



Information Seeking Behaviour as Determinants of Rice Milling SMEs Performance in North-Central Geo-Political Zone Nigeria

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Abstract

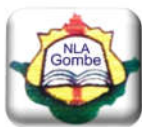
This study examined the influence of information seeking behaviour on rice milling SMEs performance in the North Central geo political zone of Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design. The population of the study comprises 651 owners of mini-rice milling SMEs. The sample size for this study consisted 248 rice milling SMEs owners drawn from the four selected states. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample for the study. The data for the study was analysed using SPSS statistical software version 23. The study found that information seeking behaviour had significant influence on rice milling SMEs performance in North Central geo-political zone, Nigeria. The study also revealed that the level rice milling SMEs performance in North Central geo-political zone, Nigeria was average. The study also found that the level of information seeking behaviour of rice milling SMEs in North Central geo-political zone, Nigeria was low. The study therefore recommended that: Rice milling SMEs in North Central geo-political zone, Nigeria should do more in order to attain high level of SMEs performance. Rice milling SMEs in North Central geo-political zone, Nigeria. They should adopt information retrieval method that are suitable in order to ease access to information that would prove their business performance.

Keywords: Information seeking behaviour, ICT use, rice milling, SMEs performance, North-Central, Nigeria

Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) sector's performance is sine qua-non to the performance of the nation. The vast majority of firms worldwide are SMEs, and they serve as breeding ground for entrepreneurs and provider of solutions to address the problems of unemployment in all consuming labours and promoting marketing growth (World Bank, 2021). The importance of SMEs in the evolution of economic, reduction in poverty, increase in employment, output, innovation in technology and lifting up in social position and standard is globally proven and acknowledged in emerging as well as in developed economies (Abraham & Schmukler, 2017). According to World Trade Organization (2018) small and medium scale enterprises have been acknowledged to have a prodigious potential for sustainable development. The surplus of the workforce employees from bigger firms were able to be reinstated back to the employment, mainly through the growth of SMEs.

Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) are very important drivers of any country's economy (Auzzir, Haigh, & Amaratunga, 2018). The sector is the backbone of major developed



economies, as well as important contributors to employment, economic and export growth (WTO, 2018). In particular, SMEs contribute significantly with their share of gross domestic product (GDP) ranging from 20% to 50% in the majority of the developing economies (Auzzir et al., 2018). The United State of America's 30 million SMEs account for nearly two-thirds of net new private sector jobs in recent decades. In South Africa, SMEs account for 91% of businesses, 60% of employment and contribute 52% of total GDP. In Ghana, SMEs represent about 85% of businesses, largely within the private sector, and contribute about 70% of Ghana's GDP (OECD 2020). In Nigeria, SMEs contribute 48% of national GDP, account for 96% of businesses and 84% of employment (Osho & Adishi, 2019). With an estimated number of 17.4 million, they account for about 50% of industrial jobs and nearly 80% of the manufacturing sector, in terms of number of enterprises (PwC's MSME Survey 2020).

SMEs performance can be described as efficient and effective management of resources in fulfilling their objectives (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020). On the enterprise level performance is a multi-dimensional concept which consists of integration of marketing, overall management, accounting, economics, sociology and psychology (Kotane & Kuzimina-Merlino, 2017). Taheri, Bititci, Gannon and Cordina (2019) consider that SMEs performance is evaluated based on the achievement of organizational goals throughout its evolution in terms of the effectiveness of its human resources, supplier performance, product and services quality customer and markets and other financial factors.

For the purpose of this study SMEs' performance will be measured in terms of innovation and growth, internal processes perspectives, customer perspectives and financial perspective. Innovation and growth are analysed through the investigation of training and knowledge resources. This first stage handles how well information is captured and how effectively employees use that information to convert it to a competitive advantage within the industry. The internal processes perspectives are evaluated by investigating how well products are manufactured or processed. Operational management is analysed to track any gaps, delays, bottlenecks, shortages, or waste. The customer perspectives are collected to gauge customer satisfaction with the quality, price, and availability of products or services. Customers provide feedback about their satisfaction with current products. Financial perspective, such as sales, expenditures, and income are used to understand financial performance. These financial metrics may include dollar amounts, financial ratios, budget variances, or income targets.

