The uptake of e-books on the African continent: challenges and prospects

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Background

- While there is a lot of data on the uptake of eBooks in the UK, US and other countries, very little has been written i.r.o the eBook market in Africa

- Sadly, some critical pointers on the eBook market are mostly found on blogs and informal discussions, rather than in scientific publications

- A comprehensive survey of the African eBook market is essential to monitor the uptake of eBooks, determine trends and patterns in the market & inform decision-makers and LIS professionals

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Presentation Objectives

- Provide an overview of the extent to which African countries have responded to the 'eBook revolution'

- Identify some of the factors & challenges that impact on the growth of the eBook market in the African Continent

- Offer some projections on the future growth of the eBook market based on current trends and patterns

- Identify collaborative opportunities in e-lending in Africa
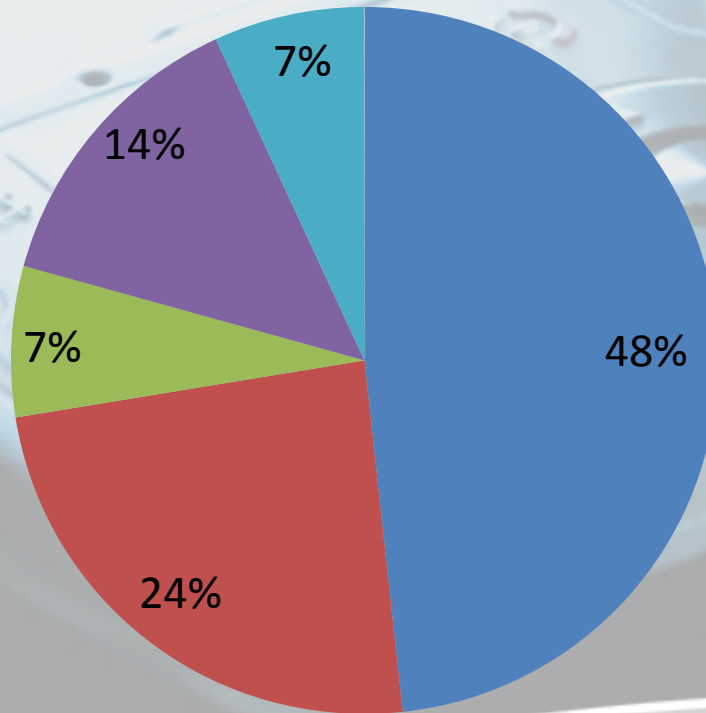
Uptake of eBooks in Africa

- The uptake of eBooks on the African Continent has not yet reached any significant levels.

- The slow growth in the eBook market has prompted some role-players to declare that 'the notion of eBooks in Africa is still an abstract' (Graham Douglas: Paperworth Books)

- Many African countries are only just beginning to set up an eBook infrastructure and spend their library budgets on eBooks – at varying levels

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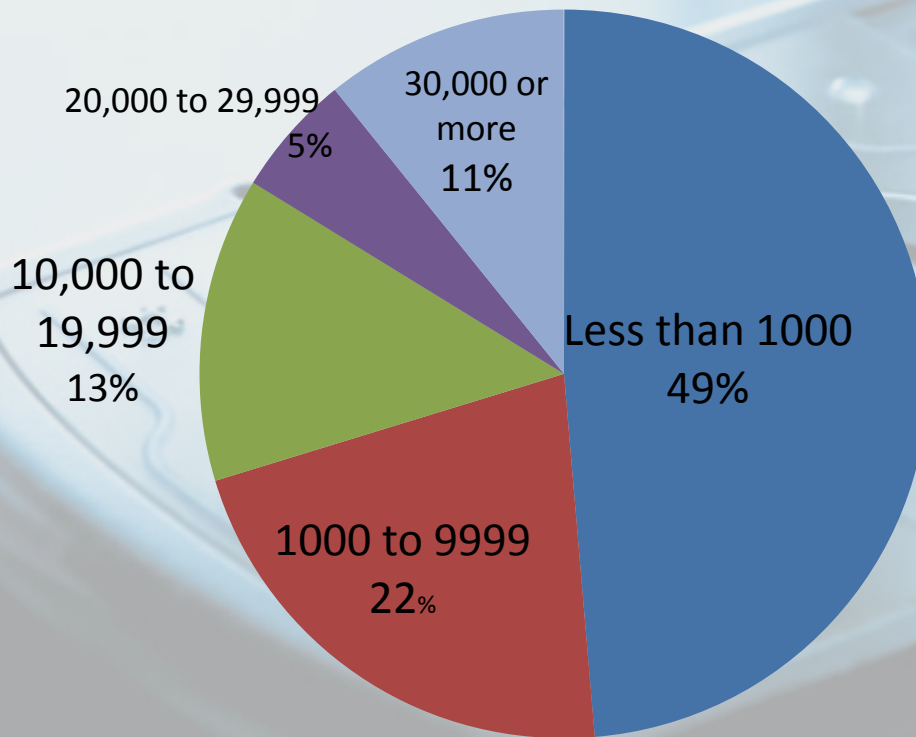
Uptake of e-Books (Cont.)

