
Information Access and Uptake as a Strategic Resource for Sustainable Growth of Small-Scale Enterprises: A Resource-Based and Knowledge-Based Perspective

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Abstract

SMEs play an important role in economic development, but they have difficulty in achieving sustainable growth. This study takes a Resource-Based View and Knowledge-Based View perspective on information access and uptake as strategic resources for sustainable enterprise growth. While information for business is important in making decisions, its value hinges on the likelihood of its acquisition, assimilation and usage by enterprises. Accordingly, the study investigates how information accessibility, acquisition, assimilation, and application capabilities influence the sustainable growth performance of small-scale enterprises. The study adopted a systematic literature review, searching Scopus, Emerald Insight, EBSCO, and Google Scholar for studies published between 2021 and 2026 on information access and uptake and the sustainable growth of small-scale enterprises. From 1,034 articles identified, 17 were selected for final review, and their findings were systematically extracted and synthesized to examine four information capabilities, identify research gaps, and develop recommendations based on the Resource-Based View and Knowledge-Based View. The study revealed that information access, information acquisition, information assimilation and information application are important strategic capabilities that can be used to support small enterprises' sustainable growth. The study results showed that in relation to information, value is created when the enterprise can have access to, comprehend, combine and utilize the information in business activities. Therefore, it is important for small-scale businesses to enhance access to reliable business information, build up digital and information literacy skills, facilitate knowledge sharing, and integrate information into decision-making. The study also suggests that government agencies and business development organizations offer readily available information services, digital skills training and advisory support to help improve enterprise growth and sustainability.

Keywords: *Information Access, Uptake, Sustainable Growth, Information Accessibility, Acquisition, Assimilation, Application*

INTRODUCTION

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are widely celebrated as engines of job creation and economic transformation (Denanyoh & Owusu, 2025). But a worrisome trend of early failure undermines this assurance all over the globe. The statistics for the failure rates of small businesses are quite high; in the US, it is estimated that about 65% of small businesses fail within the first 10 years, and nearly 50% within the first five years, while the OECD estimates that

approximately 20% of small businesses close their doors within the first year of operation. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020; United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024) Similarly, Denanyoh and Owusu (2025) indicate that the failure rate is consistently greater in developing economies than in developed ones, suggesting that there is differential access to resources that underpin growth. Most small businesses either do not achieve continuous growth but rather plateau or fade away well before they are able to become stable generators of jobs and income (Mafabi & Kyakuwaire, 2025). The prominent lack of developmental potential and survival outcomes for SMEs suggests a pressing question: What is the difference between the small number of sustainably developed SMEs and the vast majority of SMEs that aren't? There is a common theme that arises from the various studies: entrepreneurs' access to and use of relevant business information (Orrensal et al., 2024; Akadile et al., 2026).

In today's knowledge-driven economy, information functions as a strategic resource in its own right, not merely a byproduct of other business activities. The Resource Based View (RBV) suggests that a resource becomes a source of competitive advantage when it is helpful, scarce, hard to imitate, and properly used (Barney, 1991), while the Knowledge Based View (KBV) argues that a firm's ability to obtain, comprehend and apply knowledge is the source of sustained performance (Grant, 1996). If business information is viewed as valuable only when it is accessed, assimilated, and converted into a decision about pricing, markets, financing or production, then it is not valuable at all (Schiller, 2024). Several recent studies present information access and uptake as a renewable resource to foster enterprise resilience, as it reduces transaction costs, increases market reach, and unlocks opportunities for finance and technology (OECD, 2024; Costa & Castro, 2021). Yet access alone rarely guarantees these gains; its contribution to sustainable growth depends on whether entrepreneurs possess the capability to convert information into usable business knowledge.

Evidence from developed economies shows that even where digital infrastructure is mature, access to business information is uneven and its uptake lags further behind (OECD, 2021). The OECD's 2024 D4SME survey found that although digital practice adoption among OECD SMEs keeps rising, uptake of government digitalisation support programmes remains low, with awareness itself a binding constraint (OECD, 2024). A companion OECD report on SME finance found SMEs' limited demand for sustainable finance is driven largely by a lack of information and awareness rather than unavailability of the finance itself (OECD, Financing SMEs and Entrepreneurs, 2024). In the United States (US), the Office of Advocacy's listening sessions with small businesses identified information and transaction costs, not technology scarcity, as the principal barrier to digital and market access (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2023). The European Commission's SME Performance Review similarly documents persistent disparities in how EU SMEs of different sizes and regions access support information (European Commission, 2025). Together, these reports suggest that in developed contexts, information equity is less about availability than about awareness, usability, and the capability to act on what is accessible. Weaker infrastructure and institutions exacerbate information inequity in developing economies. It states that enterprises and entrepreneurs in Africa, in general, are deprived of information on global and regional markets, suppliers and distribution links, which restricts their competitiveness in the region and internationally (African Union, 2024). According to a national market sizing study in Ghana, about 70% of GDP is contributed by SMEs, and lack of access to information and communication technology (ICT) is one of the major constraints to accessing global markets (ISSER, 2023; Mohammed & Bunyaminu, 2023). Using a Resource-Based View

perspective, Osakwe et al. (2022) demonstrate that IS resources have a strong impact on competitive advantage in business contexts in Africa, but are also poorly developed in small businesses. Mwaniki et al. (2022) have revealed that business development services where information gets to entrepreneurs accounted for 23% of the variance in SME growth for Kenyan entrepreneurs. A comparative assessment of the impacts of information-rich platforms in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa also reveals a high level of variation across countries in terms of the benefits realised from the use of information-rich platforms that depend on the local digital infrastructure, digital literacy and regulatory environment (Oukouomi, 2025).

