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To cite this article: Paul Maku Gichohi, Omwoyo Bosire Onyancha & Frankwell W. Dulle (2017): A model for public Libraries' support in the development of small-scale business enterprises in Meru County, Kenya, Public Library Quarterly, DOI: [10.1080/01616846.2017.1391033](https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2017.1391033)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2017.1391033>



Published online: 13 Nov 2017.



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A model for public Libraries' support in the development of small-scale business enterprises in Meru County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at developing a suitable model for support by public libraries in the development of small-scale business enterprises (SBEs) in Meru County, Kenya. A mixed-methods research approach and survey research design were applied. We collected data from small-scale business traders, staff members from the three public libraries, and two staff members in charge of the Enterprise Development Department in Meru County by means of questionnaires and interviews, and applied document analysis on written sources held by these entities. We developed a model that can be adopted and is highly recommended to public libraries in supporting small enterprises in Kenya.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 15 March 2017
Revised 15 September 2017
Accepted 5 October 2017

KEYWORDS

Business community development; business information; business information model; public library; small-scale business enterprises (SMEs)

Introduction

Small-scale business enterprises (SBEs) are characterized by their wide geographical dispersion, small market share, low start-up capital, sole ownership, scanty business information, few workers, quest for survival, cash flow problems, low balance sheet value, and turnover volumes, short planning horizons, and simple management structures (Bridge O'Neill and Cromie 2003; Chiware 2008). Despite demean characteristics, SBEs make enormous contribution to national economic development (Pankl 2010). African Economic Outlook (2011), and Banda, Mutula and Grand (2004) emphasise the significance of SBEs in creating employment, alleviating poverty and generating wealth hence their significance in contributing to gross domestic product (GDP).

In Kenya, the SBE's sector employs a large number of people and contributes to the national income (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2014). Yet, despite these contributions, their development is curtailed by obstacles such as the lack of markets, limited access to technology, poor institutional support, and business information asymmetry (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2014). In this

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study, access to business information sources and services is considered significant in supporting the development of SBEs, and in making credible business decisions. We believe that public libraries are well placed to assist SBEs in accessing business information sources and services owing to their significant role in promoting socio-economic development (Mutshewa 2009).

Statement of the problem

Although the current role of public libraries is expanding, their status in developing countries lacks established business information provision model and framework that resonates well with local business scenes. A framework by Mutshewa (2009) for improving the provision of business information services in public libraries in Botswana has functional limitations in application at public libraries in other developing economies due to divergent socio-economic environment. We identified a gap in literature in the area of small enterprises and in the provision of business information by public libraries. The available literature provides little information on frameworks, mechanisms, and service model that are suitable for public libraries in Kenya. Public libraries in Kenya lack localized, well-structured, and systematic service model for supporting the widely dispersed SBEs.

Purpose of the study

The study aimed to investigate the provision of business information sources and services by public libraries in Meru County with a view to developing a model that would enable them to effectively support the development of SBEs.

Theoretical framework

In this section, we review the models that have previously been used to support the provision of business information as well as the models used by some public libraries in their endeavours to support SBEs.

General models for the provision of business information to small enterprises

A limited number of models have been applied in supporting the provision of business information to SBEs. A few of them are described below.

The Grampian business information center (GBIC) model

The Grampian business information center (GBIC) model refers to the business information center that was funded by the regional council and

Grampian Enterprise and Local Enterprise Network. According to Marcella et al. (1996), GBIC provided access to information on United Kingdom (U.K.) and the European Union (E.U.). Other tasks included capacity building, conducting market research, answering business queries, developing business plans, and offering auditing services to SBEs. GBIC promoted its services through road shows and advertisement in the media and through press releases. This model worked very well in U.K. and provides useful insights in this study. However, it may not resonate well with the Kenya's situation because of the low infrastructural development and poor structures for handling business information. The model is also general in nature and may not suffice a public library in developing countries. This is because public libraries in Africa are largely biased to supporting formal education systems (EIFL 2012), and hence the need to reposition them as community information centres (Fairbairn 2012).

The Scotland business information services (SCOTBIS) model

The Scotland business information services (SCOTBIS) was launched in 1989 by the National Library of Scotland to offer business information to remote users for the growth of knowledge-based economy. According to Ridley (2010), SCOTBIS provided access to a wide range of print business sources and business electronic databases such as COBRA towards supporting SBEs. It also provided information services such as document delivery, website with links to other relevant information services, fee-based enquiry, and research services. It collaborated with other agencies in holding business training workshops. SCOTBIS adopted e-bulletins, brochures, and social media in promoting its business information services. Despite its significance, the wholesome application of this model in developing countries is curtailed by higher illiteracy levels, low adoption of technology in rural areas, and the diverse disciplines served by public libraries.

