

Print vs online, and the 'digital revolution' in Africa

by

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There is a great deal of excitement nowadays about digital publishing on the African continent and, most recently, about e-book reading devices that may serve as a catalyst to foster a new culture of reading. The term 'digital revolution' keeps popping up in dozens of articles and news stories; it is a term that has perhaps been used rather too liberally, sometimes for projects that are anything but revolutionary.

This article takes a critical look at the print vs online debate in Africa, taking stock of the current position as it relates to electronic publishing and the use of electronic reading devices in (English-speaking) sub-Saharan Africa, and the rapidly changing publishing environment on the continent. It describes and critically examines a number of projects and initiatives that are concerned with digital printing and publishing, and provision of e-book reading devices.

The article also touches upon another topic that is closely associated with digital media, namely that of the somewhat contentious area of self-publishing, and the phenomenal rise in digital self-publishing in Africa in recent years.

An Appendix reviews a selection of some of the now rapidly increasing amount of literature that has appeared about digital publishing in Africa over the last year or two, which have been added to the constantly updated online database of *Publishing, Books, & Reading in Sub-Saharan Africa* <http://www.hanszell.co.uk/pbrssa/index.shtml>, currently containing almost 2,800 annotated records.

It should be added that the 'digital revolution' does of course apply right across all media, and it is not only book publishers that are struggling to adjust to the different publishing landscape and trying to find the right balances. However, the implications of the new digital environment as it relates to newspaper publishing, publishing of scholarly journals, or magazines, are not examined in this article.



Leapfrogging into the information age?

Many years ago, first with the arrival of the microchip and the computer, then desktop publishing, followed by new printing technologies such as print on demand, and more recently the Internet, some people were prophesizing that this would revolutionize publishing on the continent, and would enable publishers in Africa to leapfrog into electronic publishing and the new information age.

However, in practice – other than the phenomenal growth of mobile phone use in Africa – it turned out that there was not in fact a great deal of leapfrogging, although there has certainly been growth and progress in many African countries as African publishers are trying to take advantage of new developments in printing technology, and have

also embraced – albeit still to a limited extent – the exciting opportunities offered by the Internet. Although formidable obstacles remain, it is also true that ICT penetration in Africa has slowly but steadily made considerable progress.

With the arrival of e-books, and e-reading devices such as Kindle, we are now once again hearing the same pronouncements of a 'digital revolution' in Africa. Who needs old-fashioned books? Who needs libraries anymore? Print is dead, the digital takeover is inevitable; publishers will go bust unless they go digital, e-books is the only way to go, etcetera.

Meantime there is also a great deal of talk, much of it ill-informed, that African publishers are being left behind in the digital revolution. Moreover, in some news stories and blogs we are being told that in many parts of Africa there are only a very limited number of traditionally published books, that there are virtually no 'decent' bookshops in most African countries, or that before the arrival of e-readers the only solution to the dearth of books in Africa was shipping donated books from abroad. This is nonsense. Pronouncements of this kind completely ignore the fact that there *is* in fact quite a lively and – to some extent – a flourishing indigenous book industry in many parts of the continent; and there are some excellent bookshops at least in the urban areas.

Moving to a digital environment

Some of the organizations promoting their digital projects have stated that if only local publishers were to embrace digital publishing, it could 'revolutionize' reading in the developing world. Statements of this nature are both simplistic, and usually devoid of the realities on the ground. What is probably true is that there is still apprehension among African publishers about the digital environment, the fear of the unknown and what are still uncharted waters for many of them. Fear of piracy also remains a major issue. Not surprisingly, publishers are hesitant to digitize their books until digital and online content are seen to be secure from piracy and illegal distribution.

Mary Jay, CEO of the Oxford-based but African owned African Books Collective Ltd (ABC) <http://www.africanbookscollective.com/> (the worldwide marketing and distribution organization for over 130 independent African publishers, from 24 countries), believes it is perhaps not really a matter of fear, "more difficulty of access to information which could help guide them. There are no perfect answers for them, any more than for publishers in developed countries. Thus they are potentially prey to commercial operators pressing their 'services', which need careful evaluation and judgement."

One significant e-commerce barrier is the issue of secure payment on online platforms, and sometimes also a lack of understanding and practise with these still relatively new methods of payment. The payment platforms and an absence of localised payment mechanisms – for the payment of e-books, as well as print books – remain a problem for many African publishers, and their being able to access proceeds from sales locally rather than via overseas accounts, such as for payments via PayPal.

Additionally, some African publishers are probably still not sufficiently conversant with encryption tools, digital assets and rights management, and the access control technologies and security systems that could assist them – albeit with some caveats – to control access to their digital content, and prevent unauthorized uses.

Some of the new digital technology has been more fully embraced than others, particularly print on demand (POD), and the aforementioned African Books Collective (ABC) has played a pioneering role in this area, gradually working with African publishers to demonstrate to them the many advantages of POD production. Based on PDF files supplied by the publisher, it allows ABC to print any number of copies for a fixed unit cost, quickly and economically, and without publishers having to ship physical stocks of their books at great expense. It also means publishers can generate potentially higher sales through never being out of stock. There is a caveat however, and ABC says that while this can work very well for scholarly titles, it is not so cost effective for lower-priced literature titles, while children's books can be problematic.

Africa is the fastest growing region for mobiles in the world, and most observers seem to agree that mobile phone platforms are probably the most fertile ground for new approaches to book publishing on the continent, promoting books at relatively modest cost, to a much wider audience than was hitherto possible, and allowing new and innovative ways to deliver content to users. The concept of using mobile technology to support e-learning, especially for distant learners, is also gaining ground in a number of African countries.

It is evident that local content development is one of the key issues, but African publishers will probably need to become a bit more pro-active to ensure that they will play a dominant role in giving direction to content development, and don't miss out or are left behind. For example, the annual e-learning Africa reports published by E-Learning Africa <http://www.elearning-africa.com/index.php> present some of the most comprehensive analysis and documentation about e-learning in practice on the continent. However, while the latest 2012 volume http://www.elearning-africa.com/media_library_publications_ela_report_2012.php contains a chapter on how African entrepreneurs are training for new opportunities, there is a curious lack of contributions offering the perspective of indigenous African publishers.

There are of course many barriers and challenges in the use of e-books in educational and academic contexts, whether in Africa or elsewhere. A very useful primer on the topic was released in December 2012 by the UK-based JISC Observatory, and which may also be of considerable interest to the African book professions. Entitled *Preparing for Effective Adoption and Use of Ebooks in Education* (JISC Observatory TechWatch Series, Report No. 4, Final Version, December 2012) <http://observatory.jisc.ac.uk/docs/ebooks-in-education.pdf>, the report introduces some key concepts related to e-books in general, discusses the technical, cultural and legal challenges that need to be addressed for the successful adoption of e-books in education, and provides an overview of the most popular e-book technologies currently adopted within Higher and Further Education institutions in the UK as they start to incorporate the use of e-books.

E-books and digital content: opening up new vistas?

The introduction and adoption of digital content and electronic reading devices is changing the way some readers consume content in the countries of the North, and elsewhere. It can be said that e-books have now become mainstream, although not everybody is enthusiastic about them. Many people have considerable misgivings, and there have been dire predictions and prophecies of doom and gloom for the future of literature; but whether we like it or not, it is true that electronic readers may well be transforming the way some people like to enjoy their books. And these devices are

probably here to stay. However at this time at least – and other than a large number of self-published digital e-books – there is still relatively little African content available for purchase, although some local content is now made available for school children and students via the Worldreader projects (see below), and by one or two other smaller not-for-profit initiatives.

On a commercial basis, and primarily targeting the e-book markets overseas, the African Books Collective <http://www.africanbookscollective.com/browse/ebooks> is now offering a substantial number of e-books in several categories, including fiction and non-fiction, poetry, collections, as well as scholarly titles, which can be ordered from several of the leading e-book retailers in the world.