Taken together, this literature exposes three recurring gaps. Most studies consider information as a background or control variable and don't look into its own direct contribution to the growth of SMEs. Second, in direct examination of information, there is a strong consensus in the research that access, infrastructure, connectivity, and awareness are measured in research, but uptake, the process of assimilating and applying the information, is not well measured. A recent study in Sub Saharan Africa explicitly mentions the importance of information and the fact that it can be explained by the Resource Based View, but cannot explain how it translates into sustained outcomes (Denanyoh & Owusu, 2025). Third, the lack of geographic scope is an omission in and of itself: synthesis studies recognize that research on failures and growth in developing economies is still underdeveloped and less theoretically sophisticated than in OECD economies, raising the question of the extent to which results from OECD economies can be applied to resource-constrained economies in Africa. The gaps warrant an integrated and theory-informed study of access and uptake as two determinants of SME sustainability growth.

Problem Statement

Small-scale enterprises (SSEs) play a critical role in economic development through employment creation, income generation, and innovation (Denanyoh & Owusu, 2025). Despite their importance, many face significant survival challenges. In Kenya, 46.3% of businesses that closed had ceased operations within their first year, according to the 2016 National Micro, Small and Medium Establishments Survey (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2017). The same feature is present in developed economies, where around half of the companies that have fewer than 10 employees fail to survive for five years (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2025). These are just enough stats to show the difficulties of running an enterprise and growing it. Another question that needs to be explored is whether the availability of and uptake of appropriate business information by entrepreneurs can aid their informed decision-making, identification of opportunities and long-term growth of the enterprise.

The Resource Based View (RBV) and Knowledge Based View (KBV) are views which highlight the strategic significance of resources and knowledge in gaining competitive advantage. But the importance of business information is not only limited to its availability in the business, but also to the ability of the entrepreneurs to acquire, assimilate and use the information in their activities. Even with efforts to increase access to business information and programmes of support, some entrepreneurs might not be aware of what's available to them or might not have the skills necessary to turn information into action. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2024), for example, identifies awareness and capability barriers that may hinder the adoption of existing support and digitalisation opportunities by SMEs. It is a real-life issue that, when entrepreneurs lack the skills needed to turn business information into knowledge and better business practices, the value of the information may not be realized.

Existing empirical studies on small-scale enterprise performance have predominantly examined factors such as access to finance, entrepreneurial orientation, managerial skills, and technology

adoption, while the independent contribution of information-related capabilities to sustainable growth remains insufficiently established (Mohammed & Bunyaminu, 2023; Mwaniki et al., 2022). Moreover, studies examining information-related factors have often emphasized access, availability, or the channels through which information is obtained, giving less attention to the processes through which entrepreneurs acquire, interpret, integrate, and apply information. Consequently, limited empirical evidence explains how information accessibility, information acquisition capability, information assimilation capability, and information application capability jointly contribute to the sustainable growth of Small Scale Enterprises (SSEs). This leaves an important gap in understanding whether access to information alone is sufficient or whether entrepreneurs' ability to transform information into actionable knowledge is essential for sustained enterprise growth. Addressing this gap can extend the application of the RBV and KBV to information-related capabilities while informing policies and interventions that help SSEs convert relevant business information into lasting growth outcomes.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study will be to examine the influence of information access and uptake on the sustainable growth of small-scale enterprises from a resource-based and knowledge-based perspective. The specific objectives will be;

- i. To examine the extent to which access to information influences the sustainable growth of small-scale enterprises.
- ii. To assess the effect of information acquisition capability on the sustainable growth of small-scale enterprises
- iii. To evaluate the influence of information assimilation capability on the sustainable growth of small-scale enterprises
- iv. To determine the effect of information application (utilization) capability on the sustainable growth of small-scale enterprises

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The Resource-Based View (RBV) and Knowledge-Based View (KBV) theories are used as the theoretical basis for this study, which explains how strategic resources and knowledge capabilities are utilized in order to achieve enterprise competitiveness and sustainable growth. The following views lay the groundwork for a consideration of the role of the accessibility, acquisition, assimilation and use of information in the sustainable development of small-scale enterprises.

