



## THE CHALLENGES OF BOOK PUBLISHING IN THE MIDST OF SOCIAL MEDIA FRENZY: THE ZAMBIAN CASE

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### ABSTRACT

According to Ahmed in Brubaker, (2013), Social media is defined as Internet networks that provide an online community for users to interact in a fast, convenient manner. Within social media networks, users can create profiles, share information, and view other users' comments. The paper explores the challenges the authors encounter in the wake of social media syndrome in Kabwe in particular and Zambia in general. The study conducted in Zambia and Kabwe, in particular, revealed that with so many social networking sites displayed on the internet, students and other potential readership are tempted to abandon books/novels and reading times in preference for chatting online with friends. Many students and other readers alike are now addicted to the online rave of the moment with Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and much else. The study further revealed that today most youths, students, and even older people who are supposed to be the greatest supporters of writers of books possess Facebook accounts. As such, most of their time is spent on social media interactions. The Facebook frenzy, for instance, has a ripple effect on the reading culture of the Zambian people this time around. This has a spill over effect on the motivation to write books/novels by authors since the target readership seeps into the social media frenzy. Times that ought to be channelled towards reading books, academic research papers and innovating have been crushed by the passion for meeting new friends online, and most times busy discussing minor issues. Hence, writers of books suffer a setback as a result of distraction from the social media.

**KEYWORDS** : Social Media, Book Publishing, Readership, Challenges, Internet, Social Networking sites, Making the Book Pay.

### Introduction

Social Media and social networking sites, in particular, have captured the interest of many adolescents and young adults. Recent reports on the prevalence of online activities indicate that the majority, for instance, of United States adolescents and young adults utilise social networking sites and that the number of memberships increases with age. The above scenario is not an exception to Zambia. Spending time on social networking sites such as Facebook and WhatsApp appears to be part of most Zambian young adults' daily activities. In one study captured by Tiffany (2009), U.S. college students reported using Facebook an average of 10 to 30 minutes daily. Another study found that about half of 12-17-year-olds with social networking site memberships log on daily; 22% connected to social networking sites several times per day, 26% once a day, 17% three to five days per week, 15% one to two days per week and only 20% every few weeks or less.

A clinical report by Gwenn Schurgin O'Keeffe, et al. (2011) indicated that during the last five years, the number of preadolescents and adolescents using such sites as Facebook and MySpace had increased dramatically. The report further showed that 22% of teenagers log on to their favourite social media site more than ten times a day, and more than half of adolescents log on to a social media site more than once a day. Moreover, 75% of teenagers now own cell phones, and 25% use them for social media, while 54% use them for texting, and 24% use them for instant messaging. Thus, a large part of this generation's social and emotional development occurring while on the Internet and cell phones.

Tiffany, Pempek, Yevdokiya, Yermolayeva, and Sandra Calvert (2009) state that social networking sites are designed to foster social interaction in a virtual environment. Such interactions can potentially address many concerns of adolescence and emerging adulthood, such as the need for friendship and peer feedback. However, this social media frenzy has posed a significant challenge to book publishing in Zambia. Publishing is an integral part of the intellectual and cultural system of any country. Although books no longer hold a monopoly on cultural diffusion, they remain central to the development and dissemination of knowledge. The book publishing sector nonetheless has suffered other serious problems apart from the pressure from mass media, rising costs and inherent difficulties of production and distribution. This new threat to book publishing comes from the impact of social media on the readership. The social media syndrome has swayed the attention of

the readership away from reading the books thereby rendering authors and publishers lose the target audience.

### Literature Review

The advances made in technology have accorded new forms of socialisation, information sharing, cross-pollination of ideas, and communication; in particular, the social media has been increasingly replacing traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, and television during the last decade. Social media has grown quickly in both personal and academic use, and many studies have been done to examine the impact of social media in college, Secondary classroom settings, and in the society at large. Thus, the purpose of this section is to review the various studies done on social media.

Tharinee (2014) conducted research to examine Thailand's EFL Students' writing behaviour on Facebook and to evaluate if this experience had any impact on their academic writing. It was paramount for the researcher to understand how students were engaged in writing on Facebook, what impact it had on their English writing skills, and they perceived the use of Facebook in academic English writing.

Tharinnee's research revealed that students learned to use informal writing from friends, the internet, social media, and different websites. Besides learning from friends, eight students learned to use informal writing from other sources. The research further indicated that students made verb tense mistakes in academic writing more than in Facebook writing and that the more students wrote on Facebook, the more types of errors occurred on Facebook than in their in-class writings. The researcher concluded that the informal writing did not influence students' academic writing that they learned from their friends and through social media and online. Shamsi (2013) discusses the impact of social media networks to Secondary School Students by focussing on how it affects their academic performance. The study showed that a higher number of respondents spent more time on playing video games. 45% of respondents used to play a video game for one hour and two hours, while 33% of them were spending more than two hours playing video games per day. As far as the findings of the study were concerned, spending a higher percentage of time on video games left little time for studies. The study, therefore, found that there was not a single significant positive correlation between gaming and academic performance.