SMEs' performance can be understood from a quantitative perspective: efficiency, financial results, level of production, number of customers (Chatterjee et al 2020), market share, profitability, productivity, dynamics of revenues, costs and liquidity (Zimon, 2018), and also from a qualitative perspective: goals achievement, leadership style, employee behaviour (Hock, Clauss and Cheng 2020), customer satisfaction, product and process innovation, organisational and marketing innovation (Maier & Maier, 2017). Gopang, Nebhwani, Khatri, and Marri (2017) in their work, considered a series of indicators to describe SMEs performance: reputation, productivity, employee satisfaction, profits, sales, prompt order delivery, sufficient working capital, effectiveness in operations of production, product quality, achievement of targets, number of clients, easiness in supervision, reduction in product cost and product diversification. The SMEs could be able to make a significant contribution to the Nigerian economy if they exhibit good information seeking behaviour that will aid entrepreneurs develop the sector (Makinde et al 2019). However, in the Northern part of the country, especially in the North Central geo-political zone, challenges still persist that hinder the growth and development of the sector. This may not be unconnected to the negative attitude of SMEs sector toward information seeking behaviour in the in the region by not seeking to know the



different information sources, seeking pattern, retrieval method adopted and use information (Orrensalo & Nikou, 2021).

Information is an organized data that has a pattern in it and lends itself to the meaning-making process. Information means the exchange of processed data regarding an occurrence of a given condition or the distribution of information obtained from observations, studies or experience (Dipak, 2017). As an incredibly valuable resource, information has rapidly acquired centre-stage status. Information is seen in this way as a strategic tool for managers to adjust to the volatile environment. As the market environment becomes more complex and competitive, constant monitoring of the external environment to identify strategic risks and opportunities is increasingly important for top executives (Ibrahim, Hassan, Pate, Muazu & Danjuma, 2018). This can be achieved by considering information as something that is meaningful and pertinent to the existence and growth of SMEs. It is pertinent that information can bring changes to the operating and financial status of the SMEs globally depending on how countries perceive and direct their information seeking behaviour.

Information seeking behaviour also in some studies referred to as information behaviour as a field of information science research seeks to understand the way individuals and businesses search for and use information for the existence and sustainability of their businesses (Wahid, 2017). Information seeking behaviour is concerned with assessing the information needs of users, seeking behaviour and eventual use of information (Gordon, 2018). Kavitha and Aravind (2021) describe information seeking behaviour as a field of information science research that seeks to understand the way people search for and use information in different format. It can include information seeking pattern and information retrieval, sources consulted and how they use it. Information seeking behaviour refers to the way people search for and utilize information. He also suggests that information seeking behaviour is purposive seeking of information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal. During the time of seeking, the individual may consult with formal and informal information sources. Information seeking behaviour can be measured in terms of seeking pattern sources, access or retrieve and use of information, but it aims to understand why enterprises seek information and how they use it to accomplish organizational goals. By using information, top business managers are able to adapt their companies reactively and pro-actively to environmental changes in order to succeed and prosper (Kavitha et, al 2021).

The continent of Africa is no exception. Information seeking behaviour has put SMEs across South Africa by more than 98 percent of businesses, employ between 50 and 60 percent of the country's workforce across all sectors, and are responsible for a quarter of job growth in the private sector (Eluyela, Adetula, Oladipo, Nwanji, Adegbola, Ajayi & Faleye, 2019). In the developed countries like UK, there are approximately 5.86 million of small and medium-sized enterprises operating in the United Kingdom due to the influence of free flow of information and positive behaviour towards SMEs. Micro-sized enterprises that employ up to nine people make up the majority of SMEs in the UK at roughly 5.6 million in 2019 while in the USA, 30 million SMEs account for nearly two-thirds of net new private sector jobs in recent decades. SMEs that export tend to grow even faster, create more jobs, and pay higher wages than similar businesses that do not due to the effect of positive information behaviour of the SMEs (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2018). The mechanism that humans are engaged in to alter their state of awareness is information seeking behaviour. It is a cognitive mechanism at a high level that is part of learning or problem solving. The need to change the state of one's consciousness means finding information. SMEs are required to learn new expertise and skills in information searching due to the new information formats of information sources and tools (Cassetta, Monarca, Dileo, Di



Berardino, & Pini 2020). The need for information pushes individuals to pursue information. Research on the actions of SME managers seeking information is part of a broader and interdisciplinary stream of research per se on the information behaviour of managers. Of course, economic growth, which requires change, is important for developing countries and the entrepreneur becomes the best agent for this change. The person can interact with manual information in the course of the quest (Orakwue et, al 2020).