Resource-Based View

The Resource-Based View (RBV) was developed by Wernerfelt (1984) and further elaborated by Barney (1991) to offer an explanation of how resources within a firm can lead to competitive advantage and sustained growth. The theory suggests that a company can gain a competitive advantage by obtaining and using valuable, scarce, incompletely imitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources. Barney (1991) suggests that resources which satisfy these criteria allow firms to formulate strategies that competitors are unable to easily duplicate. The theory takes the view that firms have a heterogeneous distribution of resources—that some firms have more resources than other firms—and that resources are not perfectly mobile between firms, such that resource differences can persist over time (Asa et al., 2025). Thus, the enterprises that successfully discover, cultivate, and utilize strategic resources can be more competitive to gain better performance and maintain their competitive advantage (Kim & Roh, 2024). RBV, therefore,

highlights the significance of internal resources in the context of organizational performance and long-term growth in accounting for performance gaps.

The RBV relates to this study by conceptualizing information accessibility as a strategic resource that can support the sustainable growth of small-scale enterprises. Information on business startups, marketing, financial and regulatory information helps to identify market opportunities, optimally allocate resources, adapt to environmental changes and make informed business decisions (Asa et al., 2025). From the RBV point of view, there are differences in the type of information that enterprises can access (relevant, timely and useful), which leads to differences in the growth prospects and competitiveness of enterprises. Information can be broadly disseminated but enterprises can gain strategic value from having specialized information and being able to integrate it into their enterprise activities. As a result, small businesses that gain access to and utilize information could benefit in making more money, growing their market, and increasing their long-term sustainability. This theory thus allows an analysis of how the accessibility of information can play a role in sustainable enterprise growth, using informational resources in a strategic manner.

Knowledge-Based View

The Knowledge-Based View (KBV) emerged as an extension of the Resource-Based View and was developed extensively by Grant (1996), who emphasized knowledge as a critical strategic resource for firms. The theory suggests that organizational success is achieved through the acquisition, integration, coordination, and exploitation of specialized knowledge to generate value and give a competitive edge. Knowledge integration is key to effective organisational performance because, according to Grant (1996), knowledge is shared between people in an organisation. The theory posits that knowledge is a valuable resource; people have special knowledge and firms are established to coordinate and integrate the special knowledge in productive activities (Duarte Alonso et al., 2022). It also assumes that firms vary in their ability to acquire, share, interpret and apply knowledge, and thus their ability to perform and compete. As such, knowledge management in firms can help them to adapt, innovate and maintain their competitive advantage.

The KBV has a direct relation to this study because it addresses how the skills of information acquisition, assimilation and application are contributing factors for the sustainable growth of small enterprises. Information acquisition allows entrepreneurs to get knowledge related to the business through networks, market research, customers, suppliers and other sources (Doktoralina et al., 2025). Information assimilation is the process of interpreting, understanding, sharing and incorporating information that has been learned into business knowledge. The application of this knowledge for strategic decision-making, operational management, innovation and business development is called information application. For enterprises, the advantage isn't only to have access to information, but also to build the skills and tools to turn it into actionable knowledge (Duarte Alonso et al., 2022). These abilities can aid business owners recognize brand-new opportunities, boost operational performance, adjust to market shifts, and create new products or services. Thus, small businesses with effective access to and utilization of information can enhance their competitiveness, performance and growth in the long term.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies conducted across different geographical contexts have examined the relationship between information accessibility, information use, and enterprise outcomes, providing insights into how business information contributes to innovation, performance, and sustainable growth. Kong et al. (2022) investigated whether access to external information

influences corporate innovation, particularly among firms that rely on foreign knowledge. The researchers exploited the sudden withdrawal of Google's search services from China as an external shock to information accessibility to examine its effects on firms' innovation activities. The findings revealed that restricted access to foreign information persistently reduced the intensity and quality of innovation among firms that relied on foreign knowledge. Affected firms also cited fewer foreign patents, while their innovation efficiency declined. These negative effects were more pronounced in industries dominated by foreign technology, regions with local web filters, and firms with fewer alternative sources of foreign information. The findings demonstrate the strategic importance of information accessibility in supporting innovation. However, the study focused on corporate innovation rather than the sustainable growth of small-scale enterprises.

In South Africa, Msomi et al. (2022) examined the relationship between access to business information, access to finance, firm competition, and SME performance. The researchers adopted a quantitative approach informed by the positivist paradigm and used purposive sampling to select 140 SME owners or suitable representatives. The findings indicated a positive correlation between access to information and SME performance. Access to finance was also positively correlated with performance, whereas firm competition had a negative correlation. The authors recommended improving access to finance and strengthening entrepreneurs' management capabilities and access to relevant business information. Although the study establishes the relevance of information accessibility to enterprise performance, it does not explain how entrepreneurs acquire, assimilate, and apply information to achieve sustainable growth.

Similarly, Lambert and Deyganto (2023) investigated factors associated with the sustainable development of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), including access to finance, infrastructure, institutional coordination, access to business information, government support, and information technology utilization. The researchers used quantitative correlational design and obtained the data of the questionnaire from the respondents of MSME which is 340 respondents. The results showed that business information and MSME sustainable development were significantly and positively correlated. This study is particularly relevant because it connects business information access with a sustainability-related outcome. However, it looked at information access and at other aspects of the problem without differentiating the information access capability needed by the entrepreneur to access, interpret, integrate and apply information. The results, therefore, provide opportunities for further research on the role of specific information related capabilities in sustaining enterprise growth.

