Democratization of Book Publishing in Nigeria: An Analysis of Self-Publishing from a Digital Intermediation Perspective

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Abstract. Communication is a fundamental human right, so everyone who has a story to tell should be able to do so. However, the gatekeeping processes involved in the traditional model of publishing do not make it possible for every voice or story to end up as a book in the hands of readers. This practice is firmly rooted in the "survival of fittest" syndrome which ensures that only manuscripts that assures profits for publishers make it to the book market. As a reaction, marginalized authors at the receiving end of this practice are leveraging on digital technologies to by-pass publishers and connect directly with readers, leading to an increasing rise in self-publishing. While past studies have captured the role of digital technologies in reducing the intermediating role of book publishers between authors and readers, how this intermediation sets the pace for and enhances self-publishing practice in a developing African country like Nigeria has received scant attention. Based on the argument that democratized book publishing promotes literary diversity, this study reviews trends in self-publishing in Nigeria. Analysis reveals that self-publishing has become firmly established as a digital-led publishing model in the country. Recommendations are offered on standardizing self-publishing in the emerging Nigerian digital economy, including the relevance of strategic digital and social media marketing.

Keywords; Self-publishing, book publishing, gatekeeping, digital technologies, information management.

1. Introduction

Communication is a fundamental human right, so everyone who has a story to tell should be able to do so. Ndibe (2016: 189) captures this essence, citing one of the sayings of the Ibo tribe of Nigeria that, "a story that must be told never forgives silence". In addition to

being a vehicle for sharing ideas, thoughts and knowledge, the book also serves as a medium for the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage (Okwilagwe 2001). Indeed, the book has been identified as a potent medium for the dissemination of new ideas. Baran (2019), for example, argues that the book may be considered the least "mass" of mass media in terms of audience reach and the magnitude of the book industry within the wider media industry, it is nevertheless ideal for incubating or propagating new or unpopular ideas. While the ideal assures that everyone who has something to say should be able to put their ideas in the form of published books, the standard processes and activities involved in the production of books do not make it possible for every voice to take the shape of books that end up in the hands of readers (Schriffin 2000). Although the book industry may have a cultural and societal function, it is nonetheless a business activity. Lis and Berz (2011) acknowledge that while book publishing is a cultural activity, there must be an economic dimension to it to make it sustainable. The scholars note that this imperative explains the economization of the publishing process.

In essence, book publishers regard books as economic products whose fates are shaped by competitive market forces. Fundamentally, publishers make decisions on what to publish in order to ensure that their books do well in the market. Therefore, in the age-long book publishing practice, acquisition editors adopt a wide array of criteria in deciding manuscripts to select for publishing. According to Powell (1978), publishers' decisions are impacted by considerations that may not be obviously objective. Expressing a similar view, Squires (2017) cites Archer and Jockers's (2016) use of such words like "gambling", "wet finger in the air", and "the mysterious crystal ball" to describe the uncertainty and risks involved in manuscript evaluation and selection in book publishing. This risk-laden, non-objective manuscript assessment and selection process results in publishing books for a narrow or limited market audience, leading to a lack of diversity in the books available in the marketplace (Squires, 2017). Even when editorial decisions are taken based on pre-audience data or past sales performance, the fate of books from new or unknown authors (even when their manuscript are of high quality) often hangs in the air because new authors with no track record have a low probability of successfully scaling the market censorship hurdle (Schriffin, 2000).

However, the rise of digital technologies has disrupted the status quo in publishing. The established or standard practice in book publishing - commonly called traditional publishing - now co-exist with an alternative publishing practice known as self-publishing (Clark & Phillips 2020). Through self-publishing, authors are now able to by-pass publishers and reach out to their readers. As Hviid, Izquierdo- Sanchez and Jacques (2019) aver, self-publishing has given authors the alternative route to reaching their audience through new technologies. Essentially, the gatekeeping role of the traditional publisher - one of the key reasons the traditional publishing model has flourished over the years - is obliterated. The role of digital technologies in reducing the intermediating role of book publishers between authors and readers has been examined in the literature. Examples include: Pareschi (2015);

Waldfogel and Reimers (2015); Benghozi and Paris (2016); Kleis and Ganter (2017) and Skains (2019); Salvador and Benghozi (2021). However, how this intermediation sets the pace for, and enhances self-publishing practice in a developing African country has received scant attention. This paper examines trends in self-publishing in Nigeria, in terms of origin, growth, and challenges by examining the role of digital technologies in setting the agenda for democratized publishing in the nation's book publishing industry. It is argued that a digital-driven self-publishing practice promotes literary diversity which ultimately enhances the dissemination of information in the knowledge-driven global economy.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Gatekeeping in the Book Publishing Industry

