

Assessment of The Emergence of E-Books As Antidotes To Paucity of Tertiary Textbooks In Nigeria

by
ADUBIKA, THOMAS

Abstract

The increasing penetration of the internet in all areas of life has led to the evolution of Electronic Books which has significantly changed the reading patterns and reading behaviours of people across the globe. Using a self administered questionnaire, a study was undertaken in the campuses of Five (5) tertiary institutions in Nigeria to access how the new innovation has stemmed scarcity of textbooks at the tertiary levels of education in Nigeria. Investigation was conducted in respect of awareness, availability, usage, source of e-books, frequency of use and problems encountered in the usage of electronic books. Results indicated that electronic books are still in the early stages of development in Nigeria as in most developing economies. Suggestions such as Tackling the power problem, Increasing internet presence, granting of waivers, tax reliefs and other forms of concession to vendors and aggregators were therefore recommended to widen the access of e-books into the Nigerian book ecosystem.

Introduction

The 21st Century which has been appropriately dubbed the “Information age” is characterised both by an exponential growth in information and a paradigm shift in information handling. Little wonder then that our world today is daily being bombarded with massive amount of information in multiple sources. Not only are we confronted with traditional sources such as printed books, newspapers, radio, television etc, we now have to also contend with the information superhighway, video conference and virtual reality. Emphasis now has shifted from possession to access. One of the most recent information handling sources is the electronic books otherwise referred to as e-books.

The e-Book generally emulates a real book but it should be understood to be a product of the virtual world of the internet. In other words, the e-Book possesses the same characteristics and outlook of the traditional print book but the main difference lies in the fact that the print book has been converted and stored in a format wherein it can be accessed digitally. Villano (2005) in what could be termed a futuristic fantasy had predicted”..... *A long time ago in a far away galaxy, college and university students pursued learning through the use of bound volumes of printed materials. They were called Textbooks and students lugged them all over the campuses in devices called book packs. Some of the books contained literally thousand of copies of pages weighing up to five pounds a piece. For years,*

*these textbooks were the soldiers of education, churning out knowledge from authors, through the publishers to the students. Then with the advent of the internet; they went the ways of the **dodo** birds and disappeared from the face of the earth”.* No matter how exaggerated the predictions of Villano has been, the reality of our modern time however is that textbooks sales have continue to sag and with their prices beyond the reach of average students so much so that college and university students are increasingly turning towards electronic publishing as an affordable alternative. But what really is e-book?

According to Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia (2010), an electronic book is a book length publication in digital form consisting of texts, images or both produced on, published through and readable on computer or other electronic devices. The Oxford Dictionary of English (2010) on its part defines the e-book as an electronic version of a printed book even though it can or does exist without any printed equivalent. e- books can therefore be summarised as an amalgamation of two words- Electronic and Books. Books in electronic formats can be read on a personal computer (PC), a personal digital Assistant (PDA) or on a specially designed electronic device called e-book Reader. The PDA is a portable computer that is compact enough to hold or keep in pockets. It helps to make reading and carrying of e-books so much convenient. With the PDA, one

can read an e-book anywhere and anytime, even while on a journey. Little under then that a **Sony** advertisement in 2007 describes the amazing nature of these hand held devices thus”.....*Imagine carrying an entire library in the pocket, find a question, look up a term, read the news, study a document for escape in a best selling novel, anywhere, anytime....*”

The e-book revolution is perhaps the most profound development in the publishing world ever since the Gutenberg era. This revolution in the opinions of enthusiasts is destined to not only change the reading habits of many but has also been widely acknowledged as a solution to the paucity of textbooks which is most pronounced at the tertiary level of education in Nigeria. Early e-books were generally written for speciality areas and for limited audiences. They were meant to be read only by small and devoted interest groups. The scopes of the subject matter of these e-books according to Wikipedia (2010) include- hardware, manufacturing techniques and other subjects. In the 1990s however, the general availability of the internet made electronic transfer of files much easier hence the upward surge in e-books. In the late 1990 several publishing companies popularised the e-Books. These devices display the textbooks on small screens designed to make reading easy. E-Books are specially designed to be portable and light. Many models include a high-tech stylus that readers can use to highlight or make notes on the text.