The study done by Bicen and Cavus (2010) showed that more students use Facebook and YouTube than any other social media platform. Blogs, Twitter, MySpace, and LinkedIn, had significantly lower amounts of student users. Students from the business school had the highest percentage of users of blogs, Twitter, and LinkedIn while liberal arts students were the largest proportion of MySpace users. Due to the recency of WhatsApp in Tanzania, it got many users because of its operations like sending instant pictures, videos, messages, even audio messages are sent compared to Facebook and Twitter. The use of smartphones which contain so many applications made it easier for students to select which kind of application to use. The findings of the study further indicate that WhatsApp is the most frequently used social media platform followed by Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media. This is to show that youth use WhatsApp which is the recent social media compared to Facebook which has been there for a long time.

Ahmed (2016)'s study of the Influence of social media on Secondary School Students in Garowe, Somalia revealed that 100% of the students were using social media. The study indicated that despite the ban on social media in school, more than two thousand students in Gabool Public Secondary School used social networking. The study further revealed that 83.3% of respondents frequently used Facebook, while only 16.6% mostly used the Whatsapp application. It was found that most students used social media as a communication tool to connect and chat with friends and family members around the world. 75% of the participants responded that they used it for chatting, while 25% of the respondents used social media for educational purposes following lecturers and communicating with other classmates to exchange ideas and assignments.(P.6). The findings showed that students were spending most of the time chatting with friends instead of reading and preparing for the exams which eventually influenced their educational performance. In a nutshell, students spent a lot of time on social media, mostly for entertainment purposes.

A survey of college students in U.S.A. by Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe cited by Tiffany et al. (2009) showed that social media networking sites are used for social interaction with offline acquaintances to maintain friendships rather than to make new friends. Surveys of teens and college students with social networking site memberships revealed that youth primarily use these sites to stay in touch with friends they see often and those whom they see rarely. Also, about half of teens use social networking sites to make new friends and about half of teens use social networking sites to make new friends and about half of college students use them to let others "know about me." This high affinity for staying on social media for long longer hours has a ripple effect on the reading culture of the students as most time spent on social networking platform chatting at the expense of reading books. Hence, the book publishing industry and authors of books feel the pinch of low demand for books.

Ragai, N.M. (1996) argues that many factors have had their effect on the politics and economics of publishing in Egypt in the last ten years. Ragai indicates that in Egypt at least 40% of all books are textbooks and that a very significant portion of publishers stable income comes from textbooks. He states that without the educational market for books many publishers in Egypt could not survive without subsidy. The rate of literacy is a key variable in publishing. Illiteracy in Egypt among those who were 15 years or older in 1996 were 37% for males and 66% of females, that is, 52% for both sexes in 1992. As a result, book sales were limited, and the publishing enterprise was constricted. A small readership meant limited and costly printings high costs, in turn; meant books were available for fewer people.

Ragai further points out the serious problems the private sector faced in the publishing business. These challenges included: the Copyright problem which persisted despite the implementation of the copyright laws. Piracy is yet another serious issue which affects book industry negatively. It causes significant losses to the

publishers and authors alike while censorship and control by the department of censorship are another serious challenge publishers face. As if these problems were not enough, the crisis of printing paper, printing ink, and accessories makes publishing even worse as the increase in the prices of that stationery and customs of these items result in making the price of books go beyond the buying power of the Egyptian reader. Equally, lack of skilled labour, lack of well-trained editors and book designers and indeed the disunity in the Egyptian Publishers compounded by the weakness of marketing and advertising techniques put publishing industry in a quagmire.(p.26)

Zulkifli (2013) posits that publishing has been an important means for Indonesian Shi'is to spread their teachings, and has gone hand in hand with the development of the madhhab in Indonesia. The publication of books has been considered one of the contributing factors to the intellectual and cultural life of the country. He further says that Shi'i publishing has had a considerable impact on the lives of Shi'is in Indonesia. Zulkifli indicates further that there are three functions of publishing in the Shi'i context which include: religious change, education, and communication. He concludes that publishing operates as a conduit for spiritual change.

Chatterjee, M.N. (1970) discusses the handicaps the book publishing industry was facing in the 1970s and the progress made. He states that the manufacturing problems mainly centered around the lack of good quality paper at reasonable prices want of well-equipped modern bookbinders, limited finance and lack of expertise. More complicated than the problem of production was, however, that of distribution which deserved serious attention. In a nutshell, the problems of book publishing in India in the 1970s were largely symbolic of the socio-economic limitations and inhibitions which were an in-built feature of the structural framework of almost all developing countries. Generally, they fell into categories such as (i) limited literacy, (ii) inadequate purchasing power, because of low per capita income, (iii) lack of book-mindedness and reading habit, and (iv) absence of comprehensive and reliable data which could facilitate a purposeful evaluation of the existing situation, with a view to suggesting remedial measures wherever necessary.

Chatterjee further indicates that only one-third of India's population then was literate, though this marked an increase of about 9% since the last census in 1961. A good percentage of this literate population read books of necessity only such as textbooks and reference books prescribed for various examinations. Of the small fraction of genuine book lovers who would like to read for the pleasure of reading, there were some who could buy books but did not and preferred borrowing to buying and borrowing from friends and relatives to borrowing from libraries – to those few persons who were interested in buying and could buy books for the sake of reading and knowledge. (p.5).

However, efforts to improve the quality of production had been stepped up, and Book design, illustrations, and editorial work are receiving better attention. The annual awards for excellence in printing and design by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting have their own healthy influence. Well planned sales promotion, systematic market research, and advance publicity are