As far back as the 1800s a publishing model emerged in which authors are paid royalties in exchange for giving away the copyrights of their work to publishers who foot the bill of producing and selling the works as book products (Greco, Milliot & Wharton 2014). This practice, known as the traditional publishing model, ensures that only "good" manuscripts make the cut of becoming published books. What is considered "good" or not is subject to each book publishers' varying standards. Generally, publishers adopt a gatekeeping system that sifts the shaft from the grain by selecting manuscripts that meet requisite legal and cultural standards, in addition to having the potential to make huge sales in the market (Hawthorne, 2014). By this practice publishers mediate the flow of ideas between authors and the reading audiences. Coser (1975) notes that publishers act as gatekeepers by making decisions on what is to be published or not. Traditional publishers justify their roles as literary, cultural and economic gatekeepers, claiming that their gatekeeping process is driven by some democratic values; what the reading public wants, even when it is extremely limited in scope. The consequence is that books introducing new ideas or books from new authors run the risk of losing money in the early stage of their product lifecycle (Coser, 1975; Roberts, 2021). Schriffin (2000) argues that this thinking explains why new ideas and new authors do not easily breakthrough the book market. According to the author, it may take years for a writer to attract a large enough readership to justify the expenditures of publishing her book. Ultimately, as gatekeepers in publishing houses make judgments to publish only works that ensure quick financial success, new authors or new ideas are generally excluded.

Such exclusions, however, lead to the availability of a narrow range of book product offerings. For example, in Nigeria, book publishing is concentrated on educational publishing, especially textbook publishing for primary and secondary schools (Christopher, 2009). On the other side, trade publishing or publishing of general interest books has not attracted that much attention from book publishers. The result is limited opportunities or platform for the emergence of new voices in the Nigerian literary scene. Ihebuzor and Ihebuzor (2016) appraise this situation, urging that publishing trends in any free society

57

should not be shaped by factors bothering on the market worth of books or the net worth of their authors. They call for facilitated access to publishing opportunities for emerging authors.

The good news is that digital publishing presents various platforms for new authors to by-pass traditional publishers and tell their stories. According to Tian and Martin (2010) digital publishing is the form of publishing that depends on digital technologies; it is built around digital publishing production and supply chain, and comprises authors, publishers, technology providers, database experts, web developers, data analysts and users. They argue that the digital publishing chain, though extended, has profound impact on contemporary book publishing industry, including the disruption of the traditional model of publishing.

2.2   Digital Intermediation in Book Publishing: An Overview

The mediation role of traditional publishers in controlling the flow of ideas from writers to readers has been challenged and disrupted by emergent digital publishing technologies, leading to a merging or convergence of processes, activities and technologies in book publishing. According to Lievrous (2009), the concepts of convergence of media and mediation emerged in the media landscape with the blurring of boundaries in the production and distribution of media content. Construed as "intermediation", studies on mediation in a digital environment seek to understand how people engage with new media and the pattern of information search and consumption in the prevailing digital landscape. In the context of book publishing, mediation and gatekeeping find a nexus; mediation serving as the means to substituting gatekeeping and achieving its goal. Gatekeepers in book publishing like editors, literary agents, literary or art critics, booksellers etc, have immense control on the flow of content in the supply chain of book industries and they determine what is kept in or allowed to go out (Hjarvard & Helles, 2015). These agents of mediation or human intermediaries have long been displaced by other form of intermediaries - digital intermediaries in the form of blogging platforms, search engines, social media networks and machine-learning technologies (Davis, 2017). This has been popularly called disintermediation in the literature, with evidences of how digital technologies now function as intermediaries between authors and their readers as opposed to what obtained in traditional publishing (MacInnes, Kongsmak & Heckman, 2004; Waldfogel & Reimers, 2015).

Prior to disintermediation, the traditional publishing chain had many layers of intermediaries between authors and their readers. For clarity of research purpose, Darnton (1982) proposed the communication circuit of the book (Figure 1) to show the flow of publishing processes and activities from the author to the publisher, the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader.
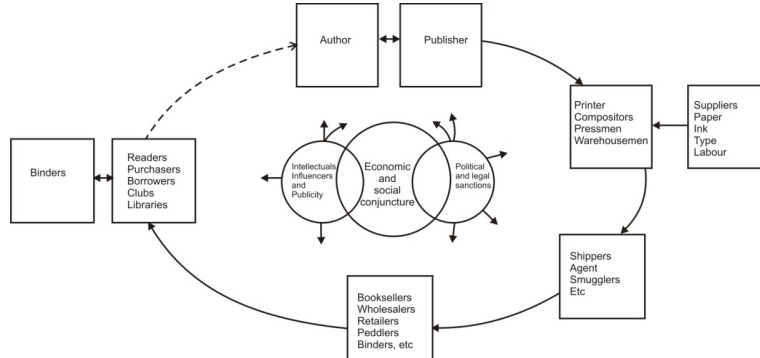
Figure 1: Darnton's Communication Circuit of the Book (Darnton 1982)

