

# Building E-Publishing Capacity by E-Collaboration: An African Experience

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## ABSTRACT

The invention of the world wide web made the internet attractive for publishing, offering Africans an opportunity to publish for the global market. Notwithstanding their e-publishing initiatives, emerging business models and competitive e-collaboration with global distribution giants have yet to be adequately interrogated from an empirical perspective. This study, therefore, describes the progression of e-publishing from the perspective of e-collaboration. In-depth interviews, website observation, and survey methods were employed in data collection, and 97 purposively selected publishing firms filled out a questionnaire offline whereas online data were collected from 82 available publishing websites. Findings indicate that publishers are building e-publishing capacity by launching websites, e-book clubs and online bookshops, collaborating with global giants for distribution, thereby increasing output significantly. This study updates the history of e-publishing, providing hitherto unavailable information on the progression of digital publishing in Africa's largest economy.

## KEYWORDS

African Publishers, E-Collaboration, E-Publishing, Innovation, Outsourcing

## INTRODUCTION

Digital publishing offers solutions to some of the challenges facing publishers worldwide. To commercial publishers, it offers solutions to the challenges posed by increasing costs and reduced patronage from libraries (Tiamiyu, 2005; Echebiri, 2005). E-publishing also has the potential not only to facilitate a more effective nationwide distribution but to also extend distribution networks across national boundaries (Hovav & Gray 2001; Tiamiyu, 2005). It also has the potential to open up a nation's publishing to opportunities which may help to overcome physical infrastructural disadvantages (Nwankwo, 2005; Mohammed, 2011; Eyitayo, 2011). It is in this light that publishers are generally expected to embrace digital publishing innovations capable of increasing their competitive opportunities and enhancing the consumption of their products (Nwankwo, 2005; Mohammed, 2011; Okojie, 2014).

However, there seems to be a mismatch of perception and reality in sections of the industry in Nigeria. Transcripts of an international conference on digital publishing in West Africa, held in 2011, indicated that there was a reasonable and growing market for digital publishing in Nigeria and a number of other West African countries (Conford, 2011). Notwithstanding, many publishers seem to perceive that the economy would not support digital publishing and e-collaboration even when they admit that digital publishing innovations would close the gaps existing between local publishers

and their foreign counterparts. To reconcile this persisting perception with reality, therefore, a clear description of the progression of digital publishing and e-collaboration in the country is necessary.

## **BACKGROUND: THE PROBLEM OF WRONG PERCEPTION OF E-PUBLISHING ENVIRONMENT**

Book publishers seem to perceive the Nigerian digital environment as an environment inhospitable to innovation adoption and e-collaboration whereas studies suggest not only that the environment is no longer as inhospitable as they think, but that a reasonable market for digital books already exists in some areas (Conford, 2011). Studies also indicate that a fairly reasonable measure of digital publishing is currently taking place (Ifeduba, 2020; Okojie, 2014). These conflicting perspectives suggest that the contemporary history of publishing in the country needs to be updated by means of empirical clarifications. This study, therefore, empirically surveys the digital environment in search of answers to the following questions:

In what ways are local publishers innovating to build capacity? What businesses are trending on publishing websites? What is the role of local innovation champions and global online distributors in the emerging business models? To what extent are local publishers outsourcing distribution to global online distributors? How are authors taking advantage of technological convergence to circumvent inhibiting factors?

### **Global Progression of Digital Publishing**

Mary Meeker's 2018 report on digital publishing trends indicate that 50% of the world's population had access to the internet, implying that online publishers could begin to estimate that over 3.5 billion people make up the potential market for digital contents. The report stated that the number of active social media users would keep pace with the reported global internet penetration partly due to cheaper connectivity and innovations encouraging data sharing. Generally, people are increasing the amount of time they spend online consuming digital media across a wide range of devices. For Americans, in 2017, that number of hours was about 5.9 hours a day. On mobile devices alone, there is a growth from 20 minutes to 3.3 hours a day (Monojoy, 2018).

Online learning and digital publishing go hand in hand, and the demand for online contents skyrocketed following the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns in almost every nation. This and other factors have also contributed to a rise in the demand for educational content usage on YouTube, which has recorded over 1 Billion learning video views daily. Use of wifi, subscription services and online learning applications are all on the increase, signaling that more and more learners are prepared to consume digital content more than ever before (Monojoy, 2018; WIPO, 2020). A global survey conducted by the International Publishers Association and the World Intellectual Property Organisation stated that the online sales channel generated more than half of total trade sector revenue in the United Kingdom while in the United States of America it generated (41.6%), Brazil (25.5%), Italy (24%) and Sweden (23.5%). In the same vein, a large proportion of total trade sector revenue in each of these countries was generated by the online sales channel.

