

Information Dissemination Practices Adopted by Small and Medium Scale Enterprises for Successful Business Operations in Ebonyi State

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Abstract

This study investigated information dissemination practices adopted by small and medium scale enterprises in Ebonyi State. Guided by one research question and a null hypothesis, the study employed a descriptive survey design. The population consisted of 2,433 registered SMEs, with a sample size of 344. A validated structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The Cronbach Alpha Reliability coefficient was 0.92. Descriptive statistics and t-test were used for data analysis. Findings revealed that SMEs use social media, YouTube, billboards, WhatsApp, radio, and television for information dissemination. No significant difference was found between male and female operators' ratings on information dissemination practices. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended, among others, those small and medium scale enterprises operators should social media platforms for business information dissemination. Business education teachers should emphasize the benefits of information dissemination practices in promoting business activities.

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Background to the Study

Information dissemination is a crucial aspect of business operations, enabling organizations to communicate their value propositions, products, and services to their target audience. Information dissemination practices refer to the methods and strategies used to share and communicate information to various audiences, stakeholders, or communities. This involves tailoring messages for specific audiences and choosing suitable channels, such as social media, email, and publications. Igwe (2024) views information dissemination as the act of delivering principles, ideas, opinions, and information to people, especially consumers of a product. Information dissemination practices refer to the processes and methods used to share, distribute, and communicate information to various audiences, stakeholders, or target groups. According to Underwood (2021), information dissemination is a signal or message that flows between a sender and a receiver. Bennet (2020) defines information as interpreted data. Salamiet et al. (2014) posit that determining the requirements of market women requires knowing who they are. Effective information dissemination is crucial in various fields, including education, healthcare, business, and development. It also involves developing engaging, informative content. Moorthy (2022) noted that the use of business information influences the performance of small and medium-scale enterprises.

Small-scale and medium-scale enterprises are business organizations set up by individuals or groups of individuals, known as business operators, to provide goods and services (Igwe, Oduma, and Utebor, 2024). The capital to operate the business is supplied by one person or a few people who are the managers of the business. These enterprises usually take the form of sole proprietorships, partnerships, or family-owned companies. According to Olufemi (2017), small-scale and medium-scale enterprises exist in the form of sole proprietorships and partnerships, although some may be registered as limited liability companies. They are characterized by simple management structures, informal employer-employee relationships, labor-intensive operations, simple technology, fusion of ownership and management, and limited access to capital. Their classification into small and medium enterprises depends on the scale or size of business operators' control. Furthermore, small-scale and medium-scale enterprises engage in various activities, including construction, agro-allied, information technology, manufacturing, educational establishments, business services, tourism, and leisure.

In Ebonyi State, small-scale and medium-scale enterprises have continued to thrive even before the state's creation in 1996. Nwusulor, in Igwe, Oduma, and Utebor (2024), states that about 80% of all economic activities in Ebonyi State are purely small-scale and medium-scale enterprises. This accounts for their significant contributions to the state's economy. According to SMEDAN (2022), Ebonyi State has 2,433 small-scale and medium-scale enterprises. These enterprises provide employment opportunities, reduce poverty, and diversify the economy. They operate in various dimensions, including water production, cassava processing, rice milling, provision stores, hairdressing, fruit juice making, computer centers, shoe making, palm oil production, vehicle repairs and maintenance, laundry and dry-cleaning services, bookshops, transport services, carpentry, electronics repairs and accessories, poultry farms, restaurants, and fast-food centers.

Despite their contributions to the state's economy, small-scale and medium-scale enterprises in Ebonyi State face challenges, including a high rate of failure. According to West and Wood (2012), 90% of business failures result from a lack of experience and knowledge about the market. In today's information age, business information is a valuable asset that aids management decision-making and provides a competitive edge. Igwe (2020) noted that no business is without competitors, and gathering information about competitors is critical. Effective information dissemination practices are vital for small-scale and medium-scale enterprises to thrive in today's competitive business landscape. These practices enable enterprises to showcase their products, services, and brand identity, fostering visibility and credibility. This, in turn, attracts customers, investors, and partners, driving business expansion. Igwe (2024) stated that accurate and timely information dissemination empowers small-scale and medium-scale enterprise managers to make informed decisions. Data-driven insights facilitate strategic planning, risk management, and innovation. Information dissemination practices also facilitate open communication channels with customers, suppliers, and business partners, ensuring seamless collaboration, feedback, and issue resolution. Small-scale and medium-scale businesses that effectively disseminate information differentiate themselves from competitors. Igwe (2024) adds that information dissemination practices directly enhance business revenue by increasing customer awareness, engagement, and loyalty, leading to higher sales and market share. Customer feedback and insights gathered through information dissemination practices enable small-scale and medium-scale enterprises to refine their products and services. These practices ensure that enterprises stay competitive, adaptable, and responsive to market changes, guaranteeing long-term sustainability. Consistent, engaging communication builds trust and credibility, attracting customers, talent, and partners.