- An online survey was conducted in February 2013 amongst eminent African librarians to tap into their experiences with eBooks in their respective countries

- A review of literature and the findings of the survey referred to above, both form the basis of this presentation

- The focus of the investigation was largely on public libraries – with a view to aligning the survey with the focus of the African Library Summit

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Proportion of library budgets spent on eBooks in 37 Public libraries in Africa

■ No Budget   ■ Less than 1%   ■ 1-2%   ■ 3-5%   ■ More than 5%

(for ebooks)

7%

14%

7%

48%

24%

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What is the size of your Library's eBook collection (No of titles held) ?

- Less than 1000 — 49%
- 1000 to 9999 — 22%
- 10,000 to 19,999 — 13%
- 20,000 to 29,999 — 5%
- 30,000 or more — 11%

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The uptake of e-Books in West Africa

- The proliferation of eBooks has not yet gained sufficient momentum in Nigeria

"We are far away from any e-book readership in Africa" (AJ Daggar Tolar: Chair: Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA))

The uptake of eBooks in West Africa

- Unfortunately most publishers venturing into the Nigerian eBook market become preoccupied with <u>piracy, security issues and high start-up costs</u>, instead of focusing on the <u>opportunities</u> opened up by the digital revolution(Cornford, 2011)

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The West African eBook market...

- According to the Nigerian National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), there is a sense that <u>government understands the need to develop an enabling infrastructure and consistent legal framework</u> that will encourage the development of digital publishing

- If this commitment is translated into action, it could lay a solid foundation for a vibrant e-book market in Nigeria

- The granting of permission by the Ghanaian government to World-reader to extend its initiative across the country is an indication of the vision and commitment to building an e-Book infrastructure

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The East African eBook situation…

- Kenya launched its first eBook store (eKitabu) only in 2012 (eKitabu means eBook in Swahili)

Experience eBooks with eKitabu

Kenya's first eBook store

- If it is managed well, the bookshop is strategically positioned to drive the Kenyan eBook market

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The East African eBook situation...

- In Kenya, Tanzania and Somalia, technology still represents a considerable challenge, with libraries struggling with an inadequate and unreliable Internet infrastructure (www.eiflinet/news)

The uptake of eBooks in Central Africa

- Rwanda has benefited from World-reader's charitable initiatives aimed at establishing an eBook infrastructure

- Data on French-speaking countries such as The Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Rwanda is difficult to retrieve as a result of language barriers

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eBook experiences in the Southern African market

- The market in Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland is driven by Kindle and World-reader, but is still relatively small in comparison

- In 2012, the eBook market in South Africa was estimated to be about 4 million Euros per annum – Unfortunately no comprehensive comparative data is available for other African countries

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Factors that impede the uptake of eBooks in most African countries

- Relatively high comfort levels with print sources and fear of the unknown make it difficult for people to experiment with new formats that require enhancements

- Lack of affordable e-readers. For instance, the average price for an e-reader in SA is ZAR 800 - about the equivalent of USD 100

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Factors that impede the uptake of eBooks in most African countries

- The scarcity of eBooks produced in Africa, with most eBooks coming from foreign countries - presents a major barrier

- Relatively high eBook prices because of fluctuating exchange rates that do not usually favour local currencies, even if the prices are considered affordable by American, British or European standards