The support and consultation center for small and medium enterprises (SUCCESS) model

The support and consultation center for small and medium enterprises (SUCCESS) is the most recent and prominent organization offering comprehensive support to SMEs in China. It was established by the Trade and Industry Department of China (SUCCESS 2016). Its services to SBEs include meet-the-advisors sessions, workshops, mentorship programmes, interactive employment services, and access to business-oriented reference library. SUCCESS further collaborates with industrial and trade organizations, professional bodies, private enterprises, and government departments in China (Okello-Obura and Matovu 2011). Adoption of this model in public libraries

in Meru County, Kenya is deterred by the poor development of IT in rural areas and the lack of full-fledged business units that provide specialized services to the business community in public libraries.

Models specific to the support offered by public libraries to small enterprises

The following two models for supporting the development of SBEs by two public libraries were identified and reviewed.

The British library business information services (BLBIS) model

According to Spencer, Ruston, and Duncan (2004), and Marfleet (2006), the British Library is one of the best equipped public libraries in business collection in the world. Its services include research, advisory, training, consultancy, online enquiry, a business-oriented website, access to business links, and webcasts of previous events. The British Library model is valuable in this study, although its services do not favor would-be entrepreneurs. Its applicability in Kenya may also face difficulties due to the poor culture of seeking business information (Gichohi, Onyancha, and Dulle 2016).

The New York public library science, industry, and business library (SIBL) model

The New York public library science, industry, and business library (SIBL) acknowledged the need to offer blended services that went beyond collecting and disseminating business information (Cohen and McDonough 2007). It stocked a variety of business information sources. Its services included as follows: training, business counselling, face-to-face consultations to SMEs, document delivery, fee-based research services, website with a page on Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), Ask-A-Librarian facility, access to online business databases, end-user roving support, and periodic networking breakfast meetings at local hotels with SMEs. It was partnering with non-profit business development groups, chambers of commerce, and local and state government agencies. Although the model is very insightful, there is wide reliance of IT in its implementation which curtails its wholesome adoption in Kenya.

The above models show that different approaches to the provision of business information exist. The models, however, lack the mechanisms of establishing the information needs of small enterprises. Consecutively, neither of the above models was sufficiently comprehensive for adoption in its original form at a local public library in Kenya. This is due to technology divide, different levels of economic growth, poor structures, approaches and

variant systems in the provision of business information sources and services in Kenya, as well as the heterogeneous nature of SBEs (Smith 2009). The situation in Kenya requires a different approach, comprehensive, localized structure, and systems that are informed by business information needs, which we hope to establish through our present study. To address the situation, the following five research questions were formulated to guide this study:

- (i) What factors influence the development of small-scale business enterprises in Meru County?
- (ii) Are business information needs of SBEs significant in determining the business information sources and services at public libraries?
- (iii) Are public libraries significant in supporting the development of SBEs?
- (iv) What measures are needed at public/community libraries in order to support the development of SBEs in Meru County?
- (v) What suitable model at public libraries could support the development of small-scale business enterprises?

Research methodology

This article reports on the findings of a broad doctoral study on the role of public libraries in the development of SBEs in Meru County, Kenya. A mixed-methods research approach was followed involving the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, with quantitative data being dominant and qualitative data largely serving an explanatory role. A survey was deemed appropriate as the population was large and widely dispersed. The target population comprised 4,514 SBE traders and 21 staff members from three public libraries in Meru County (Meru, Mikumbene, and Timau). Most of the SBEs were located in the main town centers, that is, Makutano Maua, Nkubu, Kianjai and Timau. The formula by Hoyle, Harris, and Judd (2002) was used to determine the actual sample size, which was calculated at 355 SBEs. A proportionate sample was hence computed for each target town. All 21 staff members working at the three public libraries were included in the study. Cluster sampling was used to sample the SBEs traders. The initial clusters for this study were judgmentally considered from the nine sub-counties of Meru County, after which systematic sampling was used to identify individual traders.

Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews, and a document analysis guide. The existing literature and published studies on business information sources and services, and on small-scale business development were consulted in coming up with specific elements in the data collection

instruments. Data from the SBEs were collected and analyzed first, where the results were informative in fine-tuning the subsequent interview questions for staff of public libraries and the Enterprise Development Department (EDD) in Meru County.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the analysis with the help of Statistical Products for Service Solutions (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel. Responses to all interview and open-ended questions were analysed thematically, and content analysis was applied to the syntactical and referential units specifically in assessing the documents obtained from the EDD and from the three public libraries. Data analysis was followed by consolidation and integration, where all the data sets were combined to create constructs, which were critical in the design of components of the proposed model.

Results

The survey response rate was 296 SBE traders (83.4%) and 20 (95%) staff from the three public libraries. The major constructs for the proposed model were obtained through regression analyses of the findings as outlined in what follows.

The environmental, cultural, and personality factors influencing the development of SBEs

The quantitative frequency of the environmental, cultural, and personality factors that influenced the development of SBEs was computed first with the aim of understanding the nature of the information needs emanating from each category of these factors. The environmental factors are presented separately in Table 1, while both cultural and personality factors are summarized in Table 2.