A significant component of the competitiveness of SMEs is access to information. Competency of corporate knowledge is a vital success factor to SMEs. The decision to obtain information relies on motivation that could be cognitive or emotionally dependent, as if prior beliefs need to be strengthened. The factors that influence the search for information are related to information sources, information perception and the effects of information-seeking behaviour (Hussein, Ahmed & Araja, 2017). Company owners are finding information from different types of sources that can be represented as formal (e.g. conferences, journals) or informal (personal conversations); internal (organizational sources) or external (oral or written sources (written sources include paper copies and electronic texts); and personal (these sources include paper copies and electronic texts)

A combination of several sources may also be necessary to fulfil the need for information (Doraswamy, 2017). The knowledge of information sources and/or information material by business owners will decide the direction that information quest will take. When confidentiality is a concern, the source must not be socially risky. The information needed must be obtained by SMEs immediately or within an appropriate period of time. If it is collected either too early or too late, the utility of the data will decrease (Albar & Hoque, 2017). The amount of effort and expense a business owner will spend on seeking information from any source will be dictated by the time factor and the funds available. Information cost is not only in terms of money charged for information, but the time and effort involved in obtaining the information may also be described in psychological and physical terms. The value found and the importance of the information sought for the purpose of enhancing the performance of SMEs should be the primary criteria on which an information product or service is chosen (Eluyela et, al 2019). For SMEs to seek information and access it within the shortest possible time in this technological age, they need to utilise ICT. The ability to use computer-based systems to meet information needs may influence the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Statement of the Problem

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are non-subsidiary, independent organizations which employ less than 200 employees. Murat and Opusunju (2017) observed that SMEs' performance in Nigeria and North-Central in particular is low. This is the reason why the poverty level and unemployment rate has not reduced to the globally acceptable rate for economic growth to thrive in the region (Adeyemi & Fagbemi, 2016; Osho & Adishi, 2019). For SMEs to attain high level of performance, they need to exhibit high level of information seeking behaviour (Makinde et, al 2019). Perhaps the low level of rice milling SMEs performance observed is due to inadequate information seeking behaviour. This study, therefore aim to bridge this gap by exploring the influence of information seeking behaviour on rice milling SMEs performance in the North Central geo political zone of Nigeria.



Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to investigate the influence of information seeking behaviour on performance of rice milling small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in North-Central geo-political zone, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Find out the extent of rice milling SMEs performance in North-Central geo-political zone, Nigeria.
2. Determine the level information seeking behaviour of rice milling SMEs in North-Central geo-political zone, Nigeria.
3. Determine the influence of information seeking behaviour on rice milling SMEs performance in North-Central geo-political zone, Nigeria.

Research Question

The study will address the following research questions:

1. What is the extent of rice milling SMEs performance in the North-Central geo-political zone, Nigeria?
2. What is the level of information seeking behaviour of rice milling SMEs in North-Central geo-political zone, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The null hypotheses will be tested at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance.

H0: Information seeking behaviour has no significant influence on rice milling SMEs performance in North Central geo-political zone, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design. The population of the study comprises 651 owners of mini-rice milling SMEs in the North-Central geo-political zone in Nigeria registered under Rice Millers Association of Nigeria (RMAN, 2021). The sample size for this study will consist of 248 rice milling SME owners drawn from the four selected states. Taro Yamane sampling formula will be used to determine the sample size of the respondents' -Rice mill owners from all the six states and the FCT in the North-central Geo-political zone, Nigeria. simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample for the study. The 248 sample will be shared to the four states based on proportion of each state from the main population that is Benue 72, Kogi 52, Niger 64 and Plateau 60.

Results

Research question one: What is the level of rice milling SMEs performance in the North-Central geo-political zone, Nigeria?

Table 1: Information about rice milling SME Performance.

Information about SMEs Performance.	Very High Extent (%)	High Extent (%)	Low Extent (%)	Very Low Extent (%)	Mean	SD
Innovation and Growth					2.06	.660
To what extent are your:						
Employees satisfied with their routine duties		87(38.5)	91(40.3)	48(21.2)	2.17	.755
Product advertised and rebranded		63(27.9)	129(57.1)	34(15)	2.13	.644
Employees train towards self and organization development		27(11.9)	147(65)	52(23)	1.89	.582