Within Africa, the range of e-books available is still quite small, but a few publishers in Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria for example, now offer, or are about to offer, e-versions of a range of their adult and children's titles, some of them still in simple PDF format that can be easily downloaded on even relatively modest smartphones that can run Java. A number of Nigerian publishers now also offer some of their titles with a choice of either e-book format, or purchase on a print on demand basis.

A promising new initiative in Kenya is a pilot project using tablets initiated by technology start-up eLimu <http://e-limu.org/>. Simply designed for children to use, the interactive devices are loaded with a multimedia version of Kenya's syllabus. Following trials in a small number of schools, the tablets are now set to be more widely deployed in Kenyan primary schools as from 2013. Described as an ed-tech initiative, eLimu incorporates content correlating to the national curriculum, enriched with animations, videos, songs, music, games and quizzes, thus aiming to make the learning process more interactive, interesting, and engaging for children.

South Africa has probably the liveliest e-book market at this time, where it has been realized that not only the manner in which people are choosing and buying books has changed, but that e-books and e-readers may well offer a number of advantages over print, especially in terms of accessibility and price. Many South African publishers and retailers are currently working on e-book strategies and are trying to position themselves in this new market. In a drive to make electronic content such as e-books more accessible to South Africans, some local companies are also launching their own e-readers. For example Kalahari.com <http://www.kalahari.com/>, one of the country's leading retailers of e-content, have recently released their Gobii, the first e-book device aimed exclusively at the South African market. It supports a wide range of formats and also plays music and video and has an image viewer.

Among other new South African e-book ventures are MampoerShorts <http://mampoer.co.za/>, which offers quality non-fiction 'mini' e-books, a series of short, incisive opinion pieces by prominent South African writers and commentators in e-Pub format. Covering areas such as politics, sports, business, health and travel, they are easily downloaded on Kindle Fire, iPads, Android tablets, Kobo, or on any smart phone. And Lexis Legal and Professional recently launched its LexisNexis eBooks, allowing professionals to visit its online bookstore at www.lexisnexis.co.za/ebooks to choose from a variety of electronic books aimed at the legal, tax, accounting and financial services industries.

A useful set of articles on the e-book markets in South Africa, and digital developments generally, can be found on the e-book pages of the South African Booksellers

Association <http://www.sabooksellers.com/category/ebooks/>, and discussions and debates on e-book issues also appear regularly in its lively *Bookmark* online magazine, for example its most recent December 2012 issue, which can be downloaded at <http://www.sabooksellers.com/wp-content/assets/Bookmark-Vol32-DIGITAL.pdf>.

Several companies now also offer African publishers to convert their books to e-formats, for the converted books then to become available in major e-book retail outlets such as Amazon/Kindle or Kobo. For example the US organization Digital Divide Data can now serve clients from a new facility in Nairobi <http://www.digitaldividedata.com/kenya/>. For Kenyan publishers it can provide a complete set of services to digitize, mobilize and monetize their publications in digital format; and through its e-books portal <http://www.ekitabu.com/> it offers over 250,000 titles in e-Pub format in many different categories across fiction, romance, religion, education, history, engineering, business, law and more, albeit only 48 Kenyan titles at this time (December 2012). To Kenyan readers, it provides the ability to buy and read e-books on any computer or Android mobile device, purchasing them by using M-Pesa or a credit card. M-Pesa (Kiswahili for 'Mobile Money'), a joint venture between mobile phone giant Vodafone and Kenya's Safaricom <http://www.safaricom.co.ke/index.phpa>, is a mobile money transfer system that allows those without a bank account to transfer funds as quickly and easily as sending a text message. A very large proportion of the adult population in Kenya now use the service to send money to relatives, to pay for shopping, or pay utility bills. (M-Pesa also operates in Tanzania, albeit less successfully at this time.)

On the educational side, while recognizing that the conventional print format will continue to have to form a significant part of their lists, several African publishers have plans, or have already embarked on programmes, to develop e-books by digitizing some of their existing title or developing new titles with local content for publication in e-book formats.

Some digital textbook publishing platforms have recently been launched, for example those manufactured by Yudu Education <http://yudu.com/education.php>, that enables publishers to digitize and deliver multimedia, interactive textbooks for tablets, laptops and desktop computers, for cross-platform access. The company is currently promoting these products in Southern Africa.

There has been some experimenting with digital textbooks and the use of e-readers in the classroom in the US, although it doesn't seem to have taken off thus far, and I am not aware of any such pilot projects in Africa at this time, although there is of course widespread use of electronic resources in academic institutions throughout Africa. According to a recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* <http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/students-find-e-textbooks-clumsy-and-dont-use-their-interactive-features/39082> a number of universities in the USA have recently tried a new model for delivering textbooks in the hope of saving students money. It required purchase of e-textbooks and charging students a materials fee to cover the costs. However, an evaluation of some of those pilot projects indicated that many students found the e-textbooks clumsy and still prefer print. While they praised the e-books for helping them save money, they didn't like reading on electronic devices. Many of them complained that the e-book platform was hard to navigate. In addition, it was found that they didn't use the e-books' collaborative features, which included the ability to share notes or create links within the text.

E-reading devices such as Kindle, quite apart from being rather fragile, are probably still far too expensive for the majority of African readers, although prices are very likely to drop in the near future, and more robust models will probably soon become available. However, e-books are now increasingly used in academic environments, as well as for self-education. It will be important therefore to provide basic skills training in the use of e-books and e-reading devices, and at the same time create greater awareness of the availability of numerous freely accessible, high quality electronic resources.



New projects and initiatives

Over the last few years there have been a number of new projects intended to solve the problems of the 'digital divide' in Africa and other parts of the developing world. They have generated quite a bit of press attention and have created headlines both in Africa and elsewhere.

Below I describe some of these projects.

Worldreader

The One Kindle Per Child or the Worldreader project <http://www.worldreader.org/>, founded in 2008 by former Amazon senior executive David Risher (who headed Amazon's Kindle division) has focussed on bringing e-reading devices to classrooms in Africa, primarily in three African countries at this time, Ghana, Kenya and Uganda, with the aim to create a new reading culture. Using these devices it has reportedly brought over 200,000 e-books to children in these countries and which has included access, Worldreader reports, to about 500 African-published textbooks and story books. Worldreader says "using e-readers loaded with thousands of local and international e-books, we provide children with the books they want and need, so they can improve their lives." The Kindles used for the project can run for nearly a month on a single charge, and Worldreader says many of the students charge their Kindles at school, where power is usually available at least intermittently in the rural areas where it has distributed the devices.

Worldreader also reported <http://paidcontent.org/2012/04/03/e-books-for-smart-kids-on-dumb-phones/> that it has plans to launch an e-reading app designed for basic mobile phones, as in many African countries a large proportion of the population own a cell phone of some kind and, given the elevated penetration of the mobile network across the continent, that could well be a smart move. And most recently it reported to have formed a partnership with the Caine Prize for African Writing <http://www.caineprize.com/>, which will allow the Worldreader book app to include some of the prize-winning stories, which can be read for free on Internet-enabled mobile devices.

Worldreader works with a number of partner and donor organizations, and also raises funds through private donations. For more details about the WorldReader project consult their press kit at <http://www.worldreader.org/downloads/press-kit.pdf>.

In Ghana Worldreader conducted a pilot study from October 2010 to July 2011, categorized as a Global Development Alliance programme between the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Worldreader organization, and entitled the iREAD (Impact on Reading of E-Readers And Digital Content) Ghana Study. The pilot

study aimed to give Ghana public school students access to books through e-reader technology, using Kindles supplied by Amazon. Ten Ghanaian publishers participated in the pilot project by having a range of their books digitized and made available on the Kindle, mostly books for children and young people, and a small number of textbooks. Hundreds of books from a large number of US publishers are also included. Random House, Simon and Schuster, Penguin Books, and Harper Collins are among Worldreader's core partners and, together with over 400 other US and UK publishers, have donated e-book titles for use in the project. In Kenya, Worldreader partners with Longhorn Publishers. It provides schools, communities and partners with a list of textbooks and storybooks that are available in its programmes. Based on their interests and needs, recipients then choose which books they want loaded onto the e-readers. Worldreader now plans to extend its activities into Malawi and Tanzania.