SBEs traders were asked to indicate in a 3-point Likert rating scale the extent to which various environmental factors affected the performance of their businesses. The results led to the categorization of factors according to three levels of influence, that is, factors with great influence, moderate influence, and low influence on business performance as shown in Table 1.

The results in Table 1 indicate that the majority of environmental factors had a significant influence on the development of SBEs in Meru County, as shown by the large number of participants who responded in the affirmative. This was further acknowledged by the officials of the EDD.

Overall, the influence of cultural factors on business performance was mild (see Table 2) as most factors showed a low influence on SBE performance. However, religious faith and beliefs influenced the performance of businesses to a moderate extent ($N = 127$ or 42.9%).

Table 1. Environmental factors influencing the development of SBEs ($N = 296$).

Environmental factors	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Factors with significant influence on the development of small-scale business enterprises		
1. Absence of organizations or associations that can take care of business-related grievances	179	60.5
2. Lack of ideas on the kinds of business information sources and services that are available to help in improving the performance of SBEs	171	57.8
3. Lack of sufficient skills training in business matters	164	55.4
4. Lack of access to relevant information on how to do business better	161	54.4
5. The cost of doing business is very high due to power bills, water bills, and high cost of living	159	53.7
6. Lack of information on relevant networks and collaboration opportunities that are available for SBEs	156	52.7
7. Limited funds to finance small-scale business ventures (shortage of capital)	148	50.0
8. Frequent changes in customer preferences and tastes	141	47.6
9. High competition	140	47.3
10. High licence fee charged by municipal council	136	45.9
11. High rental on business premises	134	45.3
12. Mean	154	51.9
Factors with a moderate influence on the development of small-scale business enterprises		
1. High rate of insecurity in the area	137	46.3
2. High costs of raw materials	123	41.6
3. Lack of or poor market for products and services	108	36.5
Factors with a low influence on the development of small-scale business enterprises		
1. The wide use of and developments in technology	174	58.8
2. The frequent climate changes	173	58.4
3. The changing politics/political situations	162	54.7
4. High cost of transporting products	126	42.6
5. Too many policies, regulations, and requirements affecting SBEs	123	41.6
6. Lack of awareness of regulations, standards, and other legislation affecting SBEs	114	38.5

With reference to personality factors, most SBEs (48.3%), said that they were greatly influenced by a strong belief in self, high achievement (46.3%), persistence (45.6%), risk taking (44.2%), and value for independence (43.9%), while educational background showed a moderate influence on business performance (45.3%). The results show that personality factors influenced the performance of SBEs in Meru County to a relatively large extent.

A multiple linear regression analysis was further carried out to determine the extent of the impact. Here, the three independent variables (environmental, cultural and personality factors) were regressed stepwise on the dependent variable, that is, the income earned by SBEs (a key determinant of performance and development of SBEs) to validate the level of their influence on the development of SBEs (see [Table 3](#)).

The Durbin–Watson value of 2.116 in [Table 3](#) was higher than 1, which implied that no autocorrelation was detected; hence, the regression model was reliable. The F-ratio in the analysis of variance (ANOVA) [Table 4](#) showed that all the environmental, cultural, and personality factors, together, statistically significantly predicted the income variable where the level of

Table 2. Cultural and personality related factors affecting the performance of SBEs in Meru County ($N = 296$).

Cultural factors affecting small-scale business enterprises	To a great extent <i>n</i> (%)	To a moderate extent <i>n</i> (%)	To a low extent <i>n</i> (%)	Not at all <i>n</i> (%)	Standard deviation
1. My religious faith and beliefs	40 (13.5)	127 (42.9)	61 (20.6)	68 (23.0)	0.991
2. The widespread practice of witchcraft in my community	47 (15.9)	51 (17.2)	120 (40.5)	78 (26.4)	1.012
3. Traditional beliefs of my community	23 (7.8)	47 (15.9)	53 (17.9)	173 (58.4)	0.992
4. Customs and taboos in my community	43 (14.5)	11 (3.7)	70 (23.6)	172 (58.1)	1.067
5. Marriage issues and practices	20 (3.8)	21 (7.1)	62 (20.9)	193 (65.2)	0.893
6. Mean score	35 (11.1)	51 (17.4)	73 (24.7)	136 (46.2)	0.991
7. I have a strong belief in myself	143 (48.3)	125 (42.2)	28 (9.5)	0	0.654
8. What I achieve motivates me to move on	137 (46.3)	120 (40.5)	39 (13.2)	0	0.698
9. I do not give up easily	135 (45.6)	127 (42.9)	34 (11.5)	0	0.675
10. I have the ability to face business risks without fear	131 (44.2)	122 (41.2)	43 (14.5)	0	0.708
11. The fact that I value independence (being my own boss)	130 (43.9)	123 (41.6)	43 (14.5)	0	0.707
12. The background of my education helps a lot	104 (35.1)	134 (45.3)	32 (10.8)	26 (8.8)	0.899
13. Mean score	130 (43.9)	125 (42.3)	36 (12.3)	4 (1.5)	0.724

Table 3. Multiple regression model summary of environmental, cultural, and personality factors on the performance of SBEs.