Online sales accounted for 54.9% of total number of copies sold by trade book publishers in the United Kingdom, 37.3% in the United States of America, Uzbekistan, 35.2%, Brazil 25%, Sweden, 27.3%. Though, some African countries were among the 63 countries covered in the study, data for digital publishing in most of the countries were not available, an indication that efforts being made are probably uncoordinated (WIPO, 2020).

This was not the case for the United States where *Statistica* reported that digital publishing revenue grew to nearly 18 billion U.S. dollars in 2018 while about 266 million e-books were sold in the country in 2017, with Amazon further establishing itself as the market leader in the e-book industry, having recorded hundreds of millions of e-book sales through its popular reader-Kindle. Similarly, consumers in other countries, including African countries, are demanding more and more

of digital products which the traditional publishers seem to be reluctant to embrace. However, it must be noted that readers in all those countries are generally only willing to spend less on digital product because they lack physical form (Watson, 2018).

## **FACTORS DRIVING AUTHORS AND PUBLISHERS TO E-PUBLISHING OPTION**

Censorship often takes the form of examination of books or manuscripts for the purpose of altering or suppressing contents or ideas that fall within the range of the censor's objectionable, harmful, or offensive list. And this may come before or after publication, depending on the time information is available (Yaya, Achonna and Osisanwo, 2013). Prior censorship, which occurs when a work is controlled before its release, hardly occurs in Africa's book industry. But where and whenever it occurs, publishers, groups, organisations, governments, individuals and religious bodies, try to implement it to avoid the consequence of releasing the publication. Stoppage of publication or modification of content is achieved either by force or by negotiations (Ifeduba, 2018).

Post censorship takes place when a book has been made public, and it is achieved by burning, banning, banishing, or by book restriction. Sometimes post censorship is not achieved except by instituting defamation or sedition suits (Ifeduba, 2018). In Nigeria, scholars have examined aspects of censorship, especially with regards to newspapers and magazines, paying little attention to book censorship. One consequence of an overtly censored publishing environment could be that librarians, writers and publishers may engage in self-censorship as a survival strategy. Before the Internet age, it was generally safer for writers to physically escape to safer environments, but the ubiquity of the Internet and the emergence of self-publishing platforms enamour authors to circumvent local draconian laws to reach out to global audiences. Enang and Umoh studied censorship and its influence on publishing in Nigeria, and recommended that professional censors should be employed as acquisitions editors in book publishing firms. In other words, they advocate a formal adoption of self-censorship as a way out. Self-censorship, it appears, is currently not taking the form suggested but authors are rather looking westwards to leverage on superior technology to publish with liberty. Commenting on oppressive, environments, Fabre (2014) made a connection between fascism and censorship, explaining that each system of dictatorship evolves its own method of information control.

## **THE NIGERIAN PUBLISHING ENVIRONMENT**

Uwalaka (2000) conducted an empirical appraisal of the performance of publishing in the Nigerian economy and found that there is a positive relationship between economic factors in the business environment and the performance of publishing houses in Nigeria. In line with Uwalaka's finding, Nigeria's business environment was described by Lemo (2004) as un conducive to "business concerns including publishing outfits." The foregoing discourse indicates that the general outlook of business (be it publishing or any other) in the Nigerian environment is difficult. Obiwuru, Oluwalaiye and Okwu (2011) appraised the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the external and internal environments of businesses in Nigeria and came to the conclusion that external factors such as multiple tax system, policy uncertainty, high cost of capital, infrastructure decay and dismal power supply escalated the cost of doing business, posing serious threats to firms and industries. Similarly, Duru (2011) identified the collapse of infrastructural facilities, instability and loss of regulatory focus as factors affecting businesses and argued that these challenges discourage entrepreneurship in all sectors of the economy including the publishing sector, and their studies support this view (Abulude, 2014).

One of the ways to grow a business in a difficult environment is to be innovative. Thus, Jegede (2004) described the Nigerian publishing environment as a difficult one but suggested that creative, innovative, courageous and risk-taking publishers would survive the economic hardship, especially with the adoption of digital publishing. He predicted that e-books would become the next biggest revolution in publishing and printing since Gutenberg's innovation. The thrust of Jegede's argument is

that the education sector is in a turbulent situation and, thus, is bound to be affected by contemporary changes in how knowledge is distributed, accessed and processed. The coming of the National Open University, with a plan to admit 500,000 students within five years, implies that electronic publishing is inevitable for the survival of the University (Amadi, 2011).