ILC Africa, <http://www.ilcafrica.com/> an Accra-based private organization, served as the monitoring and evaluation advisory team for the project, and an evaluation report *iREAD Ghana Study: Final Evaluation Report* <http://worldreader.org/uploads/Worldreader%20ILC%20USAID%20iREAD%20Final%20Report%20Jan-2012.pdf> was published in January 2012. The report indicates that, overall, the majority of students and teachers from the iREAD Ghana Pilot Study had positive experiences with the e-reader. "Feedback from the mid-term and final evaluation supports the general sense that the e-reader has a role in the future of the Ghanaian public school curriculum." The pilot study findings identified effects related to the use of the e-reader, both positive and negative. Positive effects included increased access to books, increased enthusiasm towards reading, improved resources for teachers, technology skills gained, and increased performance on standardized scores at the primary level. However, there were also many challenges to the management of e-readers within the pilot project. The study identified breakage as the greatest project concern, as almost half of the e-readers experienced some breakage. Another negative aspect identified was that certain e-reader functions caused frustration such as accidental book deletion or permanent freezing, and electrical charging issues were sometimes also problematic. Although 43% of the school pupils had never used a computer before, they were very quick to discover the multimedia aspects of the e-reader, such as music and Internet access. (Kindle includes an experimental Web browser and can play MP3s). Not surprisingly perhaps, this led to a measure of 'extra-curricular' access to music and searching the Internet during class time, or students using the e-readers for entertainment or playing games.

The evaluation report does not offer a great deal in terms of the views and perspectives of the participating Ghanaian publishers, but in analysing factors affecting long-term sustainability of the use of e-readers, it was recognized that digital publishing reduces transportation costs, storage costs, paper/ink costs, and the risks associated with conventional paper publishing. Additionally, the report states,

e-books would be more profitable than paper books because they would provide publishers with access to wider markets inside and outside of Ghana. Furthermore, publishers are attracted to digital publishing because it would allow them to trial new books digitally before taking the risk of investing paper, ink, and storage to print paper books that might sell unsuccessfully.

Worldreader says they are actively talking to publishers to increase local content, and that clearly must be one of the most crucial issues. What seems to be missing though, at this time at least, are independent views from the Ghanaian publishers who

participated in the project, the benefits they have derived, and how they view the sustainability of the project over the long term. However, from personal feedback I received from one Ghanaian publisher, the scheme seems to have been favourably received by a large proportion of local publishers; and one positive side effect of the initial pilot project has been that it has also given exposure to Ghanaian-published children's books beyond the borders of Ghana, for example in the US, and many of the books are now available on Amazon. Titles in local languages are not included in the scheme at this time, although this may well change in the future.

For the pilot project, participating Ghanaian publishers made content available for free in return for having their titles digitized and converted to e-Pub format. But when Worldreader subsequently realized the commercial potentials of the project, they negotiated contracts with the publishers, whereby Worldreader retains 30% of sales proceeds to cover some of their administrative costs, while the publisher is paid 70% in royalties, with regular sales reporting for all titles covered at this stage. That seems fairly generous, although this writer is not acquainted with the precise nature and extent (i.e. marketing and distribution rights, formats, pricing, length of contracts, etc.) of the digital rights ceded by Ghanaian publishers under such contracts, and to sell their content via Amazon/Kindle. While the royalty terms sound attractive in principle, the publishers will probably do well to consider all their options carefully before granting rights internationally.

One obvious question that arises is whether sales from e-books are likely to affect potential future sales of the corresponding print products. Interestingly, there are apparently no serious concerns about this. One of the participating publishers in the project, Woeli Dekutsey, believes that the activities of Worldreader in the digital area will actually complement rather than compete with, or erode local sales, for the print product; and that "the digital platform actually extends the market of our books, which first started their life as conventional paper-based creations." He adds "my belief is that for us in Africa, the paper medium will coexist with the digital platform for a long time to come."

One Laptop Per Child (OLPC)

While not directly related to digital publishing, this is a project that ought to be mentioned here, as it provides children with access to digital content and e-book reading.

The mission of the Cambridge Massachusetts-based One Laptop per Child Foundation (OLPC) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMeX2D4AOjM&feature=player_embedded is "to empower the world's poorest children through education". It aims to provide each child with a rugged, low-cost, low-power, connected laptop. To this end, it designed hardware, content and software for collaborative, enjoyable, and self-empowered learning. OLPC hope that by providing children around the world – and especially those in developing countries – with these simple laptops they will open new opportunities to explore, experiment, and express themselves. Their belief is that with access to this type of tool, children will become more engaged in their own education, and actively learn, share, and create together. The little green laptops are generally sold to governments and issued to children by schools on the basis of one laptop per child. OLPC receives financial support from a number of organizations, and funds are also raised through grassroots donation efforts. OLPC says that for a \$199 donation it can give a laptop to a child in the developing world.

The XO laptop is Linux-based, with a dual-mode display, one mode is full-colour and transmissive/instructive, the other is black and white, reflective, and sunlight-readable at three times the resolution. The XO-1.5 has a 1GHz processor and 1GB of memory, with 4GB of Flash disk. It does not have a hard disk, but it does have three USB ports and an SD-card slot for expansion. (A lower power model, the XO-1.75, that uses roughly 30% less power, has also been launched). Watch a video of the XO laptop at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMeX2D4AOjM&feature=player_embedded.

The laptops have wireless broadband that, among other features, allows children to work as an ad-hoc network: each laptop can 'talk' to its nearest neighbours, creating a local area network even if there may be no routers nearby. The laptops are designed to be highly power efficient, enabling the use of various power systems, conventional or solar power, generators, or wind or water power. The XO laptop is about the size of a textbook and lighter than a lunchbox. Thanks to its flexible design and inclusion of a transformer hinge mechanism, it can serve for standard laptop use, e-book reading, or playing games.

OLPC says that over 2.4 million children and teachers in numerous parts of the developing world, and elsewhere, now have XO laptops. In Africa there are currently XOs in ten African countries, the largest number in Ethiopia and Nigeria, with over with 6,000 distributed in each country.

The Espresso Book Machine (EBM)

The much hyped Espresso Book Machine (EBM), the creation of On Demand Books (ODB) <http://ondemandbooks.com/> was installed at the World Bank InfoShop in Washington DC in 2006. Later on in that year ODB installed a second beta machine at the Library of Alexandria in Egypt, to print books in Arabic. Since then there have been installations (primarily in libraries and bookshops) at some 150 locations, mostly in the US and Canada, but also a small number in other parts of the world. Through a partnership with Xerox the EBM is available for sale or on a leasing and servicing basis. The EBM is capable of producing high quality paperbacks, with a colour cover, in just minutes; finished copies of the book can then be printed in any standard trim size, in any quantity, thus eliminating the problem of minimum print runs.

In order to print material the Espresso Book Machine draws on content from EspressoNet, an on-demand books digital network with over 8 million titles. The EBM can also be used as a straight printer for books and magazines. Writers who self-publish their work can upload their own books for producing a printed physical book and, if desired, they can then be included in EspressoNet, http://ondemandbooks.com/selfserve/selfserve_selfpublishing.php. For a good overview and a page devoted to FAQs about this clever invention see http://www.lightningdemandpress.com/pdf/EBM_Brochure.pdf.