Model, $N = 296$	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. err development of SBEs or of the estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.584a	0.341	0.294	1.524	
2	0.636b	0.404	0.349	1.463	
3	0.647c	0.418	0.350	1.462	2.116

Table 4. ANOVA results of environmental, cultural, and personality factors on the performance of SBEs.

Model, $N = 296$		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	331.074	20	16.554	7.128	0.000b
	Residual	638.679	275	2.322		
	Total	969.753	295			
2	Regression	391.790	25	15.672	7.321	0.000c
	Residual	577.964	270	2.141		
	Total	969.753	295			
3	Regression	405.841	31	13.092	6.129	0.000d
	Residual	563.912	264	2.136		
	Total	969.753	295			

a. Dependent variable: The average income range per month after payment of rent and bills from the business (Kenya shillings)

b. Predictors: (Constant), environmental factors

c. Predictors: (Constant), environmental factors, cultural factors

d. Predictors: (Constant), environmental factors, cultural factors, personality characteristics factors

significance (0.000) in all three cases was lower than the alpha value, $p < 0.05$, and therefore, the regression model was a good fit for the data.

Three models stood out of the above regression analysis (b, c, and d in Table 4). The first model shows that the environmental factors had the greatest impacts, with R squared value of 34.1% on the income earned by SBEs. The impact increased to 40.4% (second model) when the environmental factors were combined with cultural factors. The third model, shown as “d,” had the greatest impact and comprised of three constructs—environmental, cultural, and personality factors—which jointly accounted for 41.8% of the variation in the income earned by SBEs. The document analysis carried out at the three public libraries in Meru County on the available business information sources unequivocally supported these findings. This shows that the three aggregate factors are jointly significant in influencing the performance of SBEs; hence the information needs emanating from the three aggregate factors were significant in the design of the proposed model.

Effect of business information needs on business information sources and services

The business information needs were ascertained from the SBEs and verified accordingly as recently published in Gichohi, Onyancha, and Dulle (2016). A multiple regression analysis was subsequently carried out to determine how various business information sources and services were predicted by the information needs of SBEs.

The enter method was therefore used to regress the cited business information needs (independent variables), first on each of the suggested business information sources and second on each of the suggested business information services (dependent variables). After computation, the information from the regression model summaries and ANOVA tables in each case were extracted and grouped against each business information source and service. Due to large data sets, the aggregate mean scores of columns on R square, Durbin–Watson value, F scores, and on p value—which demonstrate the influence of business information needs on business information sources and on business information services, respectively—were hence computed, and presented in Table 5.

Business information needs of SBEs were reported to statistically significantly predict the business information sources and services where p value was 0.000 and 0.031, respectively, which were less than the alpha value of 0.05 in both cases. The Durbin–Watson average value in each case was higher than 1, indicating no autocorrelation was detected. The R squared values were high, with an average impact of 30.1% and 80.4% on the variation of business information needs and with a high F value of 7.785 and 3.752 on business information sources and services, respectively. The results

Table 5. Impact of business information needs on business information sources and services.

Effect of business information needs on business information sources and services (N = 296)	R square	Durbin–Watson	ANOVA	
			F	Sig
Business information sources	0.301	1.836	7.785	0.000
Business information services	0.804	1.990	3.752	0.031

underscore the significance of business information sources and services in satisfying the business information needs of SBEs. This view was vehemently supported by all librarians in charge of public libraries in Meru County hence the inclusion of these two constructs in the development of the proposed model.

Support offered by public libraries to small business enterprises

The proposed model was founded on an exploration of appropriate mechanisms to enable public libraries to support the development of SBEs. Various questions were posed to staff respondents regarding the preparedness and nature of facilities, level of organization, design, and attractiveness of a library building, staff behavior, responsiveness, outreach activities, and the kinds of business information resources and services offered in public libraries. The results are presented in [Table 6](#).

From [Table 6](#), several facilities and conditions were rated “good” such as library opening hours, the arrangement of books on the shelves, hospitality and welcoming aspects of the library, staff dressing, and their competence. With the exception of the signage in the library, all the items that were rated “poor” were related to technology and electronic resources. The results indicated inadequate readiness of public libraries in serving the business community.

A cross-tabulation was run (see [Table 7](#)) on the question whether the staff had been personally involved in supplying business information sources and services to the SBEs. Of the 5 staff who had previously been involved in the process, 2 (40.0%) spent 0–2 hours per day, while 3 (60.0%) spent 6–10 hours per week doing so. The result shows low involvement of library staff in the provision of business information services to the SBEs. The heads of public libraries in Meru County attributed this to the low awareness by SBEs on the availability of business information sources and services. This was ascertained by the lack of profound marketing programmes for business information sources and services at public libraries, hence the great need to include this construct in the proposed model.