While Darnton's circuit of the book provides a basic understanding of the book publishing chain, there have been a number of attempts to update this circuit in light of technological developments that bring varying forms of disintermediation. For example, Luck, Lamp, Craig and Coldwell-Neilson (2016) advocated a re-examination of Darnton's paradigm in order to obtain new perspectives on the book as a medium of communication in an evolving media production environment. As a result, they produced a revised version of Danton's model, dubbed the "Communication Circuit model for electronic publishing" (Figure 2), which aids in forecasting future factors and possibilities in the book publishing sector. They claim that digital publishing advances have an impact not only on book production and distribution, but also on the structure of the industry sector and the engagement of numerous players. According to Luck et al's (2016) model, the web help creates a better communication link between authors and their readers, thus cutting off the various gatekeeping roles in traditional publishing.
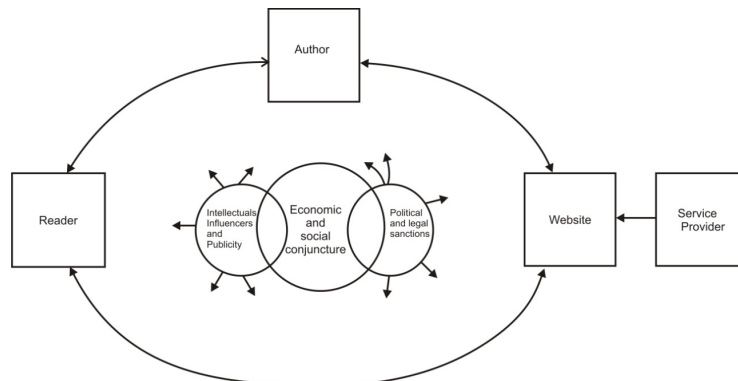

Figure 2: Communication Circuit model for electronic publishing (Luck et al 2016)

This change of roles of gatekeepers is the kernel of Murray and Squires' (2013) study which focuses on the impact of digital publishing on the communications circuit of the book, another revision of Robert Darnton's communication circuit. Murray and Squires aver that authors can now communicate directly with their readers through various digital technologies platforms. On this basis, they propose the Self-Publishing Communications Circuit (Figure 3) which acknowledges the disruption and disintermediation of traditional publishing. They affirm that self-publishing has taken firm roots as the book publishing process becomes democratized. It is now possible for authors to transact directly with online book retailers like Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Kobo using a self-publishing platform. The researchers mention John Locke and Amanda Hocking as writers who have successfully used self-publishing to rise to prominence. Furthermore, Murray and Squires (2013) aver that digital publishing technologies have led to the formation of new partnerships in the twenty-first century book publishing industry. They cite the example of Blasted Health and Guardian Books, book publishers that adopted a direct relationship with their authors, establishing a form of partnership with them on the basis of quarterly paid "royalty share" which promises the authors a better deal than the standard practice. Another example of digital intermediation, according to Murray and Squires (2013), is the transformation of book browsing and buying experience of readers with the advent of innumerable online bookstores that are built on big data analytics and algorithmic processes. They highlight the massive harnessing of analytics from online activities that are deployed to targeting readers. The overarching point in Murray and Squires' (2013) model is that self-publishing offers opportunities for authors to do without traditional publishers.
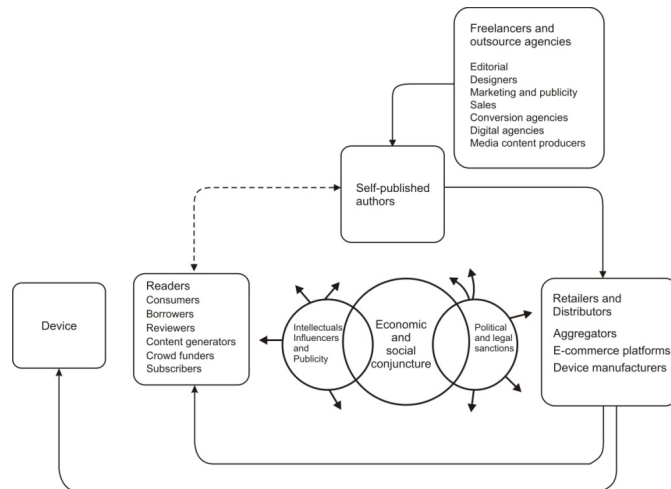