When it was first launched it was suggested that the EBM had great potential for use in Africa, both for traditional publishers and for self-publishing. Back in 2008 it was announced in the trade press <http://www.thebookseller.com/news/espresso-plans-african-mission.html> that ODB had helped to found a non-profit organization, Books On Demand for Africa (BODA), to be headed by Dirk Koehler (former publisher at the World Bank) and that BODA was undertaking an exploratory project researching the viability of three pilot centres in Africa (Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa) for the Espresso Book Machine. However, there has been no further news about these pilot centres, and from which one can probably deduce that they were not considered

viable. At this time there is only one machine in sub-Saharan Africa, in South Africa, which was installed in July 2012 by Self-Publish Press in association with Xerox at the Main Library at the University of Johannesburg, reportedly purchased at a cost of about one million SA Rand (or approximately \$125,000). Watch a video how the EBM works at this location at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6KmkqIVLGE>.

It might be added that the owner/lease holder of an EBM can also pay to have a publisher's catalogue (or parts thereof) for download through Lightning Source (LS) <http://www1.lightningsource.com/>, an Ingram Content Group company that provides a suite of inventory-free on-demand print and distribution services for books to the publishing industry. For example, the African Books Collective has given permission (i.e. a 3-way agreement, ABC-LS-OnDemand), for books to be printed on EBMs if the operator has paid to have the catalogue software.

3BillionBooks, Inc.

Almost ten years ago back in 2003 I wrote (*The Book & the Computer*, November 12, 2003 http://www.honco.net/os/index_0310.html, no longer accessible) about a new print-on-demand project that is perhaps worth re-visiting here, 3BillionBooks, Inc., jointly founded by Michael Smolens and Jason Epstein. The website address at the time was www.3billionbooks.com but those pages are no longer accessible, and this organization, and the project, seems to have gone quiet, although a Google search still finds a New York address. It was the aim of 3BillionBooks to become the first worldwide distributor of books printed on demand at point of sale. That would have entailed taking orders placed online, then sending the digitized file of the requested titles out through its global network to the appropriate 'book machine', generally the one nearest to the customer. 3BillionBooks was described as a 'dream' and it would require an estimated US\$4-5 million of funding to get it started. It seems it has remained a dream, for the time being at least, or the project may have been integrated as part of the Espresso Book Machine (EBM) mentioned above.

In principle, 3BillionBooks sounded exciting, innovative and potentially empowering. It could, for example, be a tremendous boost in making books available in Africa's rural areas and for the publication of indigenous language materials. However, this writer, for one, was a bit apprehensive about a reported "low cost (under \$100,000), totally automatic book machine, which can produce between 15-20 library quality paperback books per hour...without any human intervention," as the 3BB website described it at the time. Once it was able to take off, 3BillionBooks proposed to operate initially in emerging economies, in markets where according to them there was "relatively no competition" and which were "without an existing publishing infrastructure." At a Health Information Seminar held in London in 2002, Michael Smolens stated further that his system would "supplement and eventually supplant the present unwieldy mode of book distribution," a statement which African publishers might well have viewed with some alarm. Moreover, as it was stated that 3BillionBooks and their investors would bear "the costs of acquiring exclusive rights to the book machine and eventually the company that owns the patents" they were also in some danger of being accused of a kind of American technological imperialism.

3BillionBooks was an enormously ambitious project, and while there is nothing wrong with thinking big, it did raise some serious issues. I did question at the time, and still do so today, whether Africa's readers and book industries are well served by high-flying projects of this nature.

Paperight

Developed by Cape Town-based firm Realmdigital, Paperight <http://paperight.com/>, a project on a rather more modest scale, is a Web-based system that can turn any copy shop, school, or NGO with a printer to become a kind of print-on-demand bookstore. Any business can register with Paperight to get book content to print for walk-in customers. Many books are free to download, while for others the publisher/copyright holder charges a rights fee. After a period in beta stage, and much planning and prototyping, Paperight 1.0 was launched in May 2012 and, in the words of its founder, Arthur Atwell, it aims to be "the world's first instant-delivery rights marketing place for copy shops" <http://arthurattwell.com/2012/05/10/paperight-1-0-the-worlds-first-instant-delivery-rights-marketplace-for-copy-shops/>.

There is a simple demonstration how it works on their Web page, but for a more technical overview see <http://blog.paperight.com/2012/06/a-technical-overview-of-paperight-site-architecture/>. The project is now funded by the Shuttleworth Foundation.

Arthur Attwell writes about his vision for on-demand publishing in rural Africa at <http://arthurattwell.com/2012/07/31/tedxcapetown-every-book-within-walking-distance-of-every-home/> (a shorter version, on video, can also be found at <http://talentsearch.ted.com/video/Arthur-Attwell-On-demand-publis;TEDJohannesburg>). While not everyone will agree with his somewhat dismissive views of the state of South African libraries and the book trade – "bookshops and libraries are vanishingly rare in South Africa; and when they do exist, they're tiny and badly stocked" – this is a promising initiative that could well help to transform the landscape of publishing and the distribution of content in South Africa, and possibly elsewhere in Africa, through the humble copy-printer.

Critical voices

Some of the above projects have not been without their critics, and sceptics, and there have also been critical voices in several blog postings. They are all no doubt well-intentioned, but some may view them as projects that are foisted on Africa from the outside, without adequately taking into account the conditions of the local context, societal values and attitudes, and the cultural constructs. They have also been accused as being projects which try to introduce new IT technology, or gadgets, without sufficient infrastructural support in the long term, for example access to reliable electric power, or local technical support for maintenance of hardware and software when the devices go haywire or stop working altogether. Not to mention an absence of broadband connections in rural areas, or still very slow connections elsewhere in most African countries, and which may not be reliable due to frequent power outages. For the majority of users in Africa bandwidth available remains low, which means that downloading even a single, average size Web page may take close to a minute or more, and can be a frustrating experience.

Octavio Kulesz, in his important recent study *Digital Publishing in Developing Countries* http://alliance-lab.org/etude/wp-content/uploads/digital_publishing.pdf (and see also the literature review below), when reporting about the situation in sub-Saharan Africa, was critical of both the Worldreader and One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) projects and says (p. 45):

Regardless of the possible virtues of Worldreader or OLPC, what is certain is that both initiatives are based on a technological platform that seeks to install itself 'from above', in completely heterogeneous context. As is to be expected, the difficulties don't take long to surface: the lack of content adapted to the users and the absence of a business model designed for local creators and entrepreneurs. In other words, they are projects that first get the technology on the ground and then face the problem of generating nothing less than an ad hoc 'ecosystem' of people and infrastructure.



The digital self-publishing euphoria

The rise in digital publishing, e-readers and tablets has also generated a blossoming of a huge number of African self-publishers, who previously were unable to reach a global market place without the intermediary of a publisher. Digital media now provides them with instant access to a wide international audience. Subsidy presses such as the Amazon subsidiary Create Space <https://www.createspace.com/>, or publishing services such as Lulu <http://www.lulu.com/>, among others, have helped writers cut out the intermediaries (publishers, editors, and literary agents) and instead publish their work directly with them. Nowadays writers all over the world are saying they don't need publishers any more, and they can do it just as well themselves.

Many will view this as a welcome change, but there are also several caveats, and whether the rapid increase in digital self-publishing is a positive development probably deserves some debate. There are many valid reasons why a fledgling writer may want to go down the self-publishing route. Although some people still argue that this is akin to vanity publishing, self-publishing these days is an entirely honourable course, and there have been a good number of success stories in self-publishing.

However, it also has to be said that many self-published books are hugely flawed in their standards of writing, and hastily published without due care. When one purchases a book published conventionally by a publisher, one can reasonably expect that it would have been subject to some scrutiny, editing, re-writing, and proofreading, before it was released onto the world. That is not the case with many self-published books, where the author alone has decided on its merits—and invariably thinks all the world will want to read it!