In Zambia, Mulenga (2023) examined the influence of business information on SME performance in Lusaka's Central Business District. The study sought to identify valuable sources of business information, establish the challenges SMEs encounter when accessing information, and assess the relationship between business information and enterprise performance. The researcher used a cross-sectional design with mixed-methods research with mainly qualitative approach. The results showed that respondents had a positive attitude towards the usefulness of business information. Advantages reported included the discovery of business opportunities, better operational efficiency, better marketing efforts, financial resource management, market knowledge, and customer service. These results highlight the real-life applications of information in decision-making and business operation. The study, however, was limited to the perceived performance benefits in one urban context and was not able to test whether the information use fosters long-term growth.

In Nigeria, Ogunsola and Babalola (2020) investigated the relationship between business information use, customer satisfaction, and the performance of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises. The researchers adopted a survey design, collecting quantitative data from 120 MSMEs through questionnaires and qualitative data through interviews with 15 key informants. The results showed that there were positive relationships between business information use with customer satisfaction and between information use with enterprise performance, which were found to be statistically significant. Some business owners and managers were aware of the importance of business information but were not using it effectively enough. The study also uncovered barriers of information accessibility, time taken to search for information, timeliness, fragmentation across sources, and skills needed to find relevant information. The results reveal that the usefulness of the information is not only dependent on its availability but also on the ability of the entrepreneurs to find and effectively utilize the information. The study did not, however, investigate information assimilation as a capability and sustainable growth as an outcome in isolation.

In Kenya, Ngetich and Kithae (2020) studied the influencing factors of SME performance which included access to business information, access to finance and managerial skills. The researchers used descriptive, desk research design in which they examined the literature and documentary sources, rather than primary data from enterprise owners. The review confirmed that business information access and managerial abilities had a positive impact on SME performance. It also identified that information was not easily available for many SMEs and that information available to them may not be relevant or timely enough to reflect on the evolving situation of their businesses. The authors thus highlighted the need to offer entrepreneurs relevant and updated business and market information. While this study has a Kenyan angle on information accessibility, the use of secondary sources of information may not allow it to establish empirical connections between the variables studied. Furthermore, it does not differentiate between the accessibility of information and the capability of acquisition, assimilation and application skills and its joint impact on sustainable growth.

The reviewed studies indicate that information accessibility and use are relevant to innovation, customer satisfaction, enterprise performance, and sustainable development. However, the evidence remains fragmented across different information-related factors and enterprise outcomes. While some studies emphasize access to information, others examine information use or its contribution to specific business activities. Furthermore, most studies focus on overall enterprise performance or innovation rather than the sustainable growth of small-scale enterprises. Consequently, an empirical gap remains regarding the combined influence of information accessibility, information acquisition capability, information assimilation capability, and information application capability on the sustainable growth of small-scale enterprises. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining these four dimensions within an integrated framework.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the hypothesized relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The independent variables were the components of information access and uptake, which included information accessibility, information acquisition capability, information assimilation capability and information (utilization) capability. The dependent variable was sustainable growth of SMEs.

