

Chapter 9

A Comparison of the Information Needs and Information Seeking Behavior of Entrepreneurs in Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Developing and Developed Countries: A Review of the Literature

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ABSTRACT

“Entrepreneurial spirit has been described as the most important economic development stimulus in recent decades” (Chalhoub, 2011, p. 67). In the early 1990s it was estimated that small to medium sized enterprises SMEs employed 22% of the adult population in developing countries and the role of SMEs is viewed as increasingly important in developing countries because of their capacity to create jobs (Okello-Obura, Minishi-Majanja, Cleote, & Ikoja-Odongo, 2007, p. 369). According to Lingelback, de la Viña and Asel (2005), even though entrepreneurship has been linked to wealth and poverty in developing countries and has played an important role in growth and poverty alleviation, it is the least studied significant economic and social phenomenon in the world today. Examining how the information needs and information seeking behavior of entrepreneurs from developing countries may differ from entrepreneurs in developed countries is important as it has been suggested that “entrepreneurship in developing countries is distinctive from that practice in developed countries and that understanding these distinctions is critical to private sector development in developing countries” (Lingelback, de la

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Vina, & Asel, 2005, p. 2). A review of the studies produced thus serves as a beginning for designing information packages and information services that can benefit a global population. Consequently, this chapter targets the information needs and information seeking behavior of entrepreneurs revealed in studies associated with SMEs in both developed and developing countries and offers conclusions and recommendations for meeting the information needs of this population.

INTRODUCTION

The information needs and information seeking behavior of potential users should be the basis for the design of all high quality information services. Furthermore, it is important to tailor these services to what we know about information seeking behavior of the specific user groups to which they will be targeted. In today's global economy it is important to take a broader perspective of the information user. Most studies of information seeking behavior have been conducted in the English-speaking countries of the developed world and reflect Western culture (Leckie and Pettigrew, 1997; Allen, 1997; Wilson, 1996; Ellis, 1989, Kuhlthau,). LIS specialists cannot be content to design services that only target users from the developed world. Services that appeal to the broader needs of information users in the global economy are essential. In the past few years, some studies have become available that were conducted examining user groups in developing countries. These studies reveal information that allows the LIS community to begin comparing user information needs in both developed and developing countries, thus providing a basis for the design of information services that will appeal to users globally. For example, in a review of the research on information needs and information seeking behavior in developing countries, Dutta (2009) discovered that a study by de Tiratel (2000) concluded that the information-seeking behaviors of university researchers are similar regardless of location or the availability of resources even though developed countries have more advanced information systems and services (p. 46). Furthermore, Dutta's examination of research conducted

in Uganda and Ghana concluded that the "information behavior of scholars and educated urbanites is similar to the behavior of information users in developed countries" (p. 46).

This chapter targets the information needs and information seeking behavior of entrepreneurs revealed in studies associated with small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in both developed and developing countries. Important to developing countries, of course, is economic development, which involves change and "the entrepreneur becomes the best agent for this change" (Acs & Virgill, 2010, p. 488). Furthermore, regional differences in economic growth have been found by various studies to be linked to levels of entrepreneurship (Acs & Virgill, 2010, p. 489). In 1984, however, Carland, Hoy, Boulton, and Carland stated that there is a distinct difference between SMEs and entrepreneurship and that the concepts are not the same but Thurik & Wennekers (2004) stated that both are important to an economy and that the small business sector is populated by both entrepreneurs introducing new products and by people who own and operate a business for a living (p. 140). In a review of entrepreneurship in developing countries, Acs and Virgill (2010) state that knowledge and information affect entrepreneurship in developing countries by affecting the ability of entrepreneurs to discover what to produce and the technology and processes used in production (p. 500). Citing Mambula (2002) they emphasize that because the cost of this discovery is so high, entrepreneurs will not seek new production areas and markets but will lean toward well established markets. So, lack of information because of the costs attributed to searching likely lead to low levels of entrepreneurship according to

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