Internal Business Processes					2.25	.552
To what extent do you:						
Keep your premises safe for staff and customers	13(5.8)	73(32.3)	136(60.2)	4(1.8)	2.42	.629
Track cost of production and service delivery		77(34.1)	145(64.2)	4(1.8)	2.32	.505
Set goals and targets for all key processes		51(22.6)	158(69.9)	17(7.5)	2.15	.529
Review Staff and Customers feedbacks	3(1.3)	42(18.6)	164(72.6)	17(7.5)	2.14	.545
Customers Perspectives					2.38	.708
To what extent do you:						
Customers compliant	42(18.6)	36(15.9)	126(55.8)	22(9.7)	2.43	.903
Customers feel satisfied	10(4.4)	83(36.7)	123(54.4)	10(4.4)	2.41	.649
Customer's request receive attention		85(37.6)	135(59.7)	6(2.7)	2.35	.531
Customers refer your products	17(7.5)	62(27.4)	126(55.8)	21(9.3)	2.33	.749
Financial Perspectives					2.33	.908
To what extent is your:						
Operational expenses	83(36.7)	50(22.1)	85(37.6)	8(3.5)	2.92	.939
Administrative expenses	67(29.6)	50(22.1)	70(31)	39(17.3)	2.64	1.083
Sales growth rate	27(11.9)	44(19.5)	98(43.4)	57(25.2)	2.18	.946
Cash Flow	13(5.8)	43(19)	116(51.3)	54(23.9)	2.07	.811
Profit after Sales	11(4.9)	17(7.5)	121(53.5)	77(34.1)	1.83	.765
Grand Mean					2.73	.722

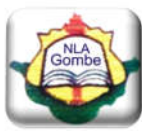
Decision rule: if mean is below 2.5=low, 2.5-2.99=average, 3.0 and above = high

The level of rice milling SMEs performance in the North-Central geo-political zone, Nigeria according to the report in table 1 is average (grand mean=2.73, SD=.722). This implies that rice milling SMEs in the region are not performing optimally. The result further reveals that the level of innovation and growth of the SMEs (mean=2.06), internal business processes (mean=2.25), customers perspectives (2.38), as well as financial perspectives (mean=2.33), were low. It is also disturbing to note that under financial perspectives, the respondents indicated that operational expenses (mean=2.92), and administrative expenses (mean=2.64) were on the average, tilting towards high level, whereas, sales growth rate (mean=2.18), cash flow (mean=2.07), and profit after sales (mean=1.83), were low.

Research question two: What is the level of information seeking behaviour of rice milling SMEs in North-Central geo-political zone, Nigeria?

Table 2: Information Seeking Behaviour of rice milling SMEs

Information Seeking Behaviour of SMEs	Very High (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Very Low (%)	Mean	SD
Information Seeking Pattern					2.32	.497
My willingness to consult relevant information before making any decision is		165(73)	56(24.8)	5(2.2)	2.71	.502



My willingness to pay for relevant information for my business is	123(54.4)	96(42.5)	7(3.1)	2.51	.560
My willingness to ignore bias information for my business sake is	98(43.4)	123(54.4)	5(2.2)	2.41	.536
My willingness to look for information to be above my competitors is	65(28.8)	159(70.4)	2(0.9)	2.28	.469
My interest in new emerging ideas is	67(29.6)	154(68.1)	5(2.2)	2.27	.494
My willingness to check the source of information before putting it to use is	64(28.3)	157(69.5)	5(2.2)	2.26	.488
My willingness to make use the internet to obtain needed information is	47(20.8)	174(77)	5(2.2)	2.19	.443
My willingness to spend maximum amount of time (as much as 8 hours/day) is	22(9.7)	172(76.1)	32(14.2)	1.96	.488
Information Sources Consulted				1.87	.601
My willingness to consult:					
Television and Radio is	6(2.7)	134(59.3)	70(31)	16(7.1)	2.58 .664
Colleagues is		67(29.6)	149(65.9)	10(4.4)	2.25 .528
Newspapers, Magazines and brochures is	3(1.3)	44(19.5)	137(60.6)	42(18.6)	2.04 .659
Internet sources is		33(14.6)	164(72.6)	29(12.8)	2.02 .525
Personal collections and archives is		21(9.3)	78(34.5)	127(56.2)	1.53 .661
SME journals is		25(11.1)	49(21.7)	152(67.3)	1.44 .685
E-resources is		7(3.1)	37(16.4)	182(80.5)	1.23 .488
Information Retrieval Method				1.56	.544
My willingness to use the following when retrieving information:					
Print and Non-print media materials is	24(10.6)	168(74.3)	34(15)	1.96	.506
Web Search engine is	32(14.2)	109(48.2)	85(37.6)	1.77	.682
On-line database is		127(56.2)	99(43.8)	1.56	.497
On-line public access catalogue (OPAC) is	5(2.2)	88(38.9)	133(58.8)	1.43	.540
Catalogue and metadata is	11(4.9)	58(25.7)	157(69.5)	1.35	.572
Digital libraries is	2(0.9)	60(26.5)	164(72.6)	1.28	.471
Information Use				2.21	.578
My willingness to use information for:					
Decision making is	134(59.3)	81(35.8)	11(4.9)	2.54	.589
To know my customers' needs and demand is	90(39.8)	117(51.8)	19(8.4)	2.31	.621