The 20th Century technological devices such as radio, television motion pictures, tape recorders, computers, CD-Rom devices challenged books as the major means of communication. However, because the book is so much easy to carry and care for, it remained a primary means of communication and dissemination of knowledge, for instruction and pleasure, in skills and arts and for the recording of experiences whether real or imagined. Technology has continued to impact on the book industry and publishers are seeking out new ways to experience and distribute or share information without using paper. The shifting digital terrain has therefore opened new vistas to traditional book publishers who are now catching in on the

potentials of digital publications and working to attract a major share in the market by focussing on archiving tertiary texts. And so with the new technologies such as internet, web design, electronic editing, print-on-demand, online subscription services, the publishing industry has turned full circle from the Gutenberg era

Electronic Books can store the same amount of information found in several paper books and they also offer some of the prime advantages of paper books. They are easy to carry and can be marked up. E-books are however rapidly becoming viable alternatives and are providing growing advantages over the traditional medium (printed Books).

Wilson (2009) reported that over 2 million free e-books were available for download and that users with mobile data connections could access these titles anytime and anywhere without necessarily storing them on their devices. Thus the book can be offered indefinitely without ever going out of print. In terms of space, the space that a comparatively sized print book will occupy, an e-reader can potentially contain thousand of e-books limited only by the memory capacity. And so when space is at a premium, it can be an advantage that an e-book collection takes up little space and weight.

Paulsen (2012) observed that many people have transitioned to e-books to fulfil their reading pleasures. The immediacy and portability of e-books make them a viable alternative to printed books in the same way electronic books have assisted college students with limited resources, and a long list of required course textbooks to save some money as the textbooks are cheaper to buy or download.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria once enjoyed a vibrant publishing industry with perhaps the largest number of publishing houses in Africa. The federal government established paper and pulp making industries at Jebba and Oku-Iboku as part of an elaborate plan for achieving self sufficiency in the production of books for all tiers of Education-Nursery/Primary Secondary and

Tertiary levels. Unfortunately all or most of these effort collapsed following the nation's economic down turn of the 1980s and the recent global economic meltdown being experienced since 2010. A Book famine has thus descended on the nation. Despite government efforts at reversing this unhealthy state of the book industry as demonstrated in the number of task forces, study groups, conferences and committees set up to make recommendations on various facets of book production and distribution, including ways to equip the book industry and make it meet the needs of the educational system, the resultant effect of the glut have priced recommended textbooks beyond what the average student can afford.

Ike (2004) reported that 90% of the annual output of the books published in Nigeria is in the area of textbooks for primary and secondary education. This results in lopsidedness in favour of primary and secondary school textbooks as against tertiary education including monotechnics, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and Universities. This also militate against the availability professional books, reference books and general books including creative writing, general interest books that aid life-long education.

Despite several past intervention efforts by government to provide books for the school system including the N70m 1989 Federal government Book Aid programme to schools, the 1991 World Bank US \$120million credit facility for the provision of suitable and appropriate foundation for the implementation of 6 years Primary Education improvement project and the multi-million U.S dollar World Bank credit facility to enable outright importation of foreign textbooks and journals for Federal Universities. The Education Tax Fund (ETF) now Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) to enable various educational institution to buy library books amongst host of developmental projects, the desired textbooks are still not readily available hence the resort to electronic books.

Research Questions

The study sought to find clues to the following research questions:

1. How readily available are electronic books in the tertiary tier of education in Nigeria?
2. What are reasons for using e-books by students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria?
3. How frequently do students of tertiary institutions consult e-books?
4. What is the impact of e-books in stemming the pervading scarcity of tertiary textbooks in Nigeria?
5. What are the problems encountered in the use of electronic Books at the tertiary tier of education in Nigeria?

Objectives of the study

The main purpose of this study was to assess the impact of e-books in mitigating scarcity of tertiary textbooks in Nigeria. In specific terms, the study sought to:

1. Ascertain the level of awareness of e-Books amongst the relevant stakeholders at the tertiary levels of education in Nigeria.
2. Investigate the availability of e-book at the tertiary level of education in Nigeria.
3. Ascertain the reasons for using e-book in tertiary level of education in Nigeria
4. Determine the extent and frequency of use of e-books at the tertiary tier of education in Nigeria.
5. Identify problems encountered in the use of e-books at tertiary level of education in Nigeria.

Significance of the study

The result of the study will highlight and bring to focus the abundant opportunities, options and alternatives offered by the new shifting digital terrain in providing a cost effective access to information and knowledge at the tertiary tier of education in Nigeria.

Scope and limitation of study

The study focuses on the emergence of e-books as antidotes to paucity to tertiary textbooks with respondents drawn from the campuses of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, University of Lagos, Yaba College of Technology, Kaduna Polytechnic and Federal College of Education Zaria. Due to the expansive nature of tertiary

education in Nigeria, the study was restricted only to the above mentioned of the several citadels of learning in Nigeria. Therefore, the extent to which the findings of this study meet the needs of all other tertiary institutions in Nigeria is the limitation of the study.

