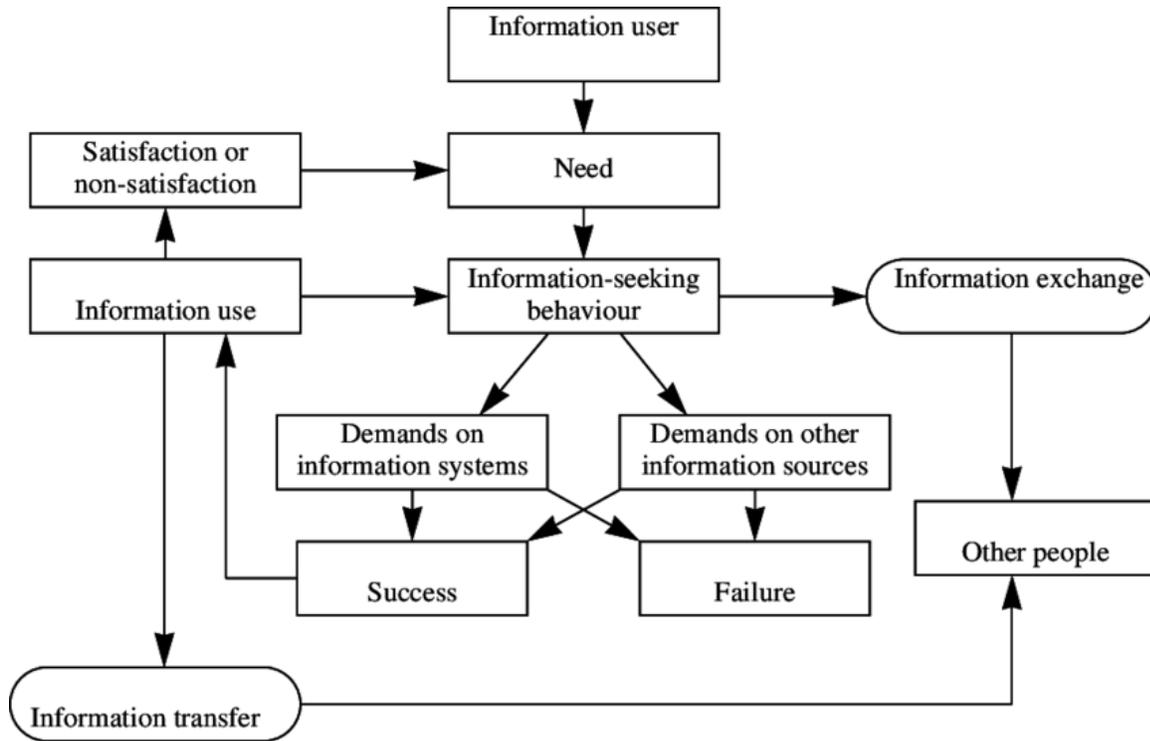


Figure 1: Wilson's model of information seeking behaviour (1999)

The justification for using this theory in the study is because of its extensive discussion of all aspects of information behaviour such as the needs, sources, services and systems, which are the focus of the study. Bawden (2006) stated that Wilson's (1999) theory is particularly useful as it provides a clear and simple representation of the relation between users' information behaviour, information seeking and information retrieval. In addition, the theory was published in 1981, and revised in the year 1996 and 1999 respectively.

Similarly, Kumar and Tholkappian (2013) added that Wilson's theory is significant in understanding information behaviour of users, their needs and services as well as the ways to satisfy them. In view of this, the theory therefore provides adequate guidelines for understanding the information seeking behaviour of users, which in this case are small-scale business owners.

Again, Gichohi (2016) asserts that Wilson’s theory is essentially useful and supports the marketing communication and customer care proposition by Maples and Wrathall (2013) who posited that a satisfied user or consumer of a product or service will tell others. He therefore maintained that its implication for small-scale traders is that anyone who benefits from information such as on business plan formulation, products design among others, will certainly share the same information with others, thus leading to more fruitful enterprises.

However, one key criticism of the theory is that of overgeneralization, hence, its postulations may not adequately apply to all spectrum of knowledge. Notwithstanding the shortcoming, it provides adequate guidelines for understanding the information seeking behaviour of users.