In this 21st century, people interact with others to get things done through various online platforms because much of our printed information is available electronically. The integration of social media platforms in the business world can help small and medium-scale enterprises disseminate information to the general public, connect with customers, and business partners who share similar business interests or activities online. It would also help small and medium-scale owners/managers access or disseminate information and resources needed to work together effectively and solve business problems online. Akujo (2020) outlines some social media platforms that small and medium-scale enterprises can use to disseminate information about their products to customers, including Facebook, Twitter, blogs, WhatsApp, YouTube, SharePoint, Instagram, and LinkedIn, among others. She further notes that these platforms allow small and medium-scale owners to tap into what people are saying about their product brand and other services, participate in the conversation, be open to new ideas, and use this insight to make better business decisions.

The use of Twitter by owners/managers of small and medium-scale enterprises can also help disseminate information about business activities. Twitter is a free online micro-blogging tool that allows people to stay in constant contact with each other through shared communication. Akujo (2020) notes that the use of Twitter in disseminating information about business can help small and medium-scale business enterprises stay connected with their customers and get

in touch with them on the latest business developments. It also enables owners to monitor their competitors by reading through their tweets. Jeremy (2013) opines that business owners who use Twitter put their business out there to a large audience that they would not have been able to reach otherwise. YouTube is another important modern way of information dissemination in this information technology age. Urchin, as cited in Akujo (2020), postulates that YouTube is an online video service that allows people to share videos. Akujo notes that YouTube is the leader in online video and the primary destination to watch and share original videos worldwide through the web. It allows people to easily upload and share video clips across the Internet through websites, mobile devices, blogs, and email. Businesses and individuals use YouTube to disseminate and find videos, including entertainment, promotions, and instructional content. Furthermore, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp can help business owners/managers disseminate information about their products or services to the general public through online platforms. Facebook is a powerful tool for small and medium-scale enterprises to disseminate information, connect with customers, and grow their business. The manager/owner can create a Facebook business page separate from their personal profile, choose a clear and concise page name, add a business profile and cover photos, and a compelling bio. They can also set up page categories and tags for discovery. This will help SME owners/managers share vital information about their new products with customers through their WhatsApp page or Facebook account. Akujo (2020) noted that Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp are social platforms that encourage active social communication between business owners and followers. These platforms offer many advantages in disseminating business information that can help owners grow their business. According to Fergerman and Seth (2014), Facebook and Instagram are great platforms for promoting all types of business information.

Another medium through which small and medium-scale operators can disseminate information is email. Electronic mail has become a vital, fast, and convenient way of disseminating information and building strategic relationships in business. It has also been transformed into an important medium for transporting electronic copies of documents, data files, and multimedia content. Lesikar, Pettit, and Flatley (2019) concur with this line of reasoning, stating that email transmissions work with computer systems, sending documents to an electronic mail box. These electronic mail boxes can be set up on a company's computers, on a service provider's computer, or on a private subscriber information services computer. O'Brien (2020) points out that, as with email, you need to know the telephone number of the receiving fax to send the message, and someone on the receiving end needs to check the fax and deliver the message. Another way to disseminate business information is through radio broadcasts. Coulson (2021) highlights the extremely high proportion of households that possess a radio. Coulson further states that a growing proportion of cars have radios, and cassette players are fitted to cars in increasing quantities. Radios are broadcast in many working situations. Portable transistor radios are listened to by the mobile young, and many young mothers listen to the radio while doing their housework. According to Okoro (2015), the radio is a popular and ubiquitous medium for disseminating information because it has the potential to reach many people efficiently for business, educational, informational, entertainment, and cultural purposes. Furthermore, radio advertisements may be heard by