Independent Variables

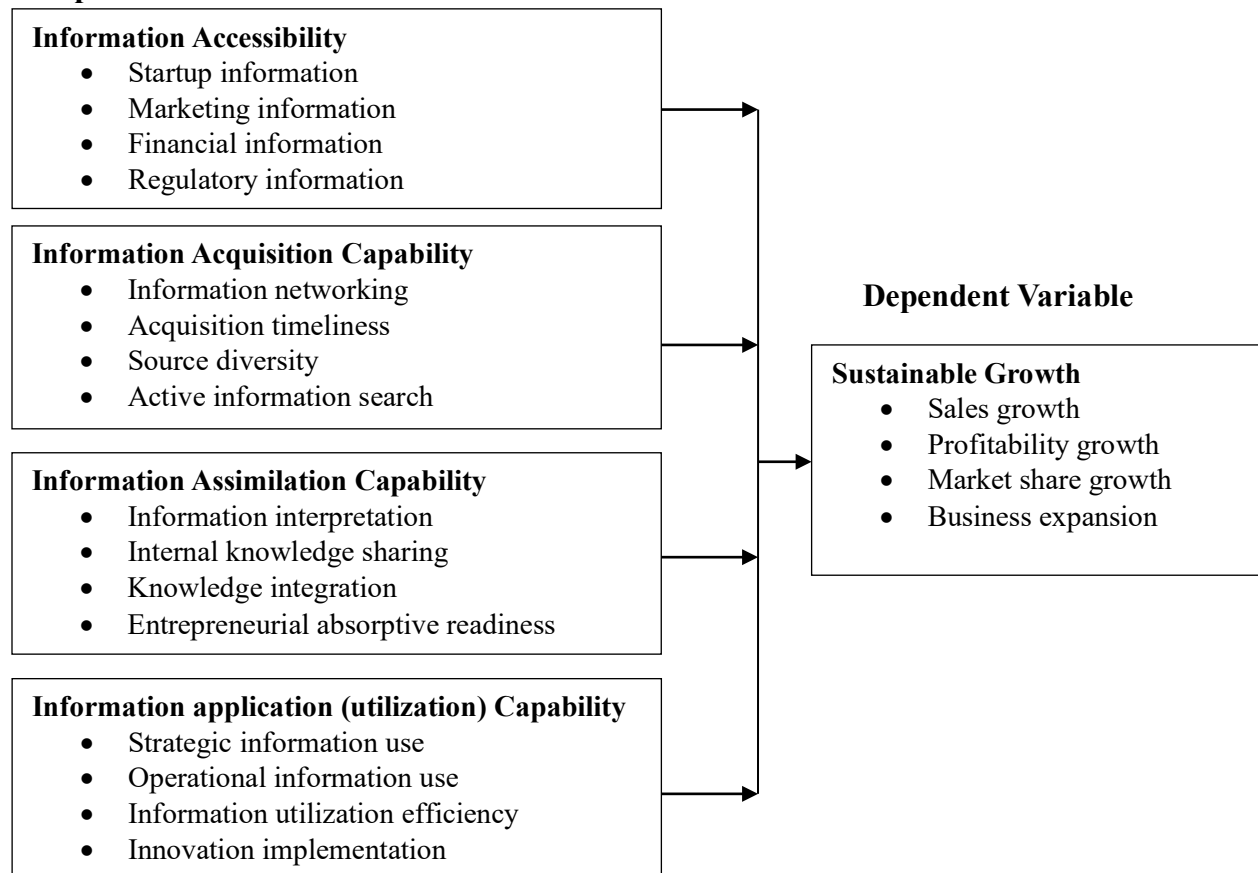


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a systematic literature review to examine how information access and uptake contribute to the sustainable growth of small-scale enterprises. The systematic literature review was carried out in 7 major steps, as described by Page et al. (2021). The first step was to state the research objective and to review the research questions. The second step was to identify inclusion/exclusion criteria. The reviewed studies were those published in the period 2021–2026 and related to any of the following aspects: information access and uptake, information-related capabilities, growth of SMEs, and enterprise sustainability. Studies were chosen due to their relevance to the research problem, their contribution to the study variables and availability of relevant empirical or theoretical evidence.

The third step involved conducting a comprehensive literature search using Scopus, Emerald Insight, EBSCO, and Google Scholar. Keywords included “*information accessibility*,” “*information acquisition capability*,” “*information assimilation capability*,” “*information application*,” “*knowledge-based resources*,” “*resource-based view*,” “*small-scale enterprises*,” “*SME growth*,” and “*sustainable growth*.” Boolean operators such as AND and OR were used to combine search terms and refine the results. Search combinations included “information access AND SME growth,” “information capabilities AND small-scale enterprises,” and “information utilization AND sustainable growth.” The fourth step involved screening the identified articles

by examining their titles, abstracts, and full texts against the established eligibility criteria. Duplicate articles and studies that did not adequately address the research objectives were excluded. The search identified 1,034 articles, of which 201 remained after initial screening, 55 after further assessment, and 17 were selected for the final review. The selection process is presented in Figure 2.

