

Publishing and Information Dissemination: Trends and Challenges in Nigeria

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Abstract

Publishing has an important role to play in the development of any nation. It involves the dissemination of information or literature through various publications such as books, periodicals, newspapers, magazines, as well as electronic resources such as websites, blogs etc. which manifests in knowledge acquisition. Publishing is, therefore, relevant in all spheres of society because through it, information is made accessible, thereby, providing or enhancing the knowledge that supports the proper functioning and growth of individuals and society as a whole. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to examine the significance of publishing in the dissemination of information in Nigeria with the objective of identifying the current trends as well as challenges publishers face in their quest to share not only knowledge that is reliable but also accurate and impactful.

Keywords:

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Background to the Study

The history of publishing is closely related to the emergence of technical innovations in the modern age which led to social transformations in societies all over the world. Significantly, both are interconnected and characterized by the invention of writing, paper and printing, all of which manifest in literacy and the dissemination of information. Inevitably, this resulted in the acquisition of knowledge and, subsequently, social change.

Campbell et al. (2010) remarked:

Before book, or writing in general, oral cultures passed on information and values through the wisdom and memories of a community's elders or tribal storytellers. Sometimes these rich traditions were lost. Print culture and the book, however, gave future generations different and more enduring records of authors' words.

With the invention of writing men (beginning with the Babylonians, Egyptians, Sumerians and Romans) began record stories, business transactions, history etc. on the clay, papyrus and parchments. In the Middle Ages, Christian clergy introduced the manuscript culture and advanced the art of bookmaking through painstaking transcription, lettering and binding (Campbell et al., 2010).

Later, Chinese printers developed block printing by applying sheets of paper to inked blocks with raised carved letters and drawings beneath them; this was followed by the invention of the movable type in the 11th century in China. Printers arranged characters made from pieces of wood or metal into various combinations of words for printing. Then came the Gutenberg revolution which witnessed the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in Germany, between 1453 and 1456, using the principles of the design of the movable type in the design of a mechanical printing press. The movable metallic type was durable enough to print page after page continuously, and the letters could be arranged and rearranged for different messages in prints. This marked the beginning of the era of modern print and the printing press which spread rapidly in Europe and America. Books, which used to be large, elaborate and expensive gradually reduced in size and cost, making them more available and affordable, thus becoming the first products to be mass-marketed in history. This feat is attributed to three features: machine duplication which replaced the hand-copying of texts, rapid duplication which led to the production of huge quantities of the same book, and reduction in the cost of books which made them more affordable to people (Campbell et al., 2010). The social and economic impact of Gutenberg's invention led to social and cultural transformations in Europe, America and other parts of the world.

Printing and Publishing in Nigeria

Publishing is one of the oldest industries in Nigeria. The first printing press was set up in 1846 by Reverend Hope Waddell and his assistant, Samuel Edgerly, missionaries of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, for the purpose of printing bible lessons, religious booklets, flyers, tracts and pamphlets for the Presbyterian Church. This marked the beginning of a thriving publishing industry in Nigeria as people began to realize the business potentials in publishing and to invest in it.

However, in the western part of the country, another milestone was marked when Reverend Henry Townsend of the Church of Missionary Society (CMS) established another printing press in Abeokuta, now in Ogun state. Townsend started a printing school where he trained pupils in Abeokuta. Five years later, in 1867, he established the first newspaper in Nigeria, named *Iwe Iroyin* (a Yoruba dialect native newspaper). Townsend's printing press folded up as a result of cultural differences, political crisis and social matters that erupted among the Egba people and the European settlers.

In 1925, the Nigerian Printing and Publishing Company was established for the publication of the *Nigerian Daily Times*. In 1948, the company benefitted greatly from the technological innovations introduced by the *Daily Mirror*, a UK newspaper that had invested in it. The success of the Nigerian Printing and Publishing Company was an inspiration to many in the budding publishing business which led to massive growth in the industry. According to Abdul-Rasheed, "Information was flowing, shaping the thoughts, the outlook and perceptions of Nigerians" (2015, para. 7).

Between the 70s and 90s, the print industry in Nigeria was digitalized. This was due to the introduction of computers with supporting high-tech printing equipment and software such as desktop publishing applications which aided graphic design and text output. The Iggesund Holmen Group defined digital printing as

an umbrella term used to describe all systems which use any one of a number of technical solutions to replace the traditional pre-press stage in which physical image carriers such as cylinders or plates are created for multiple prints (2017).