Several studies have used Wilson’s (1999) theory. Some of them include (Gichohi, 2016), among others

Applicability of Wilson’s model and gaps

A search was done on Ebscohost from the year 2000 to 2020 to investigate the number of articles that has Wilson’ model and the areas of the research. It was revealed that twelve articles employed the used of the theory in their research work. While only three articles were from Nigeria and one article is from Kenya. A critical examination of the topics that adopted the use of the theory revealed that only three articles employed the use of the theory as related to public library and SME, Ikoja –Odongo and Ocholla (2004), Information needs and information seeking behaviour by informal sector/small businesses in Uganda. Mchombu (2000) Information needs of women in small businesses in Botswana. Gichohi, Onyancha, and Dulle (2016), How public libraries in Meru county, Kenya address the information needs of small enterprises. The evidence from the analysis revealed that there is no study that employed the use of Wilson from the aforementioned years in Nigeria particularly as related to public library as a source of business information for SMEs in Nigeria

Author	Topic	Country
Majyambere (2015)	investigating the Humanities/Arts international	South Africa

	post-graduate students' information seeking behaviour in public universities in KwaZulu-Natal	
Bitso and Ina Fourie (2015)	An investigation of information seeking behaviour of georgarpahy teachers for information services intervention: The case of Lesotho	South Africa
Seyama (2009)	information behaviour of students with visual impairments	South Africa
Du Preez (2008)	Engineers' information needs and information seeking behaviour	
Mostert and Ocholla (2005)	Information needs and information seeking behaviour of parliamentarians in South Africa	South Africa
Haruna and Mabawonku (2001)	The information needs of lawyers.	Nigeria
Olorunfemi (2014)	The information behaviour of law students in Nigerian universities, used parts of this model.	Nigeria
Tunde (2016)	Information behaviour of medical faculty in tertiary health institution in Kwara State, Nigeria.	Nigeria

Ikoja-Odongo, (2002)	Insights into the information needs of women in the informal sector of Uganda	South Africa
Ikoja-Odongo, and Ocholla, . (2004)	Information needs and information seeking behaviour by informal sector/small businesses in Uganda	South Africa
Mostert, (2005).	Parliamentary information sources, systems and services in South Africa.	South Africa
Mostert and Ocholla, . (2005)	Information needs and information seeking behaviour of parliamentarians in South Africa.	South Africa
Mchombu, (2000).	Information needs of women in small businesses in Botswana	South Africa
Makinde, Jiyane and Mugwisi (2020)	A new proposed model on industrial researchers' information behaviour based on Wilson's models	South Africa
Gichohi, Onyancha, and Dulle (2016).	How public libraries in Meru county, Kenya address the information needs of small enterprises	Kenya

Conclusion

From the above review, it is established that Wilson's 1999 Theory of Information needs and seeking behaviours was not widely used among scholars in Nigeria compared with what we have in South Africa. It was also revealed that there is no study that has employed the use of the theory in Nigeria particularly from the year 2000-2020 in the context of public libraries as a source of business information for SMEs in Nigeria. Application of this theory in the subject matter will assist the entrepreneurship in the country to have access to accurate and timely information particularly about development of their businesses which they can seek from the public libraries as it is being done in developed countries. This study therefore was intended to enable the researcher identify facts about relevance of the theory in public libraries and SME studies. By so doing, more knowledge would be contributed to the existing body of literature on the subject matter.

Specifically, the study is of immense significance to small-scale business owners/managers, public libraries, state and the governments of Nigeria, researchers and the society at large, among others. Also, to small-scale business enterprise owners/managers, this study has gone a long way to create the awareness and bring to their consciousness, that there exist business information sources and services available to them in public libraries at no cost. Through this, the challenges associated with accessing reliable information for strategic business decision-making will be overcome and frequent cases of business failure due to lack of information would be reasonably minimised.

Furthermore, the outcome of the study has equally awakened the consciousness of public libraries to the understanding of the expansion in their roles in providing information to the business community as evidenced from their counterparts in developed countries. In order to sustain relevance and maintain good public image especially as partners in economic development process, outcome of this study will enable them take strategic decision and plan towards keeping pace with these changing realities.

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