Table 6. Nature of facilities and conditions at public libraries for supporting the provision of business information to SBEs ($N = 20$).

No.	Facilities and conditions at public libraries	Good n (%)	Poor n (%)	No comment n (%)
1.	Library opening hours	20 (100.0)	0	0
2.	The arrangement of books on the shelves	20 (100.0)	0	0
3.	Hospitability and welcoming aspects of the library	20 (100.0)	0	0
4.	The dressing of library staff	19 (95.0)	0	1 (5.0)
5.	Librarians' competence	19 (95.0)	0	1 (5.0)
6.	Quantity/numbers of books	18 (90.0)	1 (5.0)	1 (5.0)
7.	Librarians' responsiveness when they are responding to general queries from library users	18 (90.0)	2 (10.0)	0
8.	Library facilities and equipment	17 (85.0)	3 (15.0)	0
9.	Colour used on the walls of the library	17 (85.0)	3 (15.0)	0
10.	Outreach programmes and activities of the library	17 (85.0)	3 (15.0)	0
11.	Public goodwill	17 (85.0)	3 (15.0)	0
12.	The outer design	16 (80.0)	4 (20.0)	0
13.	The arrangement of seats, tables, shelves, and computers	16 (80.0)	4 (20.0)	0
14.	Librarians' expertise in working with computers	16 (80.0)	3 (15.0)	1 (5.0)
15.	Librarians' responsiveness when they are asked for assistance on the use of computers	16 (80.0)	3 (15.0)	1 (5.0)
16.	The interior design of service points	15 (75.0)	5 (25.0)	0
17.	Events, activities and occasions organised by the library	15 (75.0)	5 (25.0)	0
18.	Nature and ambience of recreation facilities	14 (70.0)	5 (25.0)	1 (5.0)
19.	Kinds of journals, magazines and newspapers	14 (70.0)	5 (25.0)	1 (5.0)
20.	Library space	13 (65.0)	7 (35.0)	0
21.	The design of the library's website	13 (65.0)	1 (5.0)	6 (30.0)
22.	Nature and ambience of toilets in the library	13 (65.0)	6 (30.0)	1 (5.0)
23.	Nature and ambience of the adult section of the library	13 (65.0)	6 (30.0)	1 (5.0)
24.	Quality of books	13 (65.0)	6 (30.0)	1 (5.0)
25.	Computer software, e.g. Microsoft packages	13 (65.0)	6 (30.0)	1 (5.0)
26.	The signage in the library	12 (60.0)	5 (20.0)	4 (20.0)
27.	Computers and other related equipment	7 (35.0)	12 (60.0)	1 (5.0)
28.	Nature and ambience of the computer area	4 (20.0)	10 (50.0)	6 (30.0)
29.	Range of online databases and other resources	3 (15.0)	15 (75.0)	1 (5.0)
30.	Quantity and quality of other collections (CDs, DVDs, audio-tapes)	1 (5.0)	17 (85.0)	2 (10.0)

Measures needed at public/community libraries in order to support the development of SBEs in Meru County

We further explored the appropriate measures needed at public libraries to effectively satisfy the business information needs of SBEs. During the analysis, the proposed measures were divided into six categories: those related to business information sources, business information services, public library facilities and preparedness, marketing of information sources and services, partnership, collaboration and alliances, and monitoring and evaluation, as shown in Table 8.

Result in Table 7 reveals that all the 15 suggested measures were significant in supporting the information needs of SBEs at a public library. We were further interested in finding out whether these measures would provide solutions, first to the difficulties faced by SBEs when seeking and/or

Table 7. Public library staff involvement in serving SBEs and the time taken ($N = 20$).

Percentage response to:		Approximate time spent offering services to small-scale business traders			
		0–2 hours per day	6–10 hours per month	Very rarely	Total
Yes	Count (number of respondents)	2	3	0	5
	Have you personally ever been involved in providing business information sources and services to small-scale business traders in your library?	40.0%	60.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% of total	10.0%	15.0%	0.0%	25.0%
No	Count (number of respondents)	0	0	15	15
	Have you personally ever been involved in providing business information sources and services to small-scale business traders in your library?	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Approximately how much time do you spend offering services to small-scale business traders?	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	75.0%
	% of total	0.0%	0.0%	75.0%	75.0%
	Count (number of respondents)	2	3	15	20
	Have you personally ever been involved in offering business information sources and services to small-scale business traders in your library?	10.0%	15.0%	75.0%	100.0%
	% of total	10.0%	15.0%	75.0%	100.0%

obtaining business information and second to the problems encountered by public library staff when offering business information services to the SBEs. Two multiple regression analyses were hence carried out. The enter method was used to regress all the suggested measures (independent variables) separately on each challenge encountered by SBEs and staff (dependent variables). The information from the regression model summaries and ANOVA tables in each case were extracted and the overall average scores were computed and summarized in Table 9.