Methodology

A purposive sampling technique was adopted in the choice of respondents for the study. The survey instrument- “**Student use of e-books**” (SUEB) was designed and administered on respondents in the campuses of the institutions under study. The choice of these institutions was based on the prevalence and availability of e-books in courses offered by these institutions and in collection of their institutions libraries.

The population of the study was **200** i.e. **40** each across the five institutions. The respondents were randomly chosen based on their

Table 1: Awareness of e-books

Institutions	Yes	No
Ahmadu Bello University Zaria	32	2
University of Lagos	35	3
Yaba College of Technology Yaba.	31	4
Kaduna Polytechnic	33	2
Federal College of Education, Zaria	30	3
Total	161	14

Source: Field survey Data

Table 2: Usage of e-books

Institutions	Yes	No
Ahmadu Bello University Zaria	20	14
University of Lagos	21	16
Yaba College of Technology	19	19
Kaduna Polytechnic	19	14
Federal College of Education Zaria	20	13
Total	99	76

Source: Field survey Data

availability when the researcher or his field assistants visited each of the institutions to administer the questionnaires. Of the **182** questionnaires returned, **175** copies were found usable giving a return rate of **87.5%**. Data were analysed using frequency and percentages.

Findings

Level of awareness and actual usage of e-Books

Table 1a shows that **92%** of students are aware of e-books even though **57%** in table 1b claimed to have actually used them in the course of their work. This support an online poll survey conducted by the **Daily Trust Newspapers (2012)** which shows that up to **43%** of Nigerians are aware of the latest book technology sweeping through the world of publishing .

Table 3: Sources of e-books

Sources	Frequency	%
Bookshops	15	8.57
Library	64	36.57
Internet	82	46.85
Lecturers/colleagues and friends	14	8
Total	175	100

Source: Field survey Data

Table 4: Reasons for using e-books

Reason	Frequency	%
Research	122	69.75
General reading (fiction)	16	9.13
Communication	18	10.21
Entertainment	15	8.53
Others	4	0.028
Total	175	100

Source: Field survey Data

Table 5: Frequency of Using e-books

Duration	Frequency	%
Daily	10	5.71
Weekly	30	17.14
Fortnightly	24	13.71
Monthly	86	49.14
Others	25	14.28
Total	175	100

Source: Field survey Data

Table 2 depict the use of e-books by tertiary institutions in Nigeria 56.6% of respondents use e-books while 43.4% claimed that they have not used e-books. This finding also confirms the DAILY TRUST online survey of the emerging prevalence in Nigeria.

Table 3 shows that Download from the internet is the prevalent source of e-book amongst respondents **46.85%**, Library sources account for **36.57%** while purchases from bookstores and borrowing from lecturers, colleagues and friends ranked next with **8.57** and **8%** respectively.

Research and educational purposes formed the chief reasons for using e-book by respondents **69.75%** reasons in order of importance include communication (**10.21%**), general reading (fiction) **9.13%**, entertainment **8.53%** while other reasons account for **0.028%** as depicted in table 4.

Frequency of using e-books

Respondent were asked to indicate how often they use e-book. Their responses are analysed in table 5.

Table 6: Problems encountered in the use of e-books

Problem	Frequency	%
High cost	50	28.57
Irregular power supply	40	22.85
Slow internet connectivity	46	26.28
Difficulty in accessing Relevant information	25	14.28
Others	14	8
Total	175	100

Source: Field survey Data

Table 6 highlights the problems encountered by respondents while using e-books. The most prevalent is the high cost of acquisition **28.57%**. This may not be unconnected with the fact that content aggregators of e-book are foreign based and in most cases will require payments in foreign currencies. Other problems encountered in the use of electronic books include slow internet connectivity **26.28%**, irregular power supply **22.85%**, and difficulty in accessing relevant information **14.28%** while other reasons account for 8%.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that e-books are still in the early stages of development in Nigeria as in most developing economies. There are reasons however to believe that they would be available and accessible in due course to users. Although the overall use of e-books is still relatively low compared to print books and other types of digital content, Book publishers, Bookshops and Libraries have witnessed significant growth in patrons demands for e-book titles especially new releases and best sellers.

E-books have supplemented rather than supplanted the printed books, so while the pixels and pulp will co-exist for some time, the inevitable move to e-books world will be mostly felt by students, higher institutions and the academic. The government will however do well to tackle power problem and increase internet connectivity so as to widen access into the new Book ecosystem. Generous incentives in form of Tax reliefs, waivers, concessions and other

forms of incentives such as foreign exchange discounts should be granted to aggregators, vendors and other publishing companies so the price of acquisition and purchase of e-books most especially tertiary textbooks will reduce and therefore will be affordable.

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