Figure 3: Self-Publishing Communications Circuit (Murray & Squires 2013)

Digitalization of publishing, the platform on which self-publishing thrives, offers enormous benefits. According to Waldfogel and Reimer (2015), there are two key benefits: i) lowering the cost of producing and distributing books, ii) shifting the supply-chain dynamics in the book industry by cutting off or reducing the hold of traditional publishers acting as gatekeepers between authors and the consumers. This shift has manifested largely as self-publishing. Waldfogel and Reimer (2015) assert that in addition to offering substantial gain of reduced cost of book production, self-publishing, through digital publishing, enhances increased variety of published books. The disintermediation of traditional publishing and the resultant breakdown of the barrier that hitherto existed between authors and readers present self-published authors with the opportunity of engaging in book marketing. As Marten (2016) opines this disintermediated relationship provide the foundation for direct marketing by authors to readers using digital technologies.

Squires (2017) ascribes the rise of self-published books in the media landscape to the impact of disintermediation fueled by digital technologies. With respect to the deluge of self-published books, Squires (2017) argues that the adoption of big data and algorithmic selection will go a long way in improving their discoverability. Nevertheless, the issue of low quality often linked with self-published books is not to be waved off and thus deserve some attention.

2.3   Quality Issues and Value of Self-Publishing: The Debate

In self-publishing, the author typically takes responsibilities for book editing, design, production and distribution. The author may either undertake these activities directly or outsource them to specialists in the book trade. The author may also rely on the services of a self-publishing service provider. According to Levine (2014), vanity publishing is not the same as self-publishing. He claims that vanity publishing occurs when an author produces a book solely for the purpose of publishing it, with no marketing or distribution strategy in place. Levine defines self-publishing as publishing by the author in a strategic, intelligent, and well-informed manner. He claims that self-published authors go through the same processes and phases as traditional authors, with the exception that the author bears sole responsibility for the risks and rewards associated with the venture.

However, not every self-published author can guarantee quality in their publishing workflow. Carolan and Evain (2013) laments that quite a number of self-published books have low quality because their authors skip vital steps of quality assurance or do not avail themselves of expert help. Newland (2015), in a similar vein, finds quality assurance to be a major concern in self-publishing. She claims that not every book released is deserving of being published, resulting in "a mass of mediocrity" since authors are not really discerning about whether or not their book is worth the time and effort. Newland advises aspiring writers to seek out competent freelance editors to review their manuscripts in order to improve their quality. The pervasive low quality of some self-published books is largely to blame for the continuous image problem with self-publishing, which can be remedied by

self-published writers placing a high value on editorial and design elements, so that self-published publications can seem as good as traditional books, even at a glance (Carolan & Evain, 2013).

Apart from the quality of self-published books, their sheer number in contemporary media market is staggering and overwhelming. Carolan and Evain (2013) describe the flood of self-published books as massive, noting that readers are having difficulty navigating through the limitless oceans generated by these books. This explains why the self-publishing market is incredibly competitive. To stay ahead of the pack, self-published authors must engage their potential readers through both online and offline platforms. Carolan and Evain (2013) particularly mention the use of blogging and social media networking sites for reader engagement, which helps in increasing sales of books, and boosting content richness and depth through "collaborative authorship".

The limitations of self-published books notwithstanding, self-publishing has given authors the means for self-expression, just as authors are empowered to have control over their copyrights. The low image associated with the practice is gradually waning, even as self-published books gain acceptance and find use in various ways as marketing tools in political communication, brand management, social advocacy, etc. (Grobelny, 2013). The use of self-publishing in marketing communication perhaps explains Pullizi's (2012:122) position that "the future of the marketing department is half marketing and half publishing".

However, the adoption of self-publishing in scientific research has not been warmly received due to the strict review system in academic publishing. As Vuong (2020:66) explains, self-published works "miss out on quality control checks of cross checking and self-correction". The realm of scientific research, the scholar maintains, is dependent on a strict journal publishing system that ensures that scholarly works published do not mislead the public and government. But Perakakis and Taylor (2013) do not completely subscribe to the notion of restrictive control in academic publishing as they make a case for a paradigm shift in the scholarly communication process. In their opinion, academic journal publishing process stifles scientific advancement in a variety of ways and effectively interfering with science's natural selection process. Academic publishing in contemporary society, they believe, thrives solely to benefit a group of commercial publishing corporations. They claim that the existing model is harmful to everyone else, including science, society, researchers, governments, universities, and even private commercial enterprises that profit from research findings. They assert that the need for reform is about uprooting an inefficient system and replacing it with a more efficient alternative that will free up research and improve scientific productivity for the benefit of everyone. The efficient system for assuring quality research output, according to Perakakis and Taylor (2013), should be built around independent peer-review platforms where experts can be invited to evaluate and comment on research works. They advocate that thereafter scholars can either submit peer-reviewed version of their works to an academic journal or choose other alternative publishing channels, including open access publishing and self-publishing. In summary, Perakakis and