The result in Table 9 shows that suggested measures had a statistically significant effect on the difficulties encountered by both SBEs and public library staff. This is because each of the 15 difficulties had a p value less than the alpha value of 0.05. The Durbin–Watson value was higher than 1 in each case, which showed that no autocorrelation was detected. The R squared value in each case was also high, 2.1% and 91.7% for SBEs and public library staff, respectively.

The results show that the suggested measures would go a long way in providing solutions to the difficulties encountered by SBEs when seeking business information and also to those encountered by public library staff when providing business information services. This further led to the identification and inclusion of two more constructs in the development of the proposed model due to the serendipity aspects of the constructs. These constructs are: “partnership, collaboration, and alliances,” and “monitoring and evaluation.” Undisputedly, the effective provision of business information sources and services requires concerted efforts of various stakeholders. Moreover, interviews with the staff in charge of the three public libraries in

Table 8. Measures needed at public/community libraries in order to satisfy the information needs of SBEs in Meru County (SBEs, $N = 296$; staff, $N = 20$).

Suggested measures	Responses from SBEs ($N = 296$)			Responses from public library staff ($N = 20$)		
	Significant n (%)	Moderately significant n (%)	Not significant n (%)	Major n (%)	Not major (Minor n (%)	Not major at all n (%)
Business information sources						
1. Equip public library with current business information materials (both print and via internet)	213 (72.0)	67 (22.6)	16 (5.4)	19 (95.0)	1 (5.0)	0
2. Establishment of business corners where all information materials related to businesses are kept, and related information services are offered for free	206 (69.6)	71 (24)	19 (6.4)	19 (95.0)	1 (5.0)	0
Business information services						
3. The business librarians to coach, mentor and train business people on how to use internet sources for information on businesses	215 (72.6)	65 (22.0)	16 (5.4)	20 (100.0)	0	0
4. Library to conduct/coordinate/organize for periodic business training, workshops and seminars that are specific to particular types of business people	194 (65.5)	61 (20.6)	41 (13.9)	17 (85.0)	2 (10.0)	1 (5)
5. Public libraries to offer business consultancy, reference and referral services to the small-scale business community	186 (62.8)	85 (28.7)	25 (8.4)	17 (85.0)	3 (15.0)	0
6. Provide a dedicated librarian who has a business background to address information needs of the small-scale business community	169 (57.1)	92 (31.1)	35 (11.8)	19 (95.0)	0	1 (5.0)
7. Library to organize business competition events to promote business information services to small-scale business traders	161 (54.4)	96 (32.4)	39 (13.2)	15 (75.0)	5 (25.0)	0
Public library facilities and preparedness						
8. Provide computers/iPads/tablets that are connected to the internet for the business community to use at public/community libraries	192 (64.9)	69 (23.3)	35 (11.8)	17 (85.0)	2 (10.0)	1 (5.0)
9. Open more community libraries in local areas where the small-scale business community can access them with ease and without travelling long distances	186 (62.8)	69 (23.3)	41 (13.9)	14 (70.0)	6 (30.0)	0
10. Public libraries to allocate sufficient funding for supporting the provision of business information sources, services and programmes to the local small-scale business community	166 (56.1)	87 (29.4)	43 (14.5)	14 (70.0)	5 (25.0)	1 (5.0)

(Continued)

Table 8. (Continued).

Suggested measures	Responses from SBES (N = 296)			Responses from public library staff (N = 20)		
	Significant n (%)	Moderately significant n (%)	Not significant n (%)	Major n (%)	Not major (Minor n (%))	Not major at all n (%)
11. Library to set up a meeting room where business partners can meet to discuss business matters without being charged	159 (53.7)	86 (29.1)	51 (17.2)	16 (80.0)	1 (5.0)	3 (15.0)
12. Ensure interactive and updated public library's website with a page for local business people	155 (52.4)	98 (33.1)	43 (14.5)	16 (80.0)	4 (20.0)	0
Marketing of information sources and services						
13. Public libraries to carry out market research and provide market intelligence information services to small-scale business traders	175 (59.1)	79 (26.7)	42 (14.2)	17 (85.0)	3 (15.0)	0
Partnership, collaboration and alliances						
14. Public libraries to network and collaborate with research organizations, local university business schools and other stakeholders for dissemination of business research information and advisory services to the local business community	163 (55.1)	98 (33.1)	35 (11.8)	17 (85.0)	3 (15.0)	0
Monitoring and evaluation						
15. Public libraries to conduct annual assessment to evaluate the impacts of its business information sources and services on the business community.	159 (53.7)	91 (30.7)	46 (15.5)	12 (60.0)	5 (25.0)	3 (15.0)
Average scores	180 (60.8)	81 (27.3)	35 (11.9)	16 (80.0)	3 (15.0)	1 (5.0)

Table 9. Effects of the suggested measures on the difficulties encountered by SBES and public library staff in accessing and providing business information, respectively.