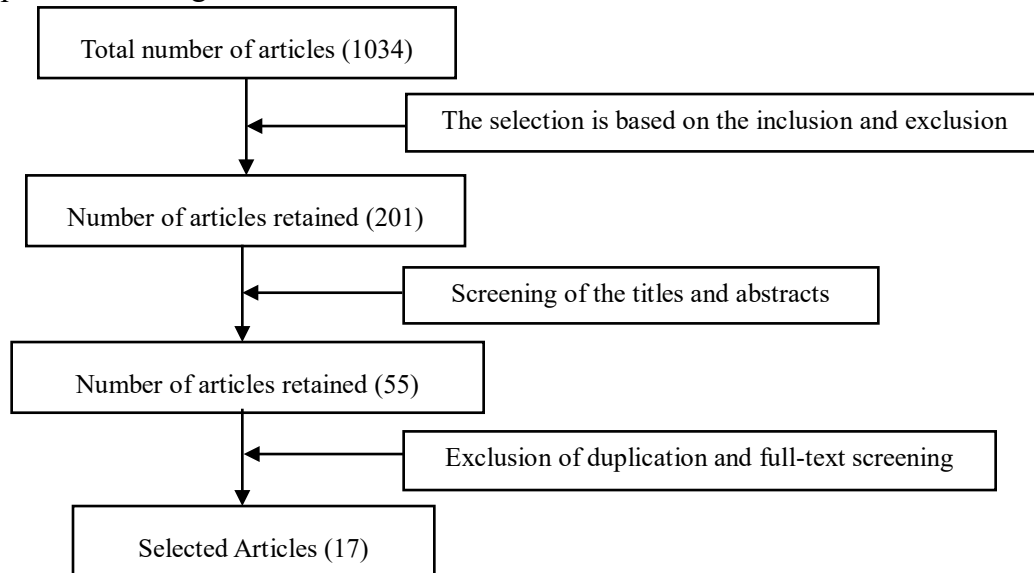


Figure 2: Article Selection Process

The fifth step involved extracting data from the 17 selected articles using a structured framework covering authors, publication year, objectives, theoretical foundations, research designs, geographical contexts, variables, measurement indicators, analytical techniques, findings, and research gaps. Particular attention was given to the conceptualization and measurement of information accessibility, acquisition, assimilation, application, and sustainable enterprise growth. The sixth step involved synthesizing the evidence to identify recurring themes, similarities, differences, and inconsistencies across the studies (Paul et al., 2021). The findings were organized according to the four independent variables and sustainable growth, considering the resource-based and knowledge-based perspectives. The seventh step involved interpreting the findings, evaluating the strengths and limitations of the reviewed studies, identifying theoretical, empirical, contextual, and methodological gaps, and developing recommendations for future research and practice on leveraging information to promote sustainable growth among small-scale enterprises.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Information Accessibility and Sustainable Growth of Small-Scale Enterprises

The objective was to examine the extent to which access to information influences the sustainable growth performance of small-scale enterprises. Five studies were reviewed to establish the relationship between information accessibility and enterprise-level outcomes across different geographical contexts. Kong et al. (2022), in China, examined the effect of information accessibility on corporate innovation. Using the withdrawal of Google services from China as an external shock, the study found that restricted access to foreign information reduced innovation among firms that relied on foreign knowledge. Although the study did not directly examine small-scale enterprises or sustainable growth, it demonstrates the strategic importance of information accessibility in supporting innovation. Msomi et al. (2022) studied the relationship

between business information access, access to finance, competition and SME performance in South Africa. The study found a positive link between information access and enterprise performance suggesting that enterprise performance could be positively impacted by access to relevant business information.

Similarly, Bunyasi et al. (2014) explored the impact of business information access on the growth of SMEs in Kenya and found that access to information was significant to enterprise growth in Kenya. The study is relevant since it offers evidence from the business environment in Kenya. Mulenga (2023) explored the impact of business information on the performance of SMEs in Lusaka, Zambia. The study emphasized that business information plays a significant role in the identification of opportunities, operating efficiency, marketing and finance management. However, being confined to enterprises in a single urban area restricts the applicability of its results to other settings. Lambert et al. (2023) also investigated besides other factors related with the sustainable development of the MSMEs business information access. The findings of this study showed that there was a positive correlation between access to information and sustainable development. However, the study is a preprint and its publication status and methodological aspects should be checked before it is accepted as a valid peer-reviewed study.

The studies reviewed generally indicate that enterprise outcomes such as growth, performance and innovation are related to access to relevant business information. The findings cannot be compared directly, however, because the various studies have different geographic contexts, research designs, enterprise populations, and outcome measures. In addition, the general firm performance, the innovation, the business growth and the sustainable growth are related but not identical. Only a minority of the reviewed studies clearly indicate whether the benefits from information accessibility are lasting. While the study by Bunyasi et al. (2014) is evidence from Kenya, it is a relatively old study, with most other studies emanating from outside of Kenya. However, there is still a gap in the literature that seeks to understand how far information access affects sustainable growth of small-scale businesses in Kenya, on a contextual and empirical basis. It is crucial to fill the information gap and determine whether timely, relevant, and reliable business information promotes continued enterprise performance and viability.

Information Acquisition Capability and Sustainable Growth of Small-Scale Enterprises

The objective was to assess the effect of information acquisition capability on the sustainable growth performance of small-scale enterprises. In order to determine this relationship, four studies were examined in the context of the various geographical environments. In Kenya Gatuyu and Kinyua (2020) studied small and medium businesses in Meru County on their knowledge acquisition strategies. The study found that there was a strong positive correlation between knowledge acquisition and their performance of SMEs ($R = .781$) after conducting descriptive survey in the sample size of 150 SMEs from a target population of 500 SMEs. This finding indicates that organizations that are proactive in learning or acquiring knowledge of relevance are more likely to benefit from better outcomes of their businesses. However, the focus of the study was on overall firm performance instead of sustainable growth in the long run. Similarly, Agustí et al. (2022) studied in Spain, the position of the international knowledge acquisition and absorptive capacity of 200 SME exporters, and concluded that the acquisition of international knowledge is important in order to improve the international business performance. Furthermore, Francis and Chakravarty (2025), in the United States, studied absorptive capacity of SMEs getting external business consultancy services. The study used survey information from 99 firms and structural equation modelling to reveal links between knowledge acquisition and the following phases of knowledge assimilation, transformation and exploitation. Business

application of acquired knowledge (knowledge exploitation) was related to better firm performance. The results suggest that knowledge acquisition is a crucial step in a more complex knowledge process that can influence the business. In Malaysia, Al Koliby et al. (2022) studied the knowledge acquisition, knowledge dissemination and sustainable performance of 428 manufacturing SMEs. The study revealed that knowledge acquisition had a significant impact on sustainable SME performance and was mediated by the knowledge application. This is a study that gives especially relevant evidence as it connects knowledge acquisition with a sustainability outcome. However, the results may not be applicable to small businesses in other industries, as it is specifically geared toward manufacturing.