Taylor (2013) encourage researchers to embrace a new publishing culture by adapting and responding to modern science's needs and aspirations for open information sharing. On the whole, submissions on the debate on output quality of non-traditional or alternative publishing are undivided that quality can be enhanced without hindering the right of expression.

3. Methodology

This paper reports on a desk research project which explored trends and developments in self-publishing in Nigeria. Towards achieving this aim, a literature search of relevant works on this subject was conducted using Google Scholar. The selected papers were reviewed and insights gained from them categorized based on themes for purposeful analysis.

4. Analysis of Self-Publishing in Nigeria

Self-publishing has taken firm roots as a platform for literary pluralism and diversity in Nigeria. Shercliff (2015) affirms that self-publishing is an important route for authors in the country. She points out that there are a lot of self-published authors in Nigeria who hire printers to design and produce their work. An expanding number of authors are also publishing on digital platforms. As Sanyaolu (2019) records, there has been an appreciable growth in the non-educational book segment in the Nigeria's book industry, in particular the literary publishing subdivision. The trends in the growth of self-publishing in the country follows subsequently

4.1   The Rise of E-books

The increased availability of e-books due to improved digital publishing technology and online distribution platforms or outlets (Okadabooks.com, Banbooks.com, etc.) has resulted in more titles by Nigerian writers being published electronically. Okadabooks is a good example to cite. According to Olofinlua (2021), who researched Okadabooks' impact on e-book publication and the circulation of homegrown Nigerian literature, the new-age publisher is creating both cultural and commercial value for homegrown Nigerian literary talent.

4.2   The Rise of Independent Publishers

The downturn in the Nigerian economy in the late 1980s led to decline of publishing activities in the book industry sector, just as well-established foreign-owned book publishing houses either left the country or scaled down operations. The return of democracy in the 2000s however restored some appreciable level of publishing activities,

buoyed by the emergence of small publishing houses with focus on publishing for specialized or targeted audiences. Given the label "independent publishers", examples include; Cassava Republic, Kachifo (Farafina), Parresia, Quida Books, etc. A number of these independent publishers have established imprints specialized in self-publishing. For example, Parresia Publishers offers self-publishing solutions through Origami Books. According to the imprint, manuscript submissions are accepted all year round in a wide array of categories, including; poetry, short stories, anthologies, religious fiction and non-fiction, educational/academic, historical fiction, plays, science fiction and fantasy.

In part, self-publishing accounts for the rise in non-educational book publishing in Nigeria. The background to the emergence self-publishing practice in Nigeria is given by Umezurike (2019) who affirms that there was no need for self-publishing in Nigeria in the 1960-1970s, at least on a significant level, until the 1980s when it became a viable medium for self-expression for writers during military dictatorship as mainstream publishing shrank due to the prevailing economic situation. In addition to offering Nigerian activist writers the means to mobilize and fight against the prevailing military tyranny in force from 1985 to 1999, self-publishing equally paved the way for broadening the scope of book publishing trade in Nigeria to encompass a wider variety of published books. In this respect, Umezurike (2019) notes that the self-publishing model in Nigeria works in the form of an author working with a printer to produce a specified number of books, which are delivered to the author for distribution and marketing. The author, consequently, becomes the publisher, publicist, distributor and marketer of her book. Providing more details on the early stage of self-publishing in Nigeria, Umezurike (2019) cites a pioneer of self-publishing in Nigeria, Richard Mammah who reiterated that self-publishing was a strategy in the struggle against military dictatorship. Similarly, Umezurike (2019) cites Amatoritsero Ede, a university professor, who commented that self-publishing emerged to fill the vacuum created by the near collapse or decline of publishing activities by mainstream publishers in the 1900s. Equally, the late activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, affirmed that self-publishing helped greatly in his struggles for the rights of the oppressed minority in Nigeria (Saro-Wiwa, 1996).