Regression summaries and ANOVA	Average scores	
	Difficulties encountered by SBES when seeking business information	Difficulties encountered by public library staff when seeking business information
R square	0.221	0.917
Sig. F change	0.000	0.842
Durbin-Watson	2.033	1.794
ANOVA	F	5.524
	Sig	0.000
		5.523
		0.020

Meru County revealed that there were no systems for tracking and monitoring the impacts of the existing business information sources and services in supporting SBES, hence the need to include monitoring and evaluation component in the proposed model.

Proposed model for the support offered by public libraries in the development of SBEs

The study was motivated by the need for a model that can be used by public libraries to support the development of SBEs in Meru County and similar geopolitical regions in Kenya. This idea was also supported by Bouthillier (2003). The findings of this study coupled with insights gleaned from the existing models on the provision of business information, a typical model for public library support for the development of SBEs was proposed. The model comprises of seven key components as described in all follows.

The public library

The public library stood out as a central component in this study because of its role in facilitating the availability, accessibility, and affordability of business information sources and services to the SBEs. This stance is moored on the argument of Pankl (2010) and Mutshewa (2009) who described the critical role of a public library in socioeconomic development and in the creation of social capital. To be effective in fulfilling this mandate, the existing structures, systems, resources, services, staffing, and the library building itself were termed critical in the value-addition process (Wilson 2013). We also took cognizance of the need to engage business services librarians (see Table 8), who would be dedicated to providing specialized and customised information services to the business community, an idea that was also supported by Urban Libraries Council (2007) and Pankl (2010).

Business information needs

With reference to Table 1, 2, 3, and 4, the proposed model transfigures factors that influence the development of the SBEs to outright information needs of SBEs. The 1999 Wilson's model of information-seeking behavior demonstrates how information need is precipitated by the context. Proper understanding of the context of business information needs is therefore critical to a public library (Wilson 1999). This can effectively be done through business profiling (Islam and Ahmed 2012) which reveals the contextual needs of SBEs, and assists in understanding the demographics and economic characteristics. However, information obtained from EDD showed that business profiling was rarely happening.

According to the results of the study and with reference to Bouthillier (2003) and Chiware (2008), the business information needs of SBEs are better understood when categorized according to the three major sets of factors, namely environmental factors, cultural factors, and personality characteristics.

Information needs based on environmental factors

The environmental factors are divided into internal and external factors which culminate into unique business information needs (See [Table 1](#)). The fulfilment of these particular information needs enables SBEs to handle, align, and configure the internal environmental factors and respond strategically to the pressure emanating from the external environment (Philip 2011).

Information needs based on cultural factors

The anthropological view of the sociological theory of entrepreneurship underpins cultural setting and practices in influencing a person's entrepreneurial behavior. The deeper facets of a culture determine one's attitudes, perspectives, and orientation to the outside world as reflected in one's economic activities, education, social life, ethnicity, and in politics (Simpheh 2011). SBEs, therefore, require information sources and services that would help them to understand the implications of the various facets of culture on their businesses and how to mitigate them. This has direct implications on collection development at public libraries.

Information needs based on psychological factors

The psychological theory of entrepreneurship links successes in businesses to one's personality traits and characteristics (Coy Shipley, Omer, and Khan 2007). Therefore, the social practices that emphasise standards of excellence and self-denial are precursors to the development of the necessary personality traits for effective pursuance of businesses. Information materials that help to reinforce confidence, build self-esteem, nurture internal locus of control, and foster entrepreneurial motivation in SBEs are, therefore, needed in public libraries.

Business information sources

The analyzed information indicated that business information sources were critical in meeting the information needs of SBEs. The same was noted by Pankl (2010). As noted in [Table 8](#), public libraries, as the main community information centers, should ensure the availability, accessibility, and affordability of business information sources to the SBEs (Underwood 2009).

Business information services

Business information services are central in the design of this model. They help to dispel library users' doubts, build confidence, and assert value and authority of knowledge as demonstrated in [Table 5](#). SBEs, therefore, expect all-inclusive and exemplary business information services in public libraries.

Partnerships, collaborations, alliances, linkages, and cooperation

The effectiveness of the previous models such as SUCCESS, BLBIS, and SIBL in providing information services to SBEs was linked to the strong collaborations and partnerships with stakeholders. The same is demonstrated in [Table 8](#). Most public libraries studied by the Urban Libraries Council (2007) were partnering with local business schools, commercial business information centres, bookshops, banks, research organizations, other libraries, national and regional government, non-governmental organizations, local chambers of commerce, local employment agencies, and private and public business holdings in implementing library strategy.