listeners who are driving, walking, working, or engaging in other activities. This was supported by Williams and Sawyer (2021), who stated that advertising, events, marketing, and publicity are done through radio. According to the authors, television also carries a captivating glamour. Outdoor advertising and personal selling are additional ways small and medium-scale enterprises can share information with customers. This method involves signs and posters placed outside along highways or other areas with heavy traffic. Reibstein (2015) describes outdoor advertising as a catchall category for anything not on the airwaves or in print. Outdoor media includes billboards, posters, signs, and printed shopping bags. Small and medium-scale enterprises using outdoor advertising determine the location by studying traffic patterns and the proximity of distribution outlets. Outdoor advertising is particularly effective in large urban areas with high concentrations of pedestrians, automobiles, or public transit users. Orogwu (2019) views personal selling as a special form of information dissemination. Its goal is to provide information to prospective buyers in a way that elicits a purchase. Although personal selling is just one of the several promotional tools available to marketing managers, it is unique in that it is a form of dyadic communication. Ile (2021) noted that personal selling is an oral presentation in a conversation with one or more prospective purchasers for the purpose of making sales.

The bulk of work in business organizations can be affected by information transmission. Most SMEs have an abundance of information within the company. According to Lau, Choy, Wong, and Fungi (2013), this information is the main input for any business organization that wants to function effectively and efficiently. The fact remains that SMEs cannot exist successfully without well-defined and analyzed information management. If the communication network is inadequate, small and medium-scale enterprise owners would not know what their colleagues are doing or what customers are requesting at any given time. This may be due to the information and communication technological revolution that has transformed business. Ajayi (2018) notes that the introduction of the Internet as a readily accessible and cost-effective means of communication has rapidly transformed the way Nigerian society conducts business and shares information. This is why modern small and medium enterprises use the internet, intranets, extranets, and other networks to support every step of the commercial process.

Small and medium-scale businesses are not exclusive to men; they involve different genders, including men and women. In this study, the first demographic characteristic is gender, referring to the physical differences between people who are male, female, or intersex. Gender is also defined as the different biological and physiological characteristics of males and females. Turner and Akinremi, as cited in Ucha (2021), note that the gender of owners/operators of small and medium-scale enterprises may influence the way one thinks and behaves. Thus, gender might influence business owners/managers' opinions on the utilization of modern information management practices in small and medium-scale businesses. A study conducted by Akujo (2019) shows that females make more use of information management than men in carrying out their business activities. According to Akujo, females use more information channels, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube, to share business information than men. This may also be the case for small and medium-scale enterprises in Ebonyi State.

However, these views are either theoretical or have not been empirically proven to affect small and medium-scale business operators' utilization of information dissemination management practices in Ebonyi State. Against this background, the researcher empirically determined the information dissemination management practices adopted by small and medium-scale business enterprises for successful business operations in Ebonyi State.

Statement of the Problem

Small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) dominate the investment landscape of Ebonyi State, playing a vital role in the state's economic development. They employ a significant percentage of the active working population and contribute substantially to the state's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The problem is that the great number of small and medium scale enterprise (SMEs) springing up on daily bases keep folding up leaving little or no significant impact on the economic development of the State. The researcher is worried that the rate of failure on the part of small and medium scale enterprise operators may be due to lack of information management practices. However, despite the crucial role of effective information dissemination in driving business success, many small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in Ebonyi State continue to struggle with inadequate information management practices, leading to poor decision-making, reduced competitiveness, and limited growth prospects. The lack of empirical research on the information dissemination practices adopted by SMEs in Ebonyi State has resulted in a significant knowledge gap, making it challenging for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and stakeholders to develop targeted interventions to support the growth and sustainability of SMEs in the region. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the information dissemination practices adopted by SMEs in Ebonyi State, with a view to identifying the challenges and opportunities for improving information management practices and promoting successful business operations."

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the information dissemination practices adopted by small and medium-scale enterprises for successful business operations in Ebonyi State. Specifically, the study aimed to:

Determine the information dissemination practices adopted by small and medium-scale enterprises for successful business operations in Ebonyi State.