To know the new trends in the business environment is	90(39.8)	113(50)	23(10.2)	2.30	.643
To improve the standard and packaging of my product is	50(22.1)	155(68.6)	21(9.3)	2.13	.547
Creativity and upgrading of my process is	44(19.5)	165(73)	17(7.5)	2.12	.507
To provide the quality and excellent customer services and experience is	52(23)	149(65.9)	25(11.1)	2.12	.573
To compare and adjust product prices is	32(14.2)	152(67.3)	42(18.6)	1.96	.572
Grand Mean				2.02	.553

Decision rule: if mean is below 2.5=low, 2.5-2.99=average, 3.0 and above =high

Presented in table 2 are the participants' responses on their level of information seeking behaviour. The grand mean (2.02, SD=.553) reveals that the information seeking behaviour of the respondents was low. The result equally reveals that the information seeking pattern of the respondents is low (mean=2.32), which implies that the pattern adopted in the quest for information may not likely produce the desired result. Their level of information retrieval level was also very low (1.56) as their willingness to use print and non-print media (mean=1.96) and web search engine (mean=1.77) for information retrieval were also very low. However, the willingness to use information for decision making (mean=2.54) was high, while, the willingness to use information to know customers' needs and demands (mean=2.31), and know the new trends in the business environment (mean=2.30), were low.

Test of Hypothesis

The null hypotheses were tested at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance.

Hypothesis one: Information seeking behaviour has no significant influence on rice milling SMEs performance in North Central geo-political zone, Nigeria.

Table 3: influence of information seeking behaviour on rice milling SMEs performance

Variables	B	T	Sig.	R ²	F(df)	ANOVA (Sig.)
(Constant)	19.438	8.874	.000	.201	56.409	.000
Information Seeking Pattern	.602	3.933	.000		(1,224)	
Information Sources Consulted	.458	2.756	.006			
Information Retrieval Method	.291	1.400	.163			
Information Use	-.214	-1.411	.160			

Dependent Variable: SMEs performance

The result presented in table 3 revealed that information seeking behaviour ($F(1,224) = 56.409$, $R^2 = .201$, $p < 0.05$) had significant influence on rice milling SMEs performance in North Central geo-political zone, Nigeria. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and restated: Information seeking behaviour has significant influence on rice milling SMEs performance in North Central geo-political zone, Nigeria. On relative contribution, the result revealed that information seeking pattern ($\beta = .602$, $t = 3.933$, $p < 0.05$), and information sources consulted ($\beta = .458$, $t = 2.756$, $p < 0.05$), were found to have significant influence on rice milling SMEs performance, while information retrieval method ($\beta = .291$, $t = 1.400$, $p = 0.163$), and information use ($\beta = -.214$, $t = -1.411$, $p = 0.160$), had no significant influence on rice milling SMEs performance engagement.



Discussion of findings

The study found that the level of rice milling SMEs performance in the North-Central geo-political zone, Nigeria is average. The result further reveals that the level of the respondents indicated that operational expenses is the highest followed by administrative expenses is average while innovation and growth of the SMEs, internal business processes, customers perspectives, as well as financial perspectives, were low. This negates the finding of Murat and Opusunju (2017) who found that SMEs' performance in Nigeria and North-Central in particular is low.

The result found that the information seeking behaviour of in North-Central geo-political zone, Nigeria is low. This result corresponds with the finding of Osho & Adishi, (2019) who also found that the level of SMEs performance was low to make the desired impact on Nigeria's economy to reducing the poverty level in the country. Ojo, Akinsunmi and Olayonu (2015) equally that the level of business information utilisation of the respondents was low Similarly, Umar and Bakare (2021). The result further revealed that the level of information use of the respondents is low.

Conclusion

The result reveals that information seeking behaviour had significant influence on rice milling SMEs performance in North Central geo-political zone, Nigeria. The study also reveals that the level rice milling SMEs performance in North Central geo-political zone, Nigeria is average. The study also found that the level of information seeking behaviour of rice milling SMEs in North Central geo-political zone, Nigeria is low. The study therefore recommended that: Rice milling SMEs in North Central geo-political zone, Nigeria should do more in order to attain high level of SMEs performance. Rice milling SMEs in North Central geo-political zone, Nigeria should adopt information retrieval method that are suitable in order to ease access to information that will their business performance. Rice milling SMEs in North Central geo-political zone, Nigeria should use information, this in turn will enhance their business performance.

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