Overall, the reviewed studies suggest that information acquisition capability is associated with improved enterprise performance and may contribute to sustainable business outcomes. However, the studies differ in geographical context, research design, enterprise characteristics, and outcome measures, making direct comparisons difficult. Furthermore, knowledge acquisition and information acquisition capability are different and related concepts and general firm performance and sustainable performance are not synonymous with sustained performance over time. Although Al Koliby et al. (2022) directly examined sustainable performance, the other studies primarily focused on broader performance outcomes or international business performance. Consequently, an empirical gap remains concerning the extent to which the ability of small-scale enterprises to identify, obtain, and access relevant information influences their sustainable growth performance. Addressing this gap is important for establishing whether information acquisition capability contributes to sustained improvements in enterprise performance, continued business expansion, and long-term viability.

Information Assimilation Capability and Sustainable Growth of Small-Scale Enterprises

The objective was to evaluate the influence of information assimilation capability on the sustainable growth of small-scale enterprises. Four studies were reviewed to establish how enterprises interpret, understand, and integrate acquired information into their existing knowledge to support business outcomes. Shodeinde et al. (2023), in Nigeria, examined knowledge acquisition, assimilation, transformation, and exploitation as dimensions of absorptive capacity and their relationship with SME economic sustainability. Using cross-sectional questionnaire data from 343 SME owners and managers in Plateau State and structural equation modelling, the study found that all four dimensions significantly influenced economic sustainability. These findings suggest that the ability to process and integrate acquired knowledge may contribute to enterprises' economic sustainability. However, the study examined absorptive capacity rather than information assimilation as a separate information-management capability, limiting the extent to which its findings can be directly attributed to information assimilation alone.

Similarly, Ha et al. (2021), in Malaysia, examined knowledge-management processes, including acquisition, conversion, application, and protection, among 159 SMEs. Using partial least squares structural equation modelling, the study found that knowledge conversion was positively related to firm performance. This finding highlights the importance of processing and integrating acquired knowledge rather than merely obtaining it. Francis and Chakravarty (2025), in the United States, examined the sequential relationships between acquisition, assimilation, transformation, and exploitation of knowledge among SMEs receiving external business consulting. The study found that knowledge acquisition influenced assimilation, which subsequently shaped transformation and exploitation. The findings indicate that enterprises need to grasp and incorporate acquired knowledge before it can be effectively used as a practical

application in the business. Absorptive capacity was also studied among 206 SME owners/managers in the Manzini region of Eswatini in 2025 (Warren). The study found that the performance of SMEs positively and significantly correlated with absorptive capacity, especially in the areas of knowledge transformation and application.

Overall, the reviewed studies suggest that information assimilation is an important organizational capability through which enterprises interpret acquired information, connect it with existing knowledge, and prepare it for practical application. Shodeinde et al. (2023) show that there is a relationship between knowledge assimilation and economic sustainability, and Ha et al. (2021) illustrate the relevance of knowledge conversion for the performance of firms. In addition, Francis and Chakravarty (2025) point out that the sequential nature of the acquisition-assimilation-transformation-exploitation process is important, while Warren (2025) stresses the holistic role that absorptive capacity plays in enterprise performance. Nevertheless, the studies differ in their conceptualizations, research contexts, and outcome measures. Knowledge conversion, transformation, and application are related to assimilation but are not interchangeable with it. Furthermore, most of the studies examine general performance or economic sustainability rather than sustained growth over time. Consequently, an empirical gap remains concerning the extent to which information assimilation capability independently influences the sustainable growth of small-scale enterprises. Addressing this gap can clarify the role of interpreting, evaluating, and integrating relevant information in supporting sustained enterprise development and long-term viability.

Information Application Capability and Sustainable Growth of Small-Scale Enterprises

The objective was to determine the effect of information application capability on the sustainable growth performance of small-scale enterprises. Four studies were reviewed to establish how enterprises use acquired information and knowledge to improve business operations and achieve performance outcomes. Ogunsola and Babalola (2020), in Nigeria, examined business information use, customer satisfaction, and micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) performance. Using a survey of 120 MSMEs and interviews with 15 key informants, the study found a significant positive relationship between information use and customer satisfaction. This finding suggests that applying business information can help enterprises respond to customer needs and improve business relationships. However, customer satisfaction is an intermediate business outcome and does not necessarily demonstrate sustainable growth in terms of continued profitability, expansion, or long-term viability.