Aspiring writers are constantly told that by publishing in e-book format they will reach audiences no conventional publisher could ever reach. There are now also a large number of blogs and websites offering advice for start-up writers, who will tell them that they can make millions through self-publishing. Many authors who found their work rejected by mainstream publishers have gone ahead and self-published their books on e-book platforms, such as Amazon's Kindle, Kobo (who have recently launched in South Africa in partnership with Pick n' Pay hyperstores and supermarkets), Barnes and Noble's Nook, or Sony's Reader, as well as on e-reading apps for smart phones such as iPhone or iPad. Or they might decide to use Ganxy's retail model <http://get.ganxy.com/>, which gives authors and self-publishers an easy-to-use set of tools to let them sell their e-books and take control of how they present, promote, and sell their work on the Web.

The authors thereafter proceed to promote and sell these books (or in some cases make them available for free) on various social media and get them 'liked', or perhaps glowingly endorsed, by Facebook or Twitter friends.

There are of course many examples of huge self-publishing successes, with an increasing number of self-published authors finding fame and fortune, as for example Amanda Hocking, an American writer of what is called paranormal romance young-adult fiction (a type of 'speculative fiction' that blends together genres of fantasy, science fiction, or horror) whose self-published *Trylle* e-book trilogy achieved quite spectacular sales; or those by the pioneer of the e-book movement Stephen King, although the latter, for his latest novel *Joyland*, has now reverted back to print, as well as publishing it in an e-book edition. Another more recent example is *Fifty Shades of Grey* by first-time author E.L. James <http://www.eljamesauthor.com/>, who self-published the first instalment of this trilogy as an e-book. It is an erotic/romantic novel about sadomasochistic frolics, some would say essentially soft porn, or 'mummy porn' as the trilogy has been dubbed. The series caught on via initial Fanzine postings <http://thefanzine.com/>, by word-of-mouth marketing, postings on blogs and social media, and achieved phenomenal popular success. It quickly became one of the most talked about books, reportedly selling hundreds of thousands of copies, as women told other women to read it. It may not have been the intention, but it was clever to publish it as an e-book, as women who might normally have felt too embarrassed reading, much less seen buying, a trashy novel, could do so relatively incognito. It has become the first e-book to have sold in excess of one million copies, and has also become the fastest selling adult paperback novel to sell more than one million print copies in the Random House edition.

Meantime it has become clear that the e-book has opened up all sorts of new mass markets, new audiences, and a new global readership publishers hitherto could only dream about, as testified by the success of e-book bestsellers by previously unknown authors who have suddenly shot to prominence, aided by publicity much of it generated by word of mouth and in the social media.

To the best of my knowledge there have not been any such huge success stories in Africa thus far, although some African writers of romantic fiction, resident in the diaspora, have gained considerable popularity. I think the position for first-time African authors is a bit different in any event, especially as they are now going to be in competition with hundreds or thousands of other start-up African writers, not to mention thousands, or hundreds of thousands, of newcomers elsewhere in the world. For example, Amazon alone – whose current e-book market share is variously reported to be in the region of 60-70% worldwide – claims to have added some 1.1 million authors to its Kindle store.

Fledgling African writers will get a good measure of satisfaction for having their work published and made accessible online or on e-book reading devices, but because of the dramatic growth of self-publishing and the digital self-publishing 'revolution' in all parts of the world, prices for books on e-book platforms are now constantly being pushed down, together with steep discounting by Amazon. (As I write, Amazon is offering some Kindle edition downloads by bestselling authors for as little as 20 pence!) I suspect any time soon many new self-published writers may discover that they can't even sell a hundred copies in this saturated market, and even if they sell more it is certainly not going to make them rich. No doubt there are, or will be, some e-books by African authors that will do very well, but for many other self-published writers – having invested an enormous amount of their time in publishing online and then trying to promote their products – disappointment, or disillusionment, could soon set in.

Conversely, it could also be argued that there are probably only a few African writers who made a lot of money from royalty earnings from publishing in traditional print format; and most others write because they enjoy it and are passionate about writing, rather than expectations to become rich and famous, and so whether it is in print or an e-book the format doesn't really matter greatly. Moreover, while many self-published books will not become run-away bestsellers, the digital self-publishing route does at least offer start-up writers an opportunity to *become* successful.

But I still have some reservations about the self-publishing process. While no writer, especially a well-established author, wants his or her book hacked about by a conventional publisher – and it would be inappropriate for a publisher to impose heavy editing without taking account of a writer's wishes and impulses – most manuscripts will benefit from at least a judicious measure of editing, or at the very least a little tinkering here and there.

There is another, often overlooked, disadvantage in self-publishing and by-passing conventional publishers: self-published books in Africa – unless distributed through specialist Africana vendors or the African Books Collective – rarely get picked up by the major bibliographic and book information services which libraries all over the world use as selection tools to purchase new publications. As a result many self-published titles will probably escape the attention of African studies librarians, and so won't be acquired; nor will they get catalogued and subsequently appear in WorldCat <http://www.worldcat.org/>, the world's largest network of library content, covering the collections more than 10,000 libraries worldwide.

In a wide-ranging recent interview the distinguished, award-winning Nigerian writer Niyi Osundare <http://saharareporters.com/interview/%e2%80%98no-university-nigeria-standard%e2%80%99-prof-niyi-osundare> expressed his views about self-publishing in Nigeria, and voiced a measure of reservations about the now flourishing self-publishing scene in the country. While sympathizing with budding Nigerian writers that are keen to break into print and have their work published

... the problem is many of these books have not gone through the normal institutional processes: submission of manuscript, acceptance, the consideration of the manuscript by an in-house editorial group, which would decide whether this manuscript is worth considering at all, and whether to send it to outside assessors. The assessors are usually experts and veterans whose judgement and recommendation are considered valid and impartial. By the time the manuscript passes through all those stages, and is made to respond to different kinds of suggestions and recommendations by the different assessors, it would have appreciated and improved considerably.

However that kind of process, Osundare says, has been short-circuited by self-publishing.

So what you have today is the cash-and-carry or carry-go syndrome. Submit a book on Friday and about Saturday the following week the book is in your hand. And you become an author. Genuine authors, authors who stay long in the literary tradition, are hardly ever made that way. Book publishing takes a long time. It also takes a long time to become an author, especially an enduring author.

While advances in technology and the new digital environment have allowed authors to take control of some or even all parts of the publishing process, there are many potential pitfalls. Mary Jay, CEO at African Books Collective, also believes that there are

many caveats for writers going down the self-publishing route, "but if authors can do it themselves and make a success of it, fine. But it is rare to be able to master all the technicalities, including digital methods for production, marketing and distribution."

There is now a useful "Publishing in Africa" open discussion group on Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/groups/233568780016434/?id=235181446521834> created by Holger Ehling and Roger Stringer in July 2011, and which has since rapidly grown to well over 200 members. It is described as "a group for publishing and bookselling professionals, as well as media professionals and authors with an interest in the industry" and has also included some discussion about self-publishing, although postings are sometimes heavily inflated by numerous authors who are probably not particularly interested in discussions, but are simply trying to push their self-published books! While more serious debates on the state of publishing and the book sector in Africa are perhaps still a little bit thin on the ground, this is a lively discussion forum. Postings also include a wide variety of news about book prizes, book fairs and other book promotional events, writers' forums, literary magazines, e-books, as well as reports about the publishing activities of enterprising small publishers and new imprints.

Self-publishing of textbooks

Self-publishing of textbooks, as alternative publishing models, is also becoming prevalent in academic circles, albeit primarily in South Africa at this time. Whether the trend for self-publishing of textbooks is going to be repeated elsewhere on the continent remains to be seen, although open access or self-publishing of scholarly papers, as opposed to entire books, is now of course widespread.

Rhodé Odendaal and Francis Galloway describe the situation in South Africa in their article "Self-publishing of Academic Textbooks in South Africa: Fact or Fiction?" http://www.up.ac.za/dspace/bitstream/2263/9637/1/Odendaal_Self%282008%29.pdf. This interesting paper aims to explore the nature and the reasons behind the self-publishing of academic textbooks in the higher education environment of South Africa. The authors describe the academic publishing landscape in relation to current trends in higher education in South Africa and explain what constitutes self-publishing as an alternative publishing model. They argue that primary data obtained through surveys proves many of the myths associated with self-publishing are false and aim to establish that academic authors have valid and just reasons for opting to self-publish.