4.3 The Impact of Internet and Social Media

Nigerian authors are taking advantage of the Internet to reach out to as many people as possible around the world. To engage with readers and share their experiences, authors are using a variety of social media sites. According to a research by Isong (2018) on the significance of new media technologies in the growth of African literature, the Internet and mobile phones have revolutionized the way Africans write and read literary works on the continent. The findings of the study also suggest that social media improves networking opportunities and gives readers a place to access, share, and debate African literature. Mobile phones also play an important and practical role in the reception and promotion of African literature. Overall, these data imply that new media technologies have enabled

readers to access, exchange, and discuss new works, allowing African literature to be recognized globally. According to Abulude (2014), web-based and mobile technologies empower authors and publishers in Nigeria to create content by taking advantage of social media's ability to organize people for the purpose of exchanging ideas, and collaborating. In a study on the Nigerian writer's creative environment, production process, and distribution of literary products in the digital age, Betiang and Akpan (2018) emphasize the importance of social media and blogging platforms as marketing and promotion tools in book publishing, while also affirming the emergence of new cultural trends that create not only new audiences but also new awareness of the writer-reader relationship.

4.4   Benefits of Self-Publishing to Nigerian Authors

Self-publishing has helped in advancing the writing careers of a number of Nigerian authors. Umezurike (2019) cites the example of the award-winning Nigerian author Helon Habila, whose first book was published by his friend's father who had just set up a self-publishing service outfit. Another award-winning writer, Igoni Barret was also reported by Umezurike (2019) to have risen to stardom on the back of self-publishing. From these cited examples, the researcher argues that self-publishing is no longer an alternative but an established platform for new authors to emerge, which, in the final analysis, is a plus for book industry as well as readers of books. Self-publishing practice in Nigeria also finds support with Lola Akande, an academic and fiction writer whose novel *What it Takes* came on the platform of self-publishing. As quoted in Braide (2017), Akande contends that "since traditional publishing isn't forthcoming for many Nigerian writers, they should explore the avenue for self-publishing so that their efforts won't be in vain". This viewpoint, according to Akande, stems from her experience submitting the manuscript for her book *What It Takes* to a traditional publisher for review in the hopes of securing a publishing deal. After two years of waiting, the publishers apologized for not contacting her and informed her that they would no longer be able to publish her book, which they promptly returned to her. However, the academic cum fiction writer confesses that the self-publishing route is difficult for writers because of problems with distribution and marketing.

Self-publishing as an alternative to mainstream publishing is also supported by Enajite Efemaye, managing editor at Khachifo (Farafina Books), a frontline independent publishing house in Nigeria, who opines that, "…a lot more people are self-publishing and that's a good thing for the industry" (as cited in Umesi, 2019). Indeed, feedbacks from self-published Nigerian authors, point at lack of access to traditional publishing opportunities as the reason for taking the self-publishing route. An example is Modupe Taiwo, who stated that her choice of self-publishing resulted from rejections of her manuscripts by traditional publishers in the late 1990. Subsequently, she became an advocate of self-publishing through the consulting services she now offers. According to Taiwo (2017), from her experience, new authors are best advised to self-publish because they are considered "high risks" by traditional publishers. She opines that aspiring authors will go places if they pay

65

the highest premium on the quality of their works by outsourcing their editing and book design to professionals who can add value. On book marketing and promotion, Taiwo notes that, although this can be outsourced to book promotion agencies, such companies are not fully operational in Nigeria. She observed that Nigerian self-published authors often build their book marketing strategies around online platforms; social media marketing, in addition to book reviews, book launch and book readings.

A case in point is Sade Adeniran, the author of *Imagine This* - a book that chronicles the life of a Nigerian girl, which at inception, was self-published in the UK and marketed by the author through online promotions and word-of-mouth. The book went on to win the 2008 Commonwealth Prize for Best First novel. The book was later published by a Nigerian independent publisher, Cassava Republic, in 2011 (Geosi, 2013).

4.5   The Entrepreneurial Dimension to Self-Publishing in Nigeria

The rise of self-publishing in the Nigerian context stems partly from the strained relations between authors and publishers. At the center of the author-publisher crisis is the issue of royalty. Akinfenwa (2008:333) records the complaint of an author; "…my publisher is giving me a raw deal. He's too exploitative for my liking. Apart from cheating me out of my royalties, he also continues every year to under-declare sales…". Another practice of some Nigerian publishers that authors complain about, according to Akinfenwa, is paying royalties on the basis of net receipt, instead of the cover price of book sold. In addition, authors are often at daggers drawn with their publishers on the issue of book promotion. As Akinfenwa (2008:332) puts it, Nigerian publishers are rather "perfunctory at marketing and promotion". On the flip side however, publishers also blame authors for not assisting well enough with marketing. Indeed, the issues highlighted often bring a lot of tensions between authors and their publishers to the point that some authors would rather become their own publishers. So, while publishers lament that authors are bereft of the expertise to function as their own publishers, authors counter that they take to self-publishing because publishers are failing to live up to expectations. Coupled with the ease of book design and production brought about by digital technologies, the entrepreneurial drive and passion for self-expression fuel a burgeoning self-publishing practice in Nigeria's book industry.