Informed views by other scholars on this issue indicate that the Nigerian economy provides an unsustainable publishing environment, inhospitable to the flourishing of a self-sustaining book industry, an environment that hinders performance and does little to provide textbooks for the school system (Akpokodje and Ukwuoma, 2016). Several scholars have, therefore, recommended the adoption of innovative technologies, including digital technology to reposition, revive and grow the local book industry. In other words, repositioning and reviving the industry requires innovative, creative and venturesome practices from the publishers (Adesanoye, 2005; Christopher, 2010; Bature, 2011).

In Nigeria, publishing has its main focus on educational publishing because of the need to produce books to meet the curriculum requirements of pre-school, basic education, senior secondary, intermediate, professional and tertiary institution. In an effort to justify this focus of publishers on educational books, Obidiegwu explained that local publishers could hardly meet demand in the education sector due to the fact that about 600 million books were needed annually to keep the schools running (Obidiegwu (2009). Orimalade (2009: 59) arguing that booksellers could not perform the duties expected of them, posed this question: “How can that be done when many bookshops, the venues of author reading and discussing have closed down?

The structure of the market could sometimes impinge on the ways and manners of adoption of innovation, and publishing firms in Nigeria have been categorized into four main classes by Nwoga. They are: Nigerian successors of multinational publishing companies, medium-sized indigenous publishers, general book-publishing companies and the informal publishers so called because they produce unrecorded books and operate outside the membership of the Nigerian Publishers Association, NPA (Nwoga, 2002). It is not clear from extant literature how this structure affects e-collaboration and e-publishing innovation adoption.

## **Theoretical Perspectives**

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory identified innovation characteristics, communication channels, time, social-system and change agents’ persuasion efforts as five elements of diffusion. It is, however, suggested that persuasion is the most critical step in explaining individuals’ decision to adopt an innovation, implying that the existence of change agents or innovation champions could be crucial to innovation adoption (Abukhzam, and Lee, 2010; Boston University School of Public Health, 2013).

An innovation champion, that is, a self-appointed advocate of an emerging process, hardware, software, or data innovation promotes his views both vertically and horizontally, and is sometimes perceived as a hero in an organisation, a hero who drives projects forward through strong advocacy and by marshaling resources. Scholars also argue that IT champions can also put projects or their organizations at financial, reputational or other risks (Gogan, Conboy and Weiss, 2020). To avoid such risks, studies argue that innovation champions of the future would require new skillsets that would benefit from new and emergent technologies to align different sets of stakeholders in networks of open innovation (Bartlett, 2017). This may require a complex nexus of collaborations and technological convergence, which are more effectively promoted and pursued by private sector enterprises (Yang, Steensma and Ren (2021).

Publishing firms also adopt digital innovations for promotion, competition, customer relations, new business opportunities and customer interaction, especially where there are no inhibiting factors, or where there are more facilitating factors than inhibiting factors (Aboelmaged, 2010; Venkatesh, Thong; Xu, X, 2012; Aboelmaged and Gebba, 2013). This theory is, therefore, appropriate in interrogating the role played by innovation champions who are change agents in difficult business environments where authors and publishers generally fear change due to perceived inhibiting factors.

## Purpose Of the Study And Methods Employed

In light of the gaps in the literature, this study examines the various ways in which local publishers innovate to build capacity and to examine the collaborative roles of local innovation champions and global online distributors in the emerging business models. It also examines the various ways in which local authors take advantage of technological convergence to circumvent inhibiting factors. This study also aims at describing the activities of the growing informal sector which appears to be making major but underreported contributions. To achieve these objectives, the following methods were employed:

In-depth interviews, website observation and survey methods were employed in data collection. Data were collected with a questionnaire, offline, from 97 purposively selected publishing firms whereas online data were collected from 82 available publishing websites by means of website observation, using a website observation guide. Data that could not be collected with these two instruments were collected by means of in-depth interviews. Analysed data were presented using frequency tables, text and charts.

The survey targeted people in top management and senior editorial positions as well as production and marketing directors to ensure that only competent and experienced publishers filled out the questionnaire or participated in the interviews. The data indicate that over 99% of the responding publishers were competent and in positions that enabled them to offer useful information. Details are presented in Table 1:

**Table 1. Positions of respondents**

SN	Positions	No of Respondents	Percent
1	Managing Editor/GM	38	39.17
2	Chairman/Director	25	25.77
3	Senior Officer	18	18.55
4	MD/CEO	16	16.49
	<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100</b>