The above article makes some good points, but many people will continue to have serious reservations about self-published textbooks that have not been peer-reviewed, much less scholarly books and especially those in the sciences, viewing them as undermining standards. Nonetheless, while academic self-publishing may still have a stigma attached to it, there are also many scholars who argue that there is no lack of intellectual integrity in open access or self-publishing.

It is easy to see the attractions of self-published textbooks, whether published digitally, in print format, or both: easy access, low price, speed of publication, and if it is published as an e-book it is also highly flexible, i.e. it can be updated and modified at regular intervals.

If academic self-publishing in Africa is going to become something more than the nowadays ubiquitous course packs (bound and sold to students), then it will certainly pose a serious threat to conventional academic or educational publishers. However authors going down that route will do well to bear in mind that effective self-publishing in academia is not an easy road and can be highly time-consuming. If books are going to be printed, for example using print-on-demand, they will need to be well-edited and proofread, and will need to look good, with an attractive cover; and if they are going to be e-books they ought to be professionally formatted, and of course vigorously promoted using marketing methods that go beyond a bit of visibility in social media and a few blogs.

Is there a downside to social media?

In most social media such as Facebook or Twitter, approval or otherwise of an article, a book, music, etc., or someone's views on a topic, is either a thumbs up 'Like', or a thumbs down for not liking it. This hardly amounts to a critical appraisal and I personally find this form of approval (or disapproval) a bit too quick, and a bit too one-dimensional.

There is no question that the emergence of social networks has had a profound effect in bringing people together for discussion and debate, sharing of news and views, interacting with one another, and for making connections with people sharing the same interests. Writers, for example, can get in touch with their potential readers, or with other authors. They are able not only to promote their books directly to potential buyers and readers, but can also respond to messages, join discussion forums, or chat on blogs.

However, it seems to me that there is also a downside to all this and the whole culture of social media 'liking', namely that objectivity is becoming increasingly blurred. Many postings on social networks are glowing endorsements by 'fans', and there is usually an absence of objective critical reviews, of the kind one used to read in African literary magazines in their print formats, sadly now a vanishing species.

As Jacob Silverman has very aptly put it in his recent article "Against Enthusiasm. The Epidemic of Niceness in Online Book Culture"

http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2012/08/writers_and_readers_on_twitter_and_tumblr_we_need_more_criticism_less_liking_.html

... if you spend time in the literary Twitter- or blogospheres, you'll be positively besieged by amiability, by a relentless enthusiasm that might have you believing that all new books are wonderful and that every writer is every other writer's biggest fan. It's not only shallow, it's untrue, and it's having a chilling effect on literary culture, creating an environment where writers are vaunted for their personal biographies or their online followings rather than for their work on the page.

But why shouldn't writers and lovers of literature construct an environment that's wholly comfortable and safe? And when the book is published don't they deserve a bit of applause? Yes they do, but, Silverman says, "that constant applause is making it harder and harder to hear the voices of dissent—the sceptical, cranky criticisms that may be painful for writers to experience but that make for a vibrant, useful literary culture."



The print vs online debate

This debate has now been raging for well over a decade. During this time the future of the book has been widely lamented, and it has been an emotional debate. The book has been pronounced as dead, or that the function of reading has been taken over by e-reading devices and tablets; while opponents of the latter have said that e-books are corroding values, that "serious readers" will always prefer print, or that e-readers will bring the death of literature!

What is clear is that the new digital technologies and the e-revolution have radically changed the whole publishing landscape and many publishers in Africa, as indeed elsewhere, are grappling with a move to a digital environment. However, although there has been a sharp rise in e-books sales in Europe, in the US, and elsewhere, a mass transition from the physical book to digital is probably still a very long way off. According to the UK Publishers Association, for example, sales of physical books still accounted for more than 87% of sales by value in the UK for the first half of 2012.

Meanwhile the general consensus among some African publishers seems to be that digital and print will go hand in hand in the foreseeable future. Many observers also believe that, for the moment at least, the conventional book continues to have numerous practical advantages over the e-book, and that, as a format, the book remains flexible, accessible, and is still relatively cheap.

While some early results in the use of e-reading devices seem to be promising, one big question must be whether digital tools will actually help to improve education on the continent.

It is clearly important that African publishers embrace the opportunities in new technology and the social media whole-heartedly, and should seek to take advantage of the new platforms offered by digital media. In doing so they will need to investigate possible digital strategies – including a multitude of factors such as cost and pricing, access and formats, as well as distribution and marketing – from two different perspectives: one is for the world/international markets for their books as part of the e-books markets, and the other one is for their home markets, and possible other markets elsewhere in Africa.

However, I don't believe African publishers' thinking should be dominated by technology, nor should they be unduly alarmed about the sometimes near-hysterical debate about the dramatic change of the publishing landscape and the growth, or threat, of e-books. They should continue to concentrate on content and quality, not on the platform. E-books may well flourish in the years ahead, new technologies may well be transforming the lives of people, new products, gadgets, apps, and exciting innovations will continue to be launched almost every day – and some will be enthusiastically embraced by readers all over the world – but traditional books, in Africa as elsewhere, will continue to have enduring qualities that digital formats can simply never replace.

The book is not going to become extinct and disappear from our lives and our book shelves any time soon; nor will digital devices ever be able to match the pleasurable experience of browsing in a good bookshop. Accessing e-books may be easy and quick, but when you 'buy' a book for download on your e-reader you might well bear in mind that you haven't actually bought it; unlike when you buy a print copy, you don't own it, all you have done is to buy a license to read it on your Kindle or other e-reading

device. Furthermore, the conventional book requires very little support, unlike e-books, which require electric power in some form or another.

As the acclaimed British writer Jeanette Winterson put it – when speaking up for the future of public libraries in the UK in her Inaugural Reading Agency Lecture to mark the 10th anniversary of the independent charity The Reading Agency - <http://readingagency.org.uk/>, edited extracts of which appeared in *The Guardian* <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/nov/23/protect-our-libraries-jeanette-winterson>

E-books are not an improvement; they are an addition. They can't be used as an excuse to take books away from the everyday world and into the virtual world. We all know that browsing an index is nothing like being in a bookshop or a library. Libraries and publishers will come to an arrangement about e-book lending and that could work very well as a satellite service for library users – providing we keep Planet Library. For kids in particular, e-books aren't the answer. Put six picture books in front of a child and she'll soon find her own way. Give her a library shelf of books and she can pull them out all over the floor. Early reading is physicality – the taste, smell, weight of books.



The bottom line

What counts is writers and readers in Africa, not fancy electronic gadgets.

The question of suitable local content remains a key issue, but one could argue that it isn't really a matter of print or digital, but simply access to books. The important thing is to get books into the hands of readers in Africa, whether adults or children; regardless whether it is the traditional print product, or to get content onto smart phones and mobile devices, or on to e-reading platforms and tablets.

We will need to remember that while access to books from indigenous African publishers – whether it is fiction or non-fiction, or children's books – can be said to have greatly improved over the last two decades, nowadays books, in Africa as elsewhere, have to compete with local newspapers, music and video sharing sites, online magazines, as well as a prolific output of home produced drama made for TV, or released by local movie industries. Additionally, the now relatively easy availability of computers, the rapid growth of the Internet, widespread use of affordable mobiles, together with the increasing popularity of social networks, have no doubt all played their part in creating what has become a diminishing reading culture in many countries in Africa. That is a worrying situation, which presents a huge challenge for Africa's book publishers.