As part of efforts to improve publishing practice in Nigeria, the British Council in November 2013 organized a series of workshops on setting up and running a book publishing house in the country. The facilitator of the workshops, Sarah Odedina, a publishing expert with over two decades of experience in the UK publishing industry noted she was fascinated by the fact that many of the attendees of the writers' workshop were already successful self-published authors with interests in content development, pricing and discoverability in the book trade. According to the publishing expert, the next day at the publishers' workshop, many of the same people who attended the writers' workshop also turned up. She said, "I was fascinated to see that the lines of publisher and author are much

more blurred in the Nigerian context, and in a country that is vibrant with entrepreneurial energy I should have anticipated that the publishing sector would be equally innovative in its approach to business" (Odedina, nd,).

4.6   Nigerian Librarians' Views on Self-Published Books

Librarians play an important role in the Nigerian book business as caretakers of books. These professionals have a wide range of opinions on self-publishing. In their opinion, Nwogu and Akinde (2007) consider the tripartite synergy of authors, publishers, and retailers as critical in an evolving information society. As a result, they view self-published authors as "less successful writers" who seek out new ways to connect with audiences. Nonetheless, Nwogu and Akinde (2007) acknowledge that self-publishing gives a platform for expressing a wide range of genres and political viewpoints. Similarly, James (2010) considers self-publishing as one of the publishing industry's problems, arguing that it leads to the production of numerous mediocre books with minimal marketing support for the vast majority of them. Bakrin, Bello, and Salami (2016), on the other hand, do not view self-published books in the same way, claiming that data reveals that library users do not distinguish between commercial and self-published books. They claim that, as libraries have chosen to collect and control traditionally published e-books, the same principle should be applied to self-published books, both printed and electronic. Nonetheless, they admit that certain self-published books present problems for librarians due to their questionable quality, large number, lack of positive reviews, and payment issues, which make procurement difficult.

Adeyemi and Sulaiman (2021) conducted a study to get insight into Nigerian librarians' practices and perceptions of scholarly self-publishing, as well as the consequences for scholarly communication. According to their findings, scholarly self-publishing causes a rise in low-quality scholarly writings and encourages bias. The findings demonstrate that in academic communication, issues of verifiability and credibility of scholarly self-published writers are major concerns. It was thus concluded that scholarly self-publishing will have a detrimental impact on the quality of scientific communication but will encourage open access activities. As a result, the present practice in Nigerian academia is to reject self-published scholarly work for academic assessment and promotion due to the differences in publication processes compared to journals and conferences, as revealed by the study.

Overall, while the general low-quality perception about self-publishing may be an impediment in gaining acceptance in the academic communities in Nigeria, there is no glossing the fact that the practice encourages open access initiatives which is germane to unhindered dissemination of knowledge in the information society we live in. As some of the respondents in Adeyemi and Sulaiman's (2021) study reveal, they go the self-publishing route to make some of their non-empirical research work available to their peers and the public, especially when such works are opinions that they want to make available to

prospective readers. Ultimately, self-publishing still serves the need for scholars' personal brand promotion as thought leaders amongst their peers and the general public.

5. Discussion

5.1   Towards Standardizing Self-publishing in the Emerging Nigerian Digital Economy

As self-publishing becomes more established as a publishing model in Nigeria, it is more practical to concentrate on measures to improve quality and thus uplift the practice than condemning it. Going by the self-publishing communications circuit (Murray & Squires 2013, figure 3), self-published authors can improve the quality of their works by engaging freelancers and outsource agencies that would stand in place of the traditional publisher. By convention, traditional book publishers undertake functions such as editing, page layout and design, production, distribution and promotion (Clark & Phillips 2020). With regard to editorial quality, it is advised that writers who are keen on establishing a writing career through self-publishing should seek out freelance professional editors to work on their manuscripts (Newland, 2015). A similar advice is given by Levine (2014:27) that "a poorly edited book is a waste of time and money…if you intend your book to be read by anyone other than your family and friends; you need to pay for the most extensive editing you can afford. Don't skimp on editing just so you can publish your book now". The good news is that freelance book editors can be sourced via the internet. Related to editorial quality is the issue of book design and production. On the cover design of a book, Levine (2014:35) advises, "A bad cover will kill your book. The book might be brilliant, but a cover that looks cheap and cheesy tells the world, 'Hey, the rest of this thing is as crappy as the outside". The inner design of a book is equally as important, in Levine's words; the inner design of a book goes beyond laying a mass of texts on the page without the standard formatting required by the industry. Lastly, if book printing is involved, the production quality should be up to the required standard; a self-published book should not be differentiated from a traditionally published one on the basis of print quality. Interestingly, a good number of Nigerian printing and graphic arts companies have state-of-the-art desktop publishing applications and digital printing equipment to produce high-quality books for self-published authors.

However, the quality of books produced by these companies is not enough for self-published authors to break through the "seas of books" on offer in the marketplace today. Nigerian authors/publishers must strive to make their books discoverable by readers. The discoverability of books through online media depends to a greater extent on search technology and algorithm, which require metadata - rich and detailed information about books and who the authors are. Also crucial is the engagement of readers who fall into the target audience of particular books through social media marketing. Knowing how to

influence search and understanding how to leverage social media are the two important strategies to make books discoverable (Redmayne, cited in Baverstock, 2015).

The importance of digital marketing in self-publishing cannot be overstated. If authors are willing to go without traditional publishers, they must be at the top of their game when it comes to book marketing. According to Murray and Squires (2013), digital technologies – and new economic models based on them – provide potential for authors to succeed with what they call "innovative self-publishing". Based on their models (Figures 2 and 3), Murray and Squires (2013) and Luck et al (2016), respectively, have stated that the roles associated with the production and distribution of the book have been substituted by various types of digital technologies in favor of authors and consumers of the book. From a practical perspective, Twelverays (2021) offer some insights on how authors can leverage on digital marketing to enhance their publishing performance. According to Twelverays (2021), self-publishers can use social media marketing as a crucial component of digital marketing to advertise their books. There exists a slew of popular social media platforms in the digital world, but each serves a distinct purpose as a digital marketing channel, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Popular social media platforms and their purposes in self-publishing

S/N	Social media platform	Purpose as digital marketing channels
1.	Instagram	Renowned for mobile marketing with features like Instagram Stories, photo + video posts. Useful to publishers in crafting a cohesive package of digital content for a book release.
2.	Facebook	Useful for computer and mobile marketing, it gives publishing houses the ability to reach more audiences and virtual book clubs that may be interested in a specific genre/author.
3.	Twitter	For giving engaging, short updates on new relevant content in relation to an author's book, possible book tours, or even just short literary content drawn from an author's book/speech.
4.	Snapchat	For less polished content from an author or label which gives an audience a more relaxed version of the author.
5.	YouTube	For uploading interviews or video content related to an author's book or the author.
6.	LinkedIn	For professional networking within and outside a publisher's workplace.
7.	Pinterest	For aesthetically pleasing images relating to the cover design of the book, as well as fan art for the book's characters/settings.

8.	TikTok	For trendsetting and reaching younger audiences through pure short video content creation that if used correctly, can help grow the fan base of an author exponentially.

Source: Adapted from Twelverays (2021)

6. Conclusion

Self-publishing is not just about the right to creative expression and literary diversity, it is also about providing the platform for self-expression, which is a fundamental human right. Traditional publishers, for commercial reasons, should not clog the wheel of self-expression. With digital technology making everyone a publisher, there is no limit to the number of books that become channels for stories waiting to be told, stories that will not forgive silence. Yes, there will be all manners of books – the good, the bad and the ugly. But then, readers as consumers, based on their needs, will make their choices. As this study shows, self-publishing has become firmly established as a digital-led publishing model in Nigeria. Notwithstanding this proliferation, standardizing self-published books in the emerging digital economy has become a front-burner issue that should be accorded priority. In particular, there is the need for publishers to focus more attention on book marketing, especially strategic digital and social media marketing.

In terms of significance, this study highlights the relevance of customer engagement through digital and social media marketing, not only in the self-publishing segment of book publishing sector, but in the broad publishing industry. The study contributes to the body of knowledge on gatekeeping in book publishing by highlighting the role of digital technology in democratizing the publishing process, so much so that anyone with a message can use the book as a medium to connect with readers. In the practical context, the possibility for book publishers to leverage on digital and social media to create more demand and sales for their book through direct sales is demonstrated. However, the study is exploratory in nature, thus lacking in empirical support for arguments presented. On this basis, empirical research is required to investigate the thesis that a digital-driven self-publishing practice promotes literary diversity in the knowledge-driven global economy. Besides, with the prevailing digital divide in societies, access to and usage of digital media could also become a new form of gatekeeping that merit further investigation in the context of book publishing.

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