Research Questions

The following research question was raised to guide the study:

What are the information dissemination practices adopted by small and medium-scale enterprises for successful business operations in Ebonyi State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypothesis was formulated to guide the study and was tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female operators of small and medium-scale enterprises regarding information dissemination management practices adopted by small and medium enterprises in Ebonyi State.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design. The study was conducted in Ebonyi State, one of the five states in the South East Geographical Zone of Nigeria. The population of the study consisted of 2,433 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) registered with the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN). A sample size of 344 SMEs was determined using the Yaro Yamane formula. A structured questionnaire, titled "Information Dissemination Management Practices Adopted by SMEs," was designed by the researcher for data collection. The instrument contained 12 items, arranged in five clusters, with a four-point rating scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree). The questionnaire was validated by three experts from the Business Education and Science Education departments. A pilot test was conducted using a sample of 30 SMEs in Enugu State, and the data collected was analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient, yielding a reliability index of 0.82. The questionnaire was administered to 344 respondents with the help of four research assistants. However, only 321 questionnaires (93%) were retrieved and used for data analysis, while 21 were not returned. The data collected was analyzed using the Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-test statistic at an alpha level of 0.05 significance. Items with a mean value of 2.50 or higher were considered as one of the information management practices adopted by SMEs, while a mean value below 2.50 indicated disagreement. The results of hypotheses tested using the t-test were accepted when the calculated p-value was greater than 0.05 and rejected when the calculated p-value was less than 0.05.

Results

Research Questions: What are the information dissemination practices adopted by small and medium scale enterprises in Ebonyi State?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of Respondents on the Information Dissemination Practices Adopted by Small and Medium Scale Enterprises N=Sample Size

S/N	Items	N	Mean	Std.	Decision
1	Post sales promotion on Face book	321	3.49	0.58	Agree
2	Uploading business videos on YouTube	321	3.52	0.61	Strongly Agree
3	Displaying bill board with vital information	321	3.49	0.65	Agree
4	Advertising products on Instagram	321	1.36	0.59	Disagree
5	Sharing product photos on Twitter handle	321	1.40	0.56	Disagree
6	Chatting with the customers on WhatsApp	321	3.42	0.69	Agree
7	Publishing articles in the magazines	321	1.54	0.68	Disagree
8	Use of radio announcement	321	3.36	0.74	Agree
9	Using television announcement	321	3.31	0.73	Agree
10	Dispatching business correspondence to customers	321	1.43	0.66	Disagree
11	Creating chat customers group with snap chat	321	1.39	0.55	Disagree
12	Sharing business information on blog	321	1.50	0.61	Disagree

Data in Table 1 show that items 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, and 9 have mean scores ranging from 3.31 to 3.52, exceeding the 2.50 cut-off point. These items represent information dissemination practices

adopted by small and medium scale enterprises in Ebonyi State. Conversely, items 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, and 12 have mean values of 1.36, 1.40, 1.54, 1.43, 1.39, and 1.56, respectively, falling below the 2.50 cut-off point and indicating disagreement among small and medium scale business operators. The respondents agreed on the following information dissemination practices adopted by small and medium scale enterprises in Ebonyi State: posting sales promotions on Facebook, uploading business videos on YouTube, displaying billboards with vital information, chatting with customers on WhatsApp, using radio announcements, and utilizing television announcements.

Research Hypothesis

H0₁: There is no significant difference in mean rating of male and female operators of small and medium scale enterprises regarding information dissemination management practices adopted by small and medium enterprises successful business operations in Ebonyi State.

Table 2: Independent t-test of Mean Ratings of Responses of Male and Female operators of small and medium scale Enterprises on Information Dissemination Management Practices Adopted by small and Medium Scale Enterprises

Items	Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Df	t-cal	Alpha	p-val.	Decision
Item 1	Male	188	3.48	.54	319	.10	0.05	.91	Not significant
	Female	133	3.49	.63					
Item 2	Male	188	3.52	.64	319	.00	0.05	.99	Not significant
	Female	133	3.52	.57					
Item 3	Male	188	3.54	.61	319	1.54	0.05	.12	Not significant
	Female	133	3.42	.69					
Item 4	Male	188	1.35	.59	319	.17	0.05	.85	Not significant
	Female	133	1.36	.59					
Item 5	Male	188	1.44	.59	319	1.38	0.05	.16	Not significant
	Female	133	1.35	.51					
Item 6	Male	188	3.42	.70	319	.10	0.05	.91	Not Significant
	Female	133	3.42	.67					
Item 7	Male	188	1.54	.68	319	.18	0.05	.85	Not significant
	Female	133	1.53	.68					
Item 8	Male	188	3.37	.75	319	.46	0.05	.64	Not Significant
	Female	133	3.33	.72					
Item 9	Male	188	3.32	.75	319	.28	0.05	.77	Not Significant
	Female	133	3.30	.69					
Item 10	Male	188	1.45	.67	319	.78	0.05	.43	Not significant
	Female	133	1.39	.65					
Item 11	Male	188	1.41	.57	319	.62	0.05	.53	Not significant
	Female	133	1.37	.51					
Item 12	Male	188	1.50	.60	319	.12	0.05	.89	Not Significant
	Female	133	1.49	.63					
					319	.83	0.05	.67	Not significant