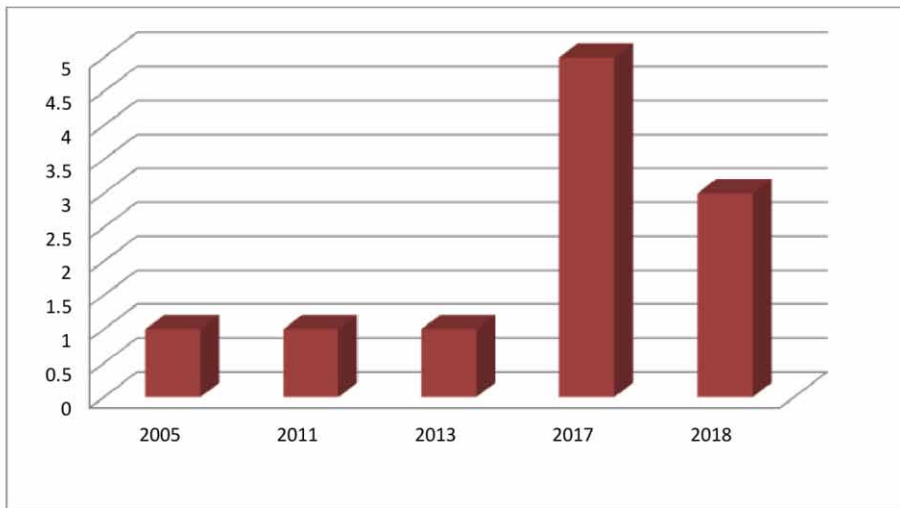
Below is a presentation of the findings arrived at through these methods

## HOW THE LOCAL PUBLISHERS INNOVATE TO BUILD CAPACITY

**Websites:** The findings indicate that local innovation leaders have established about 82 book publishing websites. Although five websites were established between 1998 and 2000, according to the responses, website observation indicates that the earliest websites were established about 2002. Since then, there has been a gradual increase in the number with 2012 and 2017 witnessing the establishment of more websites than other years.

**Book Clubs:** The findings indicate that Rainbow Book Club established in 2005 is the oldest online book club in Nigeria. At the time of this study, there were 11 online book clubs established between 2005 and 2019. The book clubs are: Rainbow, Aimee’s kids book club, Lagos book club, Ònkàwé book club, Childpreneur book camp, Bookworms arise book club, Medina book club, Channels book club, Booklify and Page Book Connoisseurs. Details on year of establishment are presented in figure 1:

Figure 1. Online book clubs establishment trend



Online Book Clubs Establishment Trend

**Online Bookshops:** Shops were observed online and the findings indicate that most of the online sellers were offshoots of existing brick and mortar bookshops established long before the launch of the Internet. However, their online presence was all established between 2000 and 2018. Bible wonderland limited (<http://www.biblewonderlandng.com/>), Jumia Books (<https://www.jumia.com.ng/>) and Iwe Bookstore (<http://iwe.store/>) are among the thriving shops. However, many publishing firms also sell books on their websites. Some of the shops are not necessarily book-only shops, but they are involved in online bookselling as part of bigger businesses as is the case with [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Books sold in the shops range from fiction, religious, educational to motivational and self-help, family, lifestyle, business, finance, science and technology titles.

**Businesses Trending on the Websites of Traditional Publishers:** The respondents were given a list and asked to indicate which of the listed businesses they transacted on their sites. Their responses and the observed data (on websites) indicate that over 61% favour the establishment of websites for the purpose of promoting print titles and digital titles, where digital titles have been produced. The second trendy business transacted on their websites is customer enquiries/feedback (38.5%) which is a logical response to successful promotion; and this is also related to the third, actual sale of print titles, on the sites. This trend suggests that the publishers are launching websites primarily to promote and sell print titles and secondly to take a cautious step into the largely unknown digital environment. Details are presented in Table 2.

**Primary Digital Devices to which Traditional Publishers Tailor Contents:** The publishers were provided with a list of devices and were asked to state the digital devices through which their contents could be accessed by consumers. The list of devices included Ipad, kindle, smart phones, dedicated devices, laptop computer and desktop computer. Details are presented in Table 3:

There is an obvious mismatch between consumer choice of devices and publishers' choice of devices to tailor content to. Whereas it is clear that smart phones and tablets are the popular devices, the majority of publishers are yet to emphasize digital delivery through smart phones. It is reported by telecommunications service providers that there are about 170 million mobile subscriptions in Nigeria, and about 25 million users of smartphones (O'Dea, 2020).