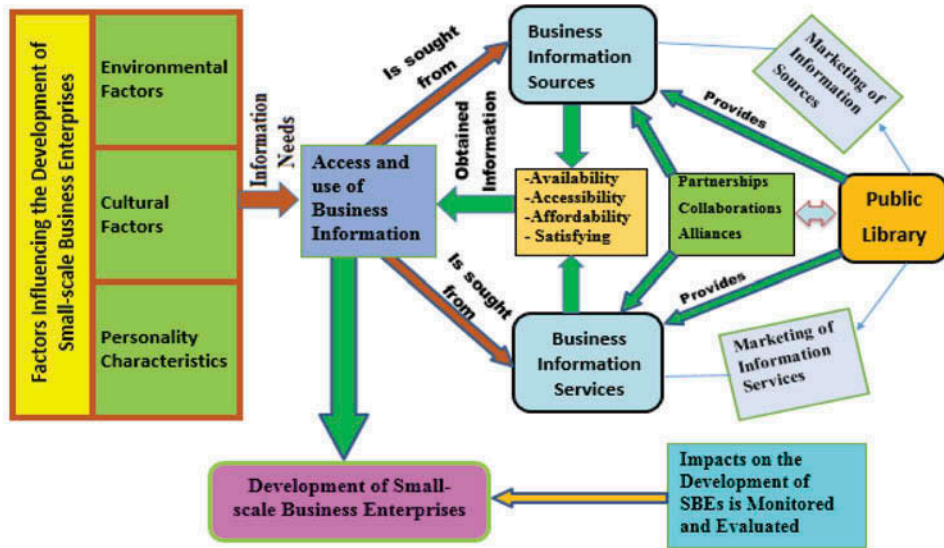
Marketing of business information sources and services by public libraries

One of the key measures proposed to public libraries by both SBEs and staff ([Table 8](#)) is the need to market and promote the business information sources and services. The same was exhibited in all the previous models (GBIC, SCOTBIS, SUCCESS, BLBIS, and SIBL), and by Pankl (2010) and Wilson (2013) in the provision of business information sources and services.

Monitoring and evaluation of business information delivery system

The performance of the entire system of delivering support for the development of SBEs needs to be monitored and evaluated for effectiveness in achieving the intended purpose. Most respondents in this survey supported this proposition. The field visits and progress reports from business services librarians and from staff of the EDD of the county government, business collection utilization reports, satisfaction surveys, and patrons' feedback are ideal in providing monitoring and evaluation information. The outcome can be used to improve the initiatives and foster higher value contribution of public libraries on small business development.

With reference to the foregoing discussion, a schematic topography of the proposed model was developed as presented in [Figure 1](#), followed by a brief description of the relationships between the components.



Key to the model







-  Shows the flow of business information need and the transmission of the same
-  Connects the monitoring and evaluation components to the development of SBEs
-  Shows the intervention measures by a public library and the flow of business information obtained
-  Connects a public library to the marketing and promotion of its information sources and services
-  Shows the linkages between the marketing effort of a public library and information sources and services
-  Shows the inter-linkages and collaboration of a public library with other stakeholders

Figure 1. Proposed model for support by public libraries in the development of SBEs.

Description of the proposed model

The proposed model shows that the development of SBEs is largely influenced by three sets of factors (environmental, cultural and personality). These factors reflect the information needs of SBEs which are fulfilled by seeking business information sources and consulting business information services. The public library as a community information center is well positioned to stock and provide access to a variety business information sources and services. SBEs may not be aware of these initiatives due to the existing perception on the traditional role of a public library. Public libraries should, therefore, market their business information sources and services by communicating their value to the business community.

In order to be effective in this endeavor, public libraries cannot be self-reliant, hence the need to seek partnerships and alliances with other

stakeholders. This helps in making business information available, accessible, and affordable to SBEs. Once accessed, the information obtained by SBEs is mapped and compared with the original business information needs, and if it is satisfying, it is utilized leading to growth and development of SBEs. It, therefore, follows that the processes, systems, and mechanisms of providing the business information should be monitored and evaluated for effectiveness in achieving the intended purpose and value.

Relevance, application, and implication of the proposed model

The proposed model demonstrates how public libraries can contribute effectively to the development of SBEs through the provision of business information. It provides mechanisms and systematic guidance to public libraries as they execute their mandate in fostering community development. The model can be applied in geo-political nations with similar socio-economic conditions. However, the ultimate development of SBEs may not depend entirely on the seven components that have been proposed in this model. This is because, the business environment is volatile, and this volatility may inhibit the development of SBEs. The proposed model implies the need for a departure from the current practices; it calls for appropriate policies and concerted efforts of county and national government; and public libraries in supporting the development of SBEs.

Conclusions and recommendations

A model for public library support in the development of SBEs in Meru County, Kenya, has been proposed. The study successfully validated the public library as a development partner in the local economy and provided a localized model that helps in the execution of this mandate. We recommend full implementation of the proposed model because of its significance in supporting the growth and development of small enterprises. The process of implementing the proposed model, however, requires sufficient funding, policies, systems, and structures that aim at repositioning public libraries as business community development centres.

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