The t-test analysis results in Table 2 reveal no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female operators of small and medium scale enterprises regarding information dissemination management practices adopted for successful business operations in Ebonyi State. This is evident from the p-values in Table 2, which range from 0.16 to 0.99, all exceeding 0.05. The grand p-value of 0.676 also surpasses 0.05, leading to the non-rejection of the null hypothesis stating no significant difference in mean ratings between male and female operators.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed how SME operators responded to the information dissemination management practices adopted by small and medium enterprises for successful business operations in Ebonyi State. The findings showed that information dissemination practices were barely applied by small and medium enterprises in Ebonyi State. This means that post-sales promotions on Facebook, uploading business videos on YouTube, displaying billboards with vital information, chatting with customers on WhatsApp, using radio announcements, and television announcements were slightly applied by small and medium enterprises in Ebonyi State. The findings are in line with the report of the World Bank (2015), which states that most small and medium-scale enterprises in Nigeria do not maintain and practice complete information dissemination in their business ventures. The findings agree with Akujo (2020), who noted that the use of Twitter in disseminating information about business could help small and medium-scale business enterprises stay connected with their customers and get in touch with them on the latest business developments. This would also enable owners to monitor their competitors by reading through their tweets. The findings also agree with Jeremy (2013), who opined that business owners who use Twitter put their business out there to a large audience that they would not have been able to reach otherwise.

Additionally, the findings concur with Urchin in Akujo (2020), who postulated that YouTube is an online video service that allows people to share videos. The findings also support the view of Akujo (2020), who noted that Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp are social platforms that encourage active social communication between business owners and followers. These platforms offer many advantages in disseminating business information, which can help owners grow their business. The findings are also consistent with Orogwu (2019), who views personal selling as a special form of disseminating information. Its goal is to provide information to prospective buyers in a way that elicits a purchase. Furthermore, the findings agree with Mgbodile (2016), who averred that the use of a register is one of the most acceptable means of disseminating information in business offices. This is because it is where each member of the workforce can sign, with a date, indicating that they have received the information. Finally, the findings are consistent with Okorie (2021), who maintained that face-to-face discussions, the use of bulletins, announcements, notice boards, letters, and memoranda, as well as the installation of more intercommunication and telephones in the office, can facilitate information dissemination to employees. Regular staff meetings can also ensure that information is disseminated early, saving employers or managers the embarrassment of not getting the message out.

The researcher is of the view that the result is so because, in the 21st century, people interact with others to get things done through various online platforms, as much of our printed information is now available electronically. The integration of social media platforms in the business world can help small and medium-scale enterprises disseminate information to the general public, connect with customers, and business partners who share similar business interests or activities online. It would also help small and medium-scale owners/managers access or disseminate information and resources needed to work together effectively and solve business problems online. Similarly, the test of the third null hypothesis indicated that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female operators of small and medium-scale enterprises regarding the information dissemination management practices adopted by small and medium enterprises for successful business operations in Ebonyi State. The findings of the study also agree with Nkuma and Adebajo (2021), who found that gender, did not influence business owners/operators of small and medium-scale businesses' views on the utilization of modern information management practices in small and medium-scale businesses. In contrast, Turner and Akinremi, as cited in Ucha (2021), found that the gender of business owners/operators of small and medium-scale businesses influenced the way one thinks and behaves.

Conclusion

The study concludes that when properly utilized, information dissemination management practices can create a conducive environment for the effective functioning of small and medium-scale business activities in Ebonyi State and beyond. However, small and medium-scale business operators' inability to effectively utilize information dissemination practices has made it challenging for them to survive and make an impact in a competitive environment in Ebonyi State.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Small and medium-scale enterprise operators should adopt social media platforms to disseminate business information to customers, creating awareness and a favorable business environment. Additionally, handbills and posters should be circulated to educate the public about their existence.
2. Government and other business support organizations should consider organizing training programs for small and medium-scale enterprises on information retrieval strategies to ensure success in business enterprises.

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