Having replaced traditional printing, Kipphan (2001) further explained that with digital printing "several intermediate film-handling stages in ... printing ... [are] ... dispensed with, [and] it has become easier to meet the quality requirements of print jobs" as most publishers now use the computer-to-plate (CTP) method during printing which has revolutionized the industry, resulting in high-speed and quality publishing.

Today computer technology is the bedrock of the publishing industry, making printing and publishing easier, faster, more reliable, accurate and with high quality production. More so, publishing and printing can now be done at a more controlled cost and with prompt delivery. Most newspaper houses have also embraced the digital era and, in addition, have broadened their scope by engaging in the publication of books. This has made the publishing industry more vibrant, competitive, efficient and rewarding as publishers adopt new technologies to boost their demand, production and quality level.

Book Publishing and Information Dissemination in Nigeria

Book publishing is an integral aspect of information dissemination because it involves the mass-production of literature that spreads information, ideas and views very rapidly in different spheres of society - environmental, social, economic, political and religious - paving the way for major transformations in these spheres. Ibrahim and Sani (2012) define information thus:

[It] is a symbol (data, text, image, images, voice etc) that conveys meaning to the intended audience. It is the raw material for making decisions, for creating knowledge and fueling the modern organization. Information is the key to innovations and self-sustaining development.

Information, therefore, is a vital avenue through which individual and societal growth can be promoted, achieved and sustained. Information dissemination is relevant because access to information enlightens people through consciousness-raising and empowers them to participate effectively in the socio-economic and political activities that promote self and societal development.

A rise in the demand for education and, subsequently, the level of literacy in Nigeria, has led to the demand for information which, in turn, has resulted in the development of a vast publishing industry consisting of publishing houses, printing presses and equipment for the effective production of books.

At the start, many publishers were more concerned with publishing significant works by quality authors. However, with factors such as “advertising and the rise of a market economy ... publishing gradually became more competitive and more concerned with sales” (Campbell et al., 2010). This resulted in the dissemination of more information. Thus, books did not just aid the preservation and propagation of information and knowledge but also supported the growth of the vibrant publishing industry.

The Federal Government of Nigeria also supported the publishing industry by establishing pulp and paper making mills in the 1960s and 1970s. A good example is the Nigeria Paper Mill Limited (NPM) in Jebba, Kwara State (also known as Jebba Paper Mill) established with the aim of achieving self-sufficiency in the development and promotion of book publication to support various stages of education in the country, and to improve the on the quality and quantity of books in libraries in private and public institutions. Currently, there are many private paper mills among them Chizoba Nigeria Enterprises and Onward Paper Mill, both situated in Lagos.

The economic recession during the 1980s, however, led to a decline in information dissemination through the book sector. Recognizing the need for proper and quality information dissemination through books, the Federal Government's search for solutions resulted in the establishment of committees and task forces tasked with finding lasting solutions to the problem. Ike (2004) lists some of the committees involved in finding solutions to this problem as follows:

[the] 1983 Nigerian National Congress on Books, 1984 task force on the Scarcity of Books and Stationary, 1987 Panel on a Books Policy for Nigeria, 1989 ODA/World Bank Books Sector Study, 1990 National Council on Education Committee on Rationalization of Textbooks in Primary and Secondary Schools.

Subsequently, meetings, workshops and conferences were organized during which recommendations and strategies were proffered for implementation and improvements in book publishing, distribution and marketing, as well as equipping book sectors to meet the requirements of the national educational system. Since then, there has been a steady growth in the level and quality of production in the book publishing industry although there is still room for improvement.

Funding the Book Publishing Sector

Publishing and education play an integral role in national development because they promote and reinforce knowledge acquisition through the dissemination of information which enhances national development. For this reason, it was essential to keep the industry alive and thriving through proper funding.

By way of funding and sustaining the publishing industry, the government of Nigeria created an avenue for its nationals to invest in the industry by decreeing that “at least 60% equity participation in book publishing must be by Nigerian nationals” as provided by the 1978 Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree (Ike, 2004). This led to the indigenization of the industry and a decrease in the participation of foreign publishing firms such as Longman, Macmillan, Heinemann, Evans, and Oxford, which were dominant forces in the Nigerian publishing industry (Ike, 2004). Significantly, the book industry became grossly undercapitalized. This affected not only the output of the industry but also the quality and quantity of their production. Although the government made efforts to set up publishing companies to stem this problem, its efforts were largely unsuccessful. Private investors in independent presses had to step in to keep the industry afloat through the use of production techniques or options that were cost-effective.