Similarly, Ha et al. (2021), in Malaysia, examined knowledge application as part of knowledge-management processes among 159 SMEs. The study found that entrepreneurial orientation positively moderated the relationship between knowledge application and SME performance, suggesting that the benefits of applying knowledge may depend partly on an enterprise's strategic approach. Francis and Chakravarty (2025), in the United States, examined how SMEs receiving external consulting used the knowledge acquired through consulting interventions. The study found that knowledge exploitation, where the knowledge acquired was used in solving business problems, and the implementation of the solution based on the acquired knowledge, had a positive correlation with the performance of the business. The results emphasize that the benefit of information is not limited to acquisition and assimilation, but is also present in real-life situations like decision making, problem solving, and business functioning. Additionally, Al Koliby et al. (2024) analyzed the application of knowledge with sustainable performance in manufacturing SMEs in Malaysia, which involved 428 manufacturing SMEs. The results included that knowledge application had an indirect effect on sustainable performance via

innovation, with innovation acting as a mediator. This study is important in the context of knowledge application because it connects knowledge application to an outcome of sustainability, and shows a potential mechanism through which application can bring benefits to business. However, the findings might only apply to small enterprises in other sectors as it is focused on manufacturing-related SMEs.

Overall, the reviewed studies indicate that the information application capability can be a key driver of better enterprise outcomes, allowing businesses to convert knowledge and information gained into action, enhanced customer relationships, better decision-making, and innovation. However, the studies differ in geographical context, research design, enterprise characteristics, and outcome measures. Customer satisfaction and general firm performance are relevant to business success but do not necessarily establish sustained growth over time. Although AlKoliby et al. (2024) directly examined sustainable performance, the other studies primarily focused on customer satisfaction or broader firm performance. Moreover, knowledge application and information utilization are closely related concepts, but the extent to which findings on knowledge application explain the use of business information may vary. Consequently, an empirical gap remains concerning the effect of information application capability on the sustainable growth of small-scale enterprises. Addressing this gap is important for determining whether the effective use of relevant information in business decisions, operational processes, and innovation contributes to continued enterprise growth and long-term viability.

Conclusion

The study concludes that information access and uptake represent important strategic capabilities that can support the sustainable growth of small-scale enterprises from resource-based and knowledge-based perspectives. First, information accessibility enables enterprises to obtain timely, relevant, and reliable information necessary for identifying opportunities and responding to changes in the business environment. Based on this, information acquisition capability is the capability that allows enterprises to search and acquire useful information from within and outside the organization, and information assimilation capability is the capability that enables enterprises to interpret and connect the information acquired with the existing knowledge of the organization. Then, information application capability helps businesses transform information and knowledge into action, operations improvement, and business innovativeness. In terms of resource, information can be seen as a strategic resource and in terms of knowledge, focus is on the processes of acquiring, assimilating and using information to create value for business.

Recommendations

Small-scale businesses need to find ways to improve their information skills, particularly in identifying, sourcing and assessing information for their business from customers, suppliers, competitors, industry associations, government agencies and digital platforms, and to develop systematic approaches to this. It is important for enterprise owners and managers to keep abreast of information regarding market trends, customer desires, technology advances, funding options, and business practices. Businesses should also set up regular practices to collect customer feedback, survey competitors, seek input from industry networks and spot new business opportunities to bolster information acquisition. They can increase the amount of information available for informed decision-making, market responsiveness and strategic planning, thus helping to facilitate sustainable growth.

Also, small businesses should develop effective practices to absorb and incorporate information they acquire. Employee training, sharing information at meetings, documenting business experiences and interpreting market and operational information together can help to reinforce

information assimilation. For the enterprises, it is necessary to ensure that they add useful information and use it in planning, allocation of resources, service, product development and daily business. Information application can be enhanced by delegating responsibility for taking information based decisions and measuring their impact. There are various signs that will help enterprise owners assess if the use of information is leading to sustainable growth, including sales growth, profitability, customer retention, market expansion and business continuity. Small-scale businesses can also be facilitated by providing them with easy-to-access business information services, training in digital skills, and advisory programmes by government agencies, business development organizations, and financial institutions.

Areas for Further Research

Since the present study adopted a systematic literature review approach, future studies should use empirical research designs to examine the individual and combined influence of information accessibility, information acquisition capability, information assimilation capability, and information application capability on the sustainable growth performance of small-scale enterprises. Questionnaires, interviews, or mixed methods could be used to collect primary data from enterprise owners and managers to establish how these capabilities influence actual business outcomes. Comparative studies across industries, enterprise sizes, and geographical locations could reveal differences in these relationships, while longitudinal studies could clarify whether the effects of information access and uptake persist over time. Future research should also investigate the role of information sources, including customers, suppliers, competitors, industry associations, government agencies, social media, and other digital platforms, in supporting business decisions and sustainable growth. Particular attention should be given to how enterprise owners and managers identify, source, assess, interpret, and integrate information from these sources into existing business knowledge before applying it in decision-making. Researchers could further examine information literacy and the adoption of affordable digital technologies as capabilities that may strengthen information acquisition, interpretation, and application. Additionally, studies could investigate whether digital literacy, entrepreneurial orientation, innovation, and access to financial resources mediate or moderate the relationships between the four information capabilities and sustainable growth.

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