Factors impeding the uptake of e-Books in most African countries

- Challenges pertaining to Internet connectivity generally, are also responsible for hampering the growth of the eBook market in the Continent – Under-sea cabling has alleviated this challenge in most parts of Africa though

- General lack of an effective legal framework to administer digital publishing in most countries — links back to issues of piracy

Challenges presented by eBooks

Some challenges regarding e-books

- E-book technological gadgets not standardized. Each publisher chooses software for its content to be compliant with, eg.: e-PUB…

- Purchasing vs subscription

- Licensing agreements:
  - Multiple access
  - Single access
- Inadequate understanding of accessing of e-books by library clients – clients print electronic versions to keep, defeats the purpose of going e-

Some challenges regarding e-books

- Downloading contents:
  - Software to be downloaded to your device; Android; iPad; Kobo
  - Registration of the client to access the contents
  - In some instances, the downloads cannot be altered in terms of font size, text to speech etc.
  - Downloading: according to the acquisition—
    - Chapter vs page

- Some of the e-book databases like Wiley do not allow downloads. An e-mail address is required where the chapter is e-mailed to a user.

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Some challenges regarding e-books

- Relatively high prices of e-books v/s print,

- Most African publishers have not completely embraced e-book publications and therefore these have to be imported using African currencies which are weaker against the US Dollar, Pound and Euro

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Future prospects

- IFLA has developed e-lending principles and is working on e-lending models in order to enable resource-sharing for e-Books

- Buying as a consortium would considerably reduce the cost of e-books. AfLIA to collaborate with IFLA to explore the possibilities and look at the challenges of e-lending

- {SA has SANLiC consortium through which we negotiate the price and use the money - power muscle} How can we make it work for other countries?

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Future prospects

- The recent ruling by the Canadian Supreme Court that music downloads need not be paid for, could have far-reaching implications for e-books in future

- As a result of the ruling, students using print sources for research, need not pay any photocopying costs (Implications for e-resources?)

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Outlook and Projections

- Kindle; iPad; Sony Reader etc. will continue to be amongst the main drivers of the eBook market

- Therefore a need to find affordable gadgets to ease the pinch felt by customers who would like to venture into the eBook market.

- African countries could consider to follow the Indian path and develop own affordable tablet or e-book reader, which is subsidised by the government?

- SA has is in a process to develop a locally assembled tablet

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Outlook and Projections…

- An observation by Wischenbart rings true, unfortunately:

"… emerging eBook markets won't necessarily follow an identical path such as that followed by the American and European Markets, but they will instead follow a delayed path to wide-spread eBook adoption (Wischenbart, R. 2011) (http://www.publishersweekly.com)

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Outlook and Projections

- The uptake of eBooks is likely to be slower particularly amongst mature African adults who are generally technophobic, as compared to the younger generation

- It would therefore be wise for publishing companies to develop strategies for growing the eBook market in Africa,

- For example they could first target the younger generation which is more receptive to technology and keen to experiment with new innovations, in order to capture this market, and subsequently focus on the adult market

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Outlook and Projections

- Africa's digital future is likely to be driven by mobile phones because they are getting cheaper

- eBooks have the potential of spreading knowledge to more people and new groups of readers that libraries would otherwise find hard to reach

Recommendations

- Owned e-books should be able to be loaned through ILL

- Implementation of a Sharing Circulation software (ILL), where a complete download is permissible, allowing a user to use the entire e-book for a specific loan period which self-destructs thereafter. (e.g.: As in software used by Overdrive resellers)

- Development of a web-page dedicated to e-books where the various applications are listed and the compatibility specifications for the various devices are described, for ease of navigation by users

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Questions & Discussions
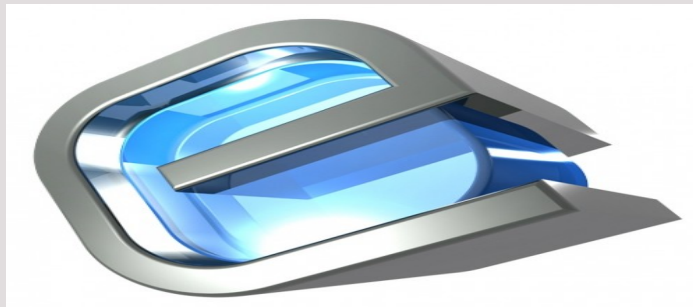
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