Table 2. Kinds of publishing business trending on websites

SN	Businesses	Number of Responses	Percent
1	Product promotion	67	61.4
2	Enquiries/feedback	42	38.5
3	Sale of print titles	36	30.0
4	Manuscript transfer	13	11.9
5	Sale of digital content	11	10.0
6	Corporate showroom	8	7.33
7	Collaboration	5	4.58
8	Socializing	3	2.75
9	Other	2	1.83
	<b>Total</b>	<b>187</b>	

Table 3. Primary digital devices to which publishers tailor contents

SN	Devices	Number of Responses	Per cent
1	Laptop Computer	20	25.0
2	Desktop Computer	20	25.0
3	Digital tablets	12	15.0
4	Smart phones	17	21.25
5	Dedicated devices	11	13.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

### Demographic Characteristics of Local Change Agents Developing Digital Capacity

In March, 2010 a platform, Najastories was launched by an author/publisher to help young and new writers to showcase their writing skills and share their works with readers. It also aims at connecting writers and readers, and has succeeded in building a literary community of nearly 10,000 members, publishing over 15,000 works by 924 authors. This organisation has also pioneered an online-first publishing model whereby titles that succeed online are published in print. By 2018, it had published print versions of over 15 successful titles. Details of the genres of the publications show that there are poetry, flash fiction, romance fiction, adventure fiction, science fiction, short story, drama, comedy, horror, fantasy fiction and non-fiction titles.

Another is a book reading and publishing platform, Okadabooks, for people looking forward to publishing any written content or reading any published works, and it runs on a free EPUB reader-friendly application. Most titles are free and as at 2018, it already had over 9200 titles in its store, 4000 registered participants and over 449,000 downloads. With over 1009 titles published in e-book format, the site is arguably described as Africa's fastest growing e-book portal, allowing all genres of literary works to be published without restrictions. Though the focus is Africa, global favourites such as *Oliver Twist* and other notable novels have been added. A unique feature of the site is that it stocks books from most of the major publishers in Nigeria including Cassava Republic, Learn Africa plc, Love Africa, Bahati Books, Parressia and many more. By so doing, it takes the lead in local collaboration which has been a major drawback to book publishing development in Nigeria.

Okadabooks partners with Samsung to deliver globally and more efficiently. In terms of genres, about 50% of the titles are fiction whereas non-fiction constitutes 30%, poetry 9% and others 11%.

Educational publishers blazed the trail by producing the first major dedicated digital tablet for massive school adoption in 2013. The device named *Opon Imo* (tablet of knowledge) was customized by First Veritas Publishers for Osun State Government schools. In the first phase of the innovation, 25,477 devices with free pre-loaded textbooks and curriculum-related contents were distributed to final year students and teachers in public secondary schools. Titles from First Veritas, Evans Publishers and several other leading firms were adopted and distributed through the device, marking a watershed in innovative publishing and collaborative distribution among local publishers. Since then, a number of other states including Lagos have introduced modified versions of digital distribution innovations.

Another digital innovation champion, the National Open University of Nigeria, distance learning institution, launched a growing e-courseware repository with 2362 PDF textbooks and hundreds of other digital resources freely available to registered students and other site visitors. Its online library provides internet access through local area networks and wireless connectivity twenty-four hours of every day, and the e-library laboratory is equipped with 45 state-of-the-art high speed computers. The library's e-book collection is expected to grow to 100,000 volumes in a few years as it pursues the goal of enrolling 500,000 students. The university provides students with an information gateway linked to world's leading providers of educational resources such as Sage, Law Pavilion, Project Muse journals, AGORA, Bibliomania, Bioline International, the British Library for Development Studies (Europe's largest research collection on economic and social change in developing countries). The gateway is also linked to Bridge Development and Gender, Chemistry Central, Directory of Open Access Journals (provides access to 2,565 quality controlled scientific and scholarly journals). EBSCO provides it with the full text for more than 2,300 journals while HINARI, JSTOR and many others provide even more.

*Emerging Business Models:* A distinct model is presented by a start-up publisher, Naijastories, a fiction site which has published about 15000 titles, and attracts daily web traffic of over 2000 visitors. They pay their authors based on the level of online readership of each work even before the titles go from digital to print. In addition to sales, they get some revenue from site advertisements. Similar to this are Okadabooks, which is strictly online, and two law publishers with online-only services.

Another model is presented by publishers who go from print to digital offline subscription, often patronized by schools, governments and institutions. Their transactions with institutions and government are based on corporate subscription while those involving individuals are based on outright purchase, usually outsourced to leading global distributors. The range of emerging business models and the number of adopting organizations is presented in Table 4:

*Global Collaborations:* Many of the local publishers are yet to develop online distribution skills and channels due to the novelty and perceived technicalities of the digital environment. So, they were asked to clarify the distribution channels through which they distribute their titles online. Amazon, Banes and Noble and Okadabooks platforms top the list. Details are presented in Table 5:

A graphic presentation of observed trends of mode of distribution (whether in-house distribution or outsourcing) indicates that over 84% of digital output is distributed online by outsourcing to Western platforms such as Amazon, while about 15% is distributed using own sites and other in-house arrangements. Further details are presented in Figure 2:

*Outsourcing of Distribution to Global Giants:* Networking and collaboration with global content producers and distributors is on the increase. To reach out to the rest of the world with their often meagre resources, weak technological backgrounds and inadequate infrastructure, some publishers are collaborating with Amazon, Barnes and Noble to distribute worldwide. There are 578 Nigerian titles on Amazon alone but not all of them are e-books. Most of the titles were published by CreateSpace, a self-publishing platform owned by Amazon. LAP LAMBERT academic publishing home universe

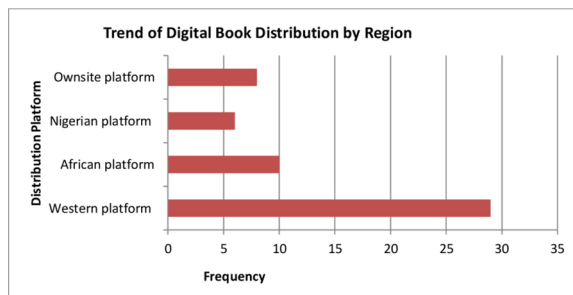
Table 4. Emerging business models

SN	Emerging Business Models	Frequency	Percent
A	Prints-only model, sold offline but promoted online	48	55.17
B	Sale of prints offline with a few digital titles online	18	20.68
C	Sale of prints offline and sale of digital offline by subscription through dedicated apps	13	14.94
D	Born-digital online-only for either free downloads or subscription supported with site advertisement revenue	5	5.74
E	Born-digital online and sold online only until transformed to print, income supported with site advertisement revenue	1	1.14
F	Free digital contents sponsored by government, whether online or offline.	2	2.29
	<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 5. Traditional publishers' digital distribution channels

SN	Distribution Outlets	Number	Percent
1	Amazon.com	21	24.13
2	Banes & Noble	16	18.39
3	Okadabooks.com	11	12.64
4	Naija Stories	1	1.14
5	Itunes.com	2	2.29
6	Worldreader.org	8	9.19
7	Wordpress	9	10.34
8	African Books Collective	10	11.49
9	Own - Site	8	9.19
	<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>

Figure 2. Digital distribution trends by regional base



Digital Distribution Trends by Regional Base

was the second, followed by Monarch Books and others. Some of them also distribute digital content through the African Books Collective (ABC), an African Publishers Network (APNET) organization based in Oxford, United Kingdom. A total of 775 digital titles are distributed through these organisations with Amazon leading. Details are presented in Table 6:

**Table 6. Number of digital titles distributed through Amazon, Banes & Noble, Wattpad, and ABC**

1	Amazon	Kindle	Audiobook Audio CD/MP3	Pre-loaded digital player/ Prime Video	Total
		204	105	19	328
2	Banes & Noble	Nook			
		101	25	0	126
3	Wattpad	All E-books			
		315	NA	NA	315
4	ABC	All E-books			
		6	NA	NA	6
	Total	626	130	19	775

It is, however, remarkable that the 775 works were only authored by about 400 Africans and not necessarily published by Africa-based publishers. The study indicates that only 28 of 85 publishers are based in Africa, and over 50% of the titles were self-published through Createspace and other self-publishing platforms.

*Author Presence on Global Platforms:* Findings indicate that Wattpad platform is patronized by more authors, especially self-publishing authors (335) followed by Amazon (224), Barnes and Noble (148) and African Books Collective, ABC, (55). Graphic details are presented in Figure 3:

*Membership of Professional Bodies:* Publishers’ membership of professional bodies could provide insight into the level of collaboration going on among them locally and internationally. This insight is significant in the sense that readiness to collaborate is necessary in the digital publishing environment which is driven by networks and networking protocols and practices. The responses indicate that about 76% of the respondents belong to at least one professional body, whereas over 23% belong to none. Details are presented in Table 7:

The associations categorized as “others” are Nigerian Booksellers Association (NBA) Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Afro-Asian Book Council, Chartered Institute of Professional Printers of Nigeria (CIPPON) and Christian Booksellers Association of Nigeria (CBAN) Law Publishers Association (LPA) Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) African Books Collective (ABC) Nigerian Book Fair Trust (NBFT) United Bible Societies and REPRONIG, a reproduction rights group. The observation that more publishers belong to CBAN could be attributed to the fact that a good number of the religious book publishers came into publishing from a background in bookselling. But they must deal with a number of inhibiting factors.