Finally, although this may sound simplistic, by the end of the day, for the book to thrive in Africa, in whatever formats, it requires a stable infrastructure, and a stable and enlightened government to support real progress; a government that takes positive steps to support literacy development, writing and reading, provision of library services, and support for its indigenous book industries.

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APPENDIX

A review of some of the recent literature on digital publishing in Africa

As stated at the beginning of this article, there has been a fairly dramatic increase in the literature on digital publishing in sub-Saharan Africa, and below I draw attention to some of the more substantial contributions on the topic, the majority of them freely accessible online.

A good starting point for a concise overview of the current picture is a report about the fifth Information for Change workshop, held in Lagos in May 2011 during the tenth Nigeria International Book Fair, part of a series of workshops that aimed to bring together individuals and organizations involved in generating, publishing, and using information for development from across Africa <http://www.informationforchange.org>. Information for Change had gathered a panel of speakers and case studies from West Africa that demonstrated the range of digital experience and passion in the region. In a summary of the workshop, **Digital Publishing in West Africa: Technology and the Future of the Book** <http://www.informationforchange.org/documents/tr-review-ifc2011-cornford.pdf>, Robert Cornford reports "...everyone at the workshop agreed with the keynote speaker and was sceptical about the immediate future for digital publishing in West Africa. There is plenty of digital promotion and marketing. People are beginning to use social media in promotion. There is a lively blog universe in Nigeria. There is a vibrant multimedia and mixed media sector. ... Publishers have been using digital production and work-flow technology for some years, and some are creating files for digital print-on-demand for global markets. All the ingredients for a lively digital publishing sector exist in Nigeria. The question is how and when the critical mass is reached and the parts come together to create new publishing streams in West Africa. Will there be any substantial publishing programmes of e-books in Nigeria in the next few years? No-one at the workshop was going to say when, but all agreed that it will happen, and probably sooner than we think. Overall, the question at the Book Fair conference and the Information for Change workshop was expressed as 'Will the book survive?' After a week of talking and listening in Lagos at the Book Fair, I'm confident that the question should be rephrased as 'How will the book survive? And will we have to change our ideas of what constitutes a book?'"

Also in 2011, the Paris-based Alliance des Éditeurs Indépendants pour une Autre Mondialisation (Alliance of Independent Publishers for Another Globalization) <http://www.alliance-editeurs.org/>, in association with the Prince Claus Fund in the Netherlands, published an important study by Octavio Kulesz, **Digital Publishing in Developing Countries** (also available in French and Spanish versions), http://alliance-lab.org/etude/wp-content/uploads/digital_publishing.pdf that offered an overview and succinct assessment of the prospects of digital publishing in developing countries. The study covered Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab world, and Russia, although coverage of the situation (and the survey undertaken) in Africa was primarily restricted to a number of francophone African countries and South Africa. It included a look at the challenges and opportunities ahead, and the possible trends. Although the study's analysis of the situation in Africa was somewhat limited, this was a welcome and valuable report. It also contained some interesting observations in its conclusions and the proposed action plan, albeit with many caveats.

A recent update of the situation, as at the beginning of 2012, can be found at http://www.alliance-lab.org/index.php?option=com_zoo&task=item&item_id=15&category_id=5&Itemid=16&lang=en. It reviews developments since the publication of the main study above, the current situation being described by Kulesz as "a period characterized by the growth of local actors as well as by a change in tactics on the international players' part."

In another paper by Octavio Kulesz "**Digital Publishing in Developing Countries: The Emergence of New Models?**" *Publishing Research Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (2011): 311-320, <http://www.springerlink.com/content/l3078mu23n06t251?MUD=MP> (access subscription based/pay per view) he summarizes the main results presented in the main study and adds some further thoughts. Kulesz recognizes that in developing countries, where traditional publishing faces enormous challenges, moving to a digital publishing environment may act as an accelerator that could help local actors to skip a stage and position themselves at a much more advanced level. However, for domestic players to really benefit from the electronic age, he believes it will be essential for them not to adopt systems implanted from the outside on an 'as is' basis, but rather to invest in new models better suited for the local people's expectations and needs.

Bibi Bakare-Yusuf's keynote speech **Technology and the Future of the Book**, delivered at the already mentioned Information for Change workshop held in Lagos in 2011 <http://www.informationforchange.org/documents/tr-technology-future-book-ifc-2011-bakare-yusuf.pdf>, perhaps ought to become required reading for any publisher in Africa, both conventional and self-publishers. The author, who is Co-Founder of Cassava Republic Press in Nigeria <http://www.cassavarepublic.biz/>, eloquently sets out the challenges and the opportunities, but also the realities, i.e. the many constraints and caveats of digital publishing in an African environment at the present time. Technology, she says, would seem to provide a potential answer, "but the Internet infrastructure is still precarious and the question remains as to whether technology-enabled solutions can significantly address the yawning knowledge-gap." She goes on to say "here on the continent, for all the excitable talk of an emerging African middle class, the reality is that the majority of Africans are still not online and if anything at all, 'Amazon' remains a large river in South America. E-commerce (and e-books) are a middle-distance dream." She believes that the need for *printed* books will remain the key issue for years to come as the rising consumer class expands.

Unlike the West where there is a glut in book and knowledge production, we simply don't have enough books providing quality information about our society today and in the distant past. In contrast to their Western and Asian counterparts, many African children grow up without ever having seen, let alone owned, beautiful, well-illustrated books which inspire them to a life of reading, beauty, learning and curiosity for the world.

Bakare-Yusuf says that

rather than just produce content in book format, we should be thinking how of how to produce content from a hybrid, multi-platform perspective, drawing upon the different talents in the culture industry. Digital publishing therefore should not just be about platforms and e-devices, but about the opportunity to create a social space gathered around certain stories and forms of narrative.

Through technology, she concludes, publishers can increasingly deliver rich content using a variety of media.

We can talk also about e-books and the possibility in terms of sales and better access, etc. However, I am sceptical about the immediate opportunities here in Africa. Nonetheless, digital allows us to challenge the notion of the narcissistic authorial voice or the cult of the 'genius' that is at the heart of book production with its obsession over the individual celebrated author, which masks the collective efforts that is involved in any act of creation.

Wesley Thompson's two-part online article **Digital Publishing in South Africa** <http://www.readerssociety.org.za/digital-publishing-in-south-africa-part-1/> (part 1) <http://www.readerssociety.org.za/digital-publishing-in-south-africa-part-2/> (part 2) presents an informative review about the current state of electronic publishing and digital media in South Africa that will also be of interest to publishers (and self-publishers) elsewhere in Africa. The first part provides a brief overview of the situation, such as the nature and uptake of e-reader devices, the kind of e-books that are on offer, and the development of local content. Part two explores some of the opportunities and major shifts that currently characterize the e-publishing industry.

Thompson uses the concept of 'liquid' to look at e-publishing, and how this concept might help us to understand the far-reaching changes that are currently occurring. For example, information is more liquid as it is flowing more easily between people and within networks; books and social conversation are liquid too:

In a digital format it is simple to reproduce extracts of books on websites and in new unforeseen ways, on a range of platforms. As it is liquid, the information can be commented on, spread virally via social media sites, and interacted with – it is no longer one-dimensional, but sinuous.

Books can and should be promoted as much as possible via social media, he says, but authors are now able to do this themselves. "The barriers of the old model – relying almost solely on a newspaper's books editor to say how much he likes your book – are crumbling." Distribution and content is liquid as well, as books are becoming infinitely more easily and more widely available: "Self-published authors who take advantage of distributing their works via Amazon Kindle's dtp site are already a few steps ahead of publishers that are too slow or wrapped up in red tape to make their titles available to an international audience." Previously books were available in one format only and remained so for life, but in order to be liquid books they need to adapt to different devices, channels and usages. "The way that content is shaped – and the essence of that content – needs to be more liquid in order to reflow, morph and adapt to different platforms."