The Role of Publishing Associations

Several associations have evolved in the publishing industry to safeguard and promote its interests in the dissemination of information. Among them are the Nigerian Publishers' Association (NPA) established in 1965 to regulate the operations of book publishers. Members must be registered limited liability companies that have published a stipulated number of books. Apart from the NPA, other regulating bodies and professional associations in the industry include the Nigerian Booksellers Association, Association of Nigeria Printers, Association of Nigerian Authors and Nigerian Library Association. Playing supporting roles are several writers' associations including the following: Association of Nigerian Authors, Academic & Non-fiction Authors Association of Nigeria, and Women Writers of Nigeria (Ike, 2004). These associations play major roles in the regulation of rules in the industry thus ensuring the successful and effective promotion of information dissemination through book production.

Copyright Laws

The Nigerian Copyright Commission is responsible for the enforcement of copyright laws to prevent the piracy of books. They are supported in this endeavour by the Nigerian Publishers Association to ensure that the rights of publishers and authors are not violated. The protection

of publishers and authors ensures the continuity of, and improvement in the dissemination of information in the sector.

Book Destination and Distribution

Book destination and distribution are the final part of the publishing process and key aspects of information dissemination. The successful and effective circulation of books gives many readers the opportunity to acquire the power associated with knowledge through the printed word. Most book publishing firms engage in marketing strategies such as advertising, book exhibitions and competitions to promote and aid the distribution of the books up to the point of their destination. Many have warehouses and distribution vehicles for nationwide distribution of the published books to different outlets such as bookstores and sales agencies. Currently, some publishers resort to the use of book clubs and mail order to effectively market their products. The application of effective strategies in book distribution, in turn, ensures effective information dissemination of literature and information.

Current Trends in Publishing

In Nigeria, many books are published locally and internationally to cater for primary and secondary schools, polytechnics, colleges of education, and universities in various subject areas and fields of knowledge such as the sciences, social sciences and the humanities. A great variety of books is, therefore, published: trade books, professional books, textbooks, reference books, religious books, as well as mass market paperbacks to name a few. To meet market demands, and remain relevant and in tune with international standards, publishers have had to keep abreast with current trends in the industry through the acquisition and use of current technology and skills. Some of these trends are discussed below.

The Use of Direct Imaging Technologies in Book Publishing

Direct Imaging (DI) is currently one of the fastest technologies in the printing and publishing industry in Nigeria. It involves the use of “print engines” that work with “a re-imageable master directly from data files ... mostly used for small to medium length repetitive print runs where the advantage lies in the machines fast make-ready time. (“Digital printing & direct imaging, para. 2). This technology was introduced into Nigeria in 2001 by Planet Press, Lagos. Today, in most cities in Nigeria, Direct Image printing is available. It is also very convenient for authors who want to engage in self-publishing as the machine is user friendly and does not require a large space. Clem and Link (2005) observed that “since the printed products created by the digital press require less setup for production than traditional printing methods, it is typically more economical (less cost per paper impression made by offset printing machine) for use in short-run printing situations”

Digital machines, such as Direct Image press, are available and marketed by Xerox, Konica Minolta, Hewlett Packard etc. They can also be obtained through agents of printing equipment and products or from marketers on the internet.

Production of Audio Books

The production of audio books is a major development in the publishing industry. It involves the incorporation of sound recording into publishing. Also known as books on tape or talking

books, they feature voices of famous personalities such as actors or actresses or a digital voice that reads abridged versions of popular books, usually popular fiction, to which readers listen like the radio.

Audio books are popular among readers who are visually challenged, drivers, and people engaged in exercising. Although audio books are available in Nigeria, they are not a feature of the Nigerian publishing industry due to the cost implications.

e-Books

The internet and social media have brought about massive transformations in the publishing industry which involve the exploration of processes of publication that go beyond digitalization. E-books are one such example. E-books are digital books that readers read on a computer by accessing them on a website. Some electronic books can be downloaded and accessed through portable reading devices or cell phones.