### **How Authors Circumvent Inhibiting Factors by Collaboration And Convergence**

Four authors were asked to explain the factors motivating digital migrations. The responses of northern authors and those of southern authors were not the same. In the south, “incessant rejection of fiction and poetry manuscripts simply because the publishers are more interested in the lucrative textbook line” was the most common motivating factor followed by local piracy of successful titles. In the north

Figure 3. Author presence on global digital platforms

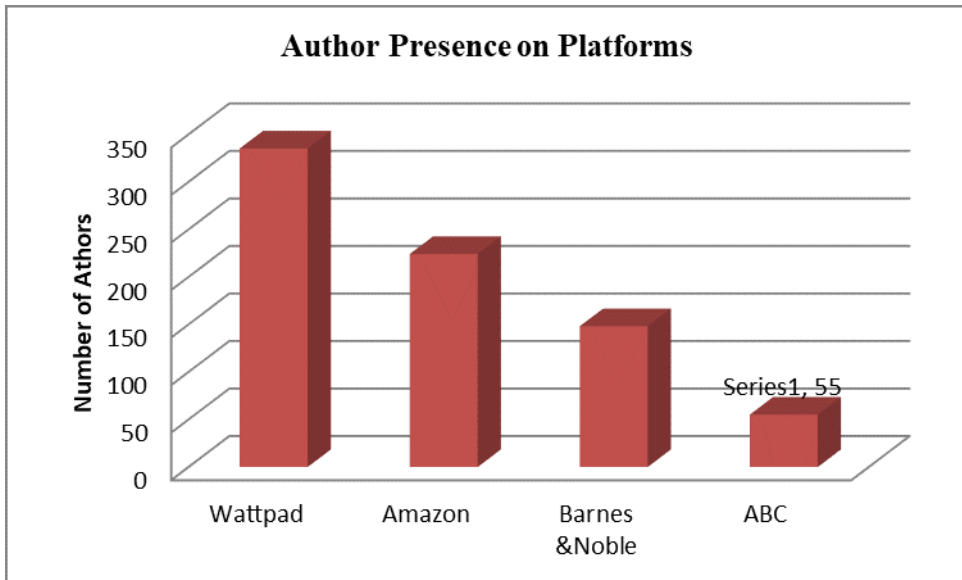


Table 7. Membership of professional bodies

SN	Professional Bodies	Number of Members	Percent of Sample
1	NPA	62	63.91
2	APNET	35	36.00
3	ABC	35	36.00
4	IPA	12	12.37
5	Others	15	15.46
6	None	9	9.27
	<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100</b>

ensorship of various descriptions was the most prevalent motivating factor. An author explained that fewer than seven houses out of over 140 are fully focused on fiction and trade books whereas almost all the rest concentrate on the textbook market. In both geographical regions avoidance of unaffordable cost of self-publishing was an important motivating factor to seek online collaboration with free authoring platforms such as Wattpad. Moreover, reader access and discoverability are enhanced on popular platforms, according to one of the responses.

The publishers who filled the questionnaire were asked to state what they perceived as challenges facing potential adopters of digital publishing innovations and over twenty challenges were identified by the respondents. Book piracy, lack of capital and unsupportive environment top the list of perceived challenges in that order, and this is consistent with both the interview responses and the literature (Conford, 2011).

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The publishers generally towed the line of least resistance by cautiously launching websites to register their presence on the global digital space, promote their print products and attend to enquiries at the initial stage. This is consistent with global practices whereby publishers, first establish websites before applying for e-publishing grants (where applicable) or just as a logical first step to e-publishing innovation adoption (Hashim, 2012). They seem to perceive the website as a cost-effective avenue to promote their under-promoted titles, especially since there are not many titles published in digital formats. A respondent specializing in the textbook line stated: “We specialize in school books, and we know that our customers would rather buy recommended texts through their schools or in the bookshops. So, for us, placing digital contents on our websites does not make as much business sense as it would for a publisher of fiction or short stories.”

The study shows that there are two discernible categories of innovating publishers. Whereas, the traditional publishers, mainly focused on the textbook line, are cautiously and gradually inching towards e-publishing, the leading innovation champions spearheading the development of local digital capacity are mainly start-up publishers established between 2010 and 2020. Whereas, the traditional publishers are already entrenched in the production of print, the start-ups such as *NaijaStories*, *Okadabooks*, *First Veritas* and the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) are fully focused on digital formats—HTML, PDF, EPUB and dedicated tablets as in the case of *Opon Imo* tablets. In some cases, they publish no print versions, as is the case with *Okadabooks*.