For example, Thompson says, one needs to recognize the basic differences between a PDF and an e-Pub: with an e-Pub content flows more easily to adapt to different reading views on different devices while PDFs can be frustratingly static. Adaptive layout and presentation are therefore essential for liquid books. Moreover, liquid content is also interactive, insofar as it allows users to engage with it and for it to speak to them, and for consumers to speak back. Content is similarly liquid in the way it is used, and Thompson argues that new models must be developed to allow people to pay for and use content in the way that they want to; and depending on the type of content new pricing and distribution models might be required to meet that need. Finally, knowledge production is liquid too, and new tools are empowering people to

create content like never before. "Print on demand technologies allows authors and publishers to avoid using the tried and tested 'print first, sell later' model. This outmoded model traditionally needs a publisher to run the risk of investing in a print run on a book, hoping that the book will sell more than a certain 'breakeven' number to ensure financial success."

An insightful interview with James Woodhouse, formerly commissioning editor for Penguin Books South Africa and now the newly appointed Publisher at Kwela Books since April 2012, recently appeared in Litnet <http://www.litnet.co.za/Article/the-landscape-of-south-african-publishing--james-woodhouse-discusses-his-position-at->. Entitled **The Landscape of South African Publishing**, the interview focusses on the way in which social media has changed the South African publishing landscape, and changed reading and book buying habits. Woodhouse says

... the landscape of South African publishing is in flux at the moment and all of us – those who work in the industry – are having to re-examine our assumptions about how we sustain our lists. Hopefully this period of transition will allow all of us to once again re-engage with the reality that almost all trade publishing in this country is done in two languages – and perhaps come up with some innovative ideas around how to change this for the better. However, much as I would love to say that I can see new vistas opening up, the fact remains that trade sales in anything but English and Afrikaans remain very small. Can we change this? I believe so. But it is not going to happen without a larger architecture in place.

And have social media sites like Facebook and Twitter really changed the way literature is brought into and presented to the world? James Woodhouse believes that it hasn't necessarily changed it that much as yet,

but there is no question that it is changing it. Very soon we will have a generation of people who have grown up completely surrounded by accessible technology of a type that never existed before. The way they interact with one another and the world around them is bound to be shaped in some way by this, and it is impossible to deny that this is the case. If you want to reach readers you will have to interact with social media on some level – this is the future.

In a well-informed article **"Is the e-Book a Prospect or a Threat?"** <http://www.african-publishers.net/images/stories/downloads/apr%202012.pdf>, Nigerian publisher Ayo Ojeniyi examines some of the advantages and disadvantages of electronic books and their different formats, how digital media might develop in Africa, the current constraints, and what African publishers should do to take advantage of the new digital environment and compete in this new market, creating new content for online delivery, while continuing to serve traditional print customers as well. Ojeniyi believes that digital and print will go hand in hand in the foreseeable future, and that the challenges of moving to digital publishing are not insurmountable "but will need commitment and foresight."

There have been several recent studies on the prospects and challenges of digital publishing in Nigeria, for example an article by Samuel Eytayo published in *Publishing Research Quarterly* (27, no. 3, 2011) **"Book, Technology and Infrastructural Development: What the Future Holds for the Book Industry in Nigeria"**, <http://www.springerlink.com/content/2813v21u12ng0475/> (access subscription based) (Another version, freely accessible, at the website of the African Publishers Network at <http://www.african-publishers.net/images/stories/downloads/apr%202012.pdf>).

Eyitayo looks at infrastructural progress in Nigeria as it relates to ICTs and found that it is hampered by many issues, ranging from the government's ineptitude in handling the energy sector and the consequent costs of running businesses in Nigeria; high government taxes, high cost of equipment, as well as an absence of a capable maintenance culture. He also examines some of the recent technological developments as it relates to the industry, including issues such as bandwidth, the growing popularity of smartphones, much increased use of social media, and more and more authors going down the self-publishing route. He argues that key players in the industry must learn to fully embrace ICT in developing the book industry, and sets out a range of recommendations what key players in the industry should know, and should do.

Another study, by Emmanuel Ifeduba and Godwin Shoki, "**Patterns of Adoption of Electronic Publishing Innovations among Nigerian Publishers**"

http://www.worlib.org/vol18no1/ifedubaprint_v18n1.shtml, investigated patterns of usage of electronic publishing innovations among Nigerian publishers, using a questionnaire, interviews, and an observation guide as a survey method. Although it was recognized that there is still a paucity of empirical evidence on the status of electronic publishing activities in Nigeria, the authors believe that there are several signs of adoption of e-publishing innovations. With this study they sought to investigate the particular aspects of e-publishing thus far adopted by Nigerian publishers, the extent of such adoption, and the different ways which book publishers, printers, and booksellers have adopted, or failed to adopt them.

In the field of scholarly publishing in Africa there have also been a number of significant studies and collections, and even a recent thesis:

Strengthening Scholarly Publishing in Africa: Assessing the Potential of Online Systems by the Ghanaian scholar Samuel Kwaku Smith Esseh

https://circle.ubc.ca/bitstream/handle/2429/34184/ubc_2011_spring_esseh_samuel.pdf?sequence=1, is a substantial and far-reaching thesis that investigates current publishing practices among scholarly journals in Africa, while exploring the potential contribution of online publishing systems to aid those practices. It examines "how current systems, largely involving traditional publishing methods, offer Africans limited opportunities and incremental gains in taking advantage of faster and wider dissemination of digital systems for scholarly communication." A range of recommendations and proposals are put forward "for tapping into the full potential of these technologies in strengthening research capacity, improving the quality of research, reducing Africa's isolation from the global scholarly community, and ultimately narrowing the information divide."

The Dakar-based Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) <http://www.codesria.org/> has been holding a series of biennial conferences on electronic publishing and dissemination in Africa, and the challenges – and practical experiences – of putting African journals online. The papers presented in the third in the series, **Conference on Electronic Publishing and Dissemination - Putting African Journals Online: Opportunities, Implications and Limits, Dakar, Senegal, 6-7 October, 2008**, report about a variety of new initiatives in digital book and journal publishing on the continent, and can be viewed at <http://www.codesria.org/spip.php?article588&lang=en>. The papers from the two previous conferences can also be accessed from the CODESRIA Web pages.

Charles Batambuze, Executive Secretary of the National Book Trust of Uganda, in a presentation entitled **Digital Publishing in Africa: Lessons from the PALM Project**, delivered at an Information for Change workshop held in Nairobi in September 2010 <http://www.informationforchange.org/documents/tr-lessons-palm-project-ifc2010-batambuze.pdf>, reported about the PALM-Africa (Publishing and Alternative Licensing Models for Africa) project. This study, carried out in Uganda and South Africa, aimed to shed light on how, and how far, publishing on the Internet could eliminate the shortage of learning materials or learning content, facilitate trade, and generate new business models that would best serve the commercial interests of publishers. The study explored the different ways through which books can be licensed through the Creative Commons Plus protocol with minimum risk, and which might alleviate publishers' fears about potential copyright violations. This model is deemed as an attractive option for facilitating the development of e-book formats, negotiating print-on-demand, seeking territorial licenses for printing in other countries, and translation rights.

The replacement of printed books with digital technology is likely to have far reaching consequences not just for the African publishing industries, but also for UK and US organizations who have been donating books to African schools and libraries for many years now. During the 2011 London Book Fair, the UK book charity Book Aid International <http://www.bookaid.org/> hosted a seminar on some of the challenges and opportunities that sub-Saharan Africa faces in the age of digital publishing, and produced a 55 minute video recording of the seminar. Entitled **Sub-Saharan Africa in the Age of Digital Publishing** it can be viewed at <http://vimeo.com/22328313>. The seminar examined the key challenges and opportunities for sub-Saharan Africa in the age of digital publishing. Some of the issues that were addressed included these: Will the availability and affordability of hardware remain beyond ordinary people? Will digital publishing improve access to appropriate content? Will printed books continue to be required and available to meet the need for information and entertainment in Africa?