Publishers and authors in Nigeria are gradually making inroads into the e-book market such as Amazon's Kindle. However, e-books are yet to be as convenient as printed books. Campbell et al. acknowledge that the future market of the e-book in the publishing industry “will develop slowly as engineers try to figure out how to make digital books an improvement on printed books”.

Some Challenges in the Publishing Industry

The publishing industry has, over the years, faced many challenges some of which have proved to be impediments to its survival. These will be discussed below.

Piracy and Second-Hand Books

Piracy, the unauthorized downloading, publishing or use of works that are copyrighted, is an endemic problem in the book industry. It is a problem which affects the entire book publishing chain comprising authors, publishers, distributors, retailers, by robbing them of the financial benefits of their labour, while buyers and readers are subjected to low quality products. Often, buyers and readers who are subjected to pirated works lose faith in the publishers which affects the marketing of such works.

The sale of second-hand books at cheaper prices also has a harmful effect on the industry as it affects the revenue generation. This is because the purchasing of second-hand books by readers results in low turnover for publishers who will also find it difficult to produce new editions of such books. Copyright laws and policies should, therefore, be formulated and enforced by the government to protect the book chain from these two anomalies.

Lack of Advanced Publishing Technology

Many book publishers lack contemporary equipment as well as skills and techniques that will enable them to upgrade the quality and quantity of their production. For some, it is lack of finance due to low sales or low profit margins and, for others it is the lack of technical know-how. Finding avenues to overcome these two challenges will enable their businesses to prosper.

Intrusion of Internet-Based Publishing Houses

Many internet-based publishing houses have also emerged that offer custom design and distribution services to writers and aspiring writers who want to self-publish. Many writers are now taking advantage of this service to get their works published and marketed online thus by-passing established publishing houses to have their books printed on demand. A solution would be for Nigerian publishers to also offer some of these services to avoid losing jobs to them.

Censorship and Banned Books

Sometimes, governments practice political censorship to stop the circulation of books that promote ideas they consider radical or which challenge their authority. This results in a loss for the publishers.

Large Publishing Houses and Conglomerates

Many independent book publishers struggle financially because they are often under-cut in the pricing and promotion of books by larger publishing houses and conglomerates like bookstore chains some of which define the direction of the industry. Although such challenges are difficult to overcome, these publishers have the option of reviewing their pricing in order to attract more customers and break even.

Choosing the Right Publisher

On the part of the writer selecting the right publisher can be challenging. This is because the writer requires a publisher that will be transparent, efficient and give the best options required for the successful publication and marketing of his or her book. The writer must, therefore, be cautious in his choice to ensure that the work the standard is not compromised.

Conclusion

The significance of the role of publishing in the dissemination of information cannot be disputed. It is in recognition of this that the publishing industry has become an integral part of the developmental process of the nation. Having gone through various stages of development, the industry is now firmly entrenched in the age of digital revolution which has ushered in new trends as well as challenges which publishers must strive to control by being acquainted with current technologies and systems. This will prove to be of great benefit to them and the industry at large.

A noticeable and alarming aspect of publishing and the dissemination of information in Nigeria is the decline in reading culture which is of great concern. Many attribute this trend to the lack of awareness of the significance of reading in the acquisition of knowledge, and the digital revolution which has resulted in focus on the social media. Others also blame the high cost of books for the decline in reading. To keep reading alive for the effective dissemination of information and knowledge, publishers, government, institutions and interested organizations and individuals must initiate programmes such as workshops, literary festivals, conferences, and reading and writing competitions etc. to rekindle interest in reading. This will be of great benefit to readers, publishers and society as a whole.

By extension, promoting a better understanding of the educational sector (which is a large market) will also bring in better opportunities for publishers and improve the quality of books published in Nigeria, which could also restore interest in reading.

Finally, an improvement in the economy of the nation will be of great benefit to the industry. This is because a downturn in the economy always has an adverse effect on the art of publishing in Nigeria. Purchasing power also becomes low. The government should encourage authors, publishers and sellers by providing them with incentives such as soft loans. The reduction of taxes on publishing machines, prepress equipment and supporting resources, will go a long way in aiding book production by encouraging publishers to upgrade their equipment, and new and prospective investors to enter the industry. This will enable the industry to be current, productive and relevant.

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