Collaboration is a major strategy for the four e-book innovation leaders. *Okadabooks* signed an agreement with Samsung Corporation to upload 7500 titles (mostly Nigerian) on Samsung application, suggesting that collaboration, which the literature shows to be almost none-existent (Mosuro, 2007, Obidegwu, 2009) among the traditional print publishers is actually improving in the digital environment and promises to get better. The publishing director at *Naijastories* explained the need for collaboration thus: “Because we start online, publish short stories and distribute mainly short stories, collaboration with writers, reviewers, readers and publishers is inevitable.” For this reason, *Naijastories* has a constant visitor survey on its site, and views and comments of respondents are sometimes accepted as useful guide in shaping subsequent stories or compilations. Similarly, the NOUN is partnering with over twenty global organisations and institutions to provide digital contents for students, just as the UNESCO has expressed interest in adopting the *Opon Imo* e-book distribution method championed by *First Veritas Publishers*.

Among the educational publishers, a prints-only model, sold offline but promoted online is predominant whereas government institutions generally provide free contents sponsored by government. In between these two extremes are models championed by start-ups striving to carve online niches for themselves. For instance, *Naijastories* is a born-digital fiction site that creates and gives out so much content for free y, depending heavily on online revenue from sales and advertisements and only diversifies to print formats for only titles that have succeeded online. On the other hand *Okadabooks* is heavy on distribution of digital contents produced by many publishers but depends heavily on online sales. Different from these, however is the *First Veritas* model which seems to be pursuing a balance of digital offline and print at the same time and pace.

With nearly 800 titles distributed through Amazon, Wattpad and Barnes and Noble, the publishers, especially the startups, seem to have found a way of circumventing the inhibiting factors endemic in the Nigerian publishing environment. But the few innovating print specialists expressed concerns about the possibility of outsourcing taking pricing out of publishers’ hands, the possibility of a reap off by book collectives if the accounting system is not transparent and if it is difficult to track. They also expressed concerns regarding Amazon’s royalty being too small and their policies seeming to marginalize publishers in favour of authors.

The majority of the authors creating contents on Wattpad, *Naijastories* and Amazon’s *Creospace* are authors critically challenged by censorship in the North (Ifeduba, 2018) and lack of manuscript

acceptance opportunities in the South. One of the authors explained that these online platforms offer them “the opportunity we seek to express ourselves as authors but making reasonable sales online is still a huge challenge probably because we are yet to figure out how to make a title stand out from the thousands churned out annually.”

## **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

In light of the limitations of this study, it would make an interesting study to investigate the factors inhibiting e-collaboration as well as the determinants of e-collaboration in the studied setting as well as in similar environments. In the same vein, a qualitative research investigation into the e-commerce and e-content creation activities of the numerous authors migrating and collaborating online is bound to be more revealing than the present study. In the light of the findings, the following recommendations are made for future studies and practices:

The study indicates that e-collaboration centres mainly on trade books whereas the publishing industry is dominated by educational print publishers (Amadi, 2011). Therefore, to increase educational book-based collaboration, it might be necessary to adapt from the innovative practices introduced by the NOUN (see demographic characteristics of change agents) and provide a collaborative digital highway for the distribution of textbooks since this would be cheaper in the long run for all the parties. To achieve this, future studies should be designed to interrogate:

### **Recommended Research Direction 1:** E-collaboration Trends in Textbook Distribution, E-Learning and Computer-Based Examinations

For state schools, Osun state has provided a model which could guide states in providing digital distribution highways in public schools. The Federal Government should provide e-publishing collaboration grants for the leading innovation champions identified in this study. It could do so under its various reading promotion programmes since these start-up publishers seem to be better positioned and motivated to create content, distribute content globally and promote reading locally.

### **Recommended Research Direction 2:** The Role of E-collaboration and Government Funding in Reading Promotion and E-content Creation

## **CONCLUSION**

This study establishes that e-publishing capacity building is gradually but steadily taking place in Africa’s largest economy in three ways, spearheaded by a few startup organisations which specialize in collaborating with local authors to create and distribute thousands of titles through their own websites. A second group of e-publishers are traditional print specialists, focused on the textbook line and cautiously venturing into e-publishing by establishing promotional websites where very few digital titles are sold or displayed; the third group refers to online book clubs and bookshops striving to draw readers to the digital environment. This third group consists of authors and publishers collaborating with global leaders such as Wattpad, Amazon’s Createspace and others to express themselves without being censored by government or snubbed by local print publishers.

Publishers also attempt to distribute e-content to schools and institutions outside the web environment. On the framework of Rogers’ Diffusion of Innovations Theory the few publishers in the first category could be classified as innovators confidently working to survive and thrive in the digital environment, whereas those in the second could be classified as laggards (Rogers, 2003). However, it could be stated that e-publishing awareness is high, business interest on the rise and market size increasing (Worldinternetstatistics.com, 2020), implying that there are opportunities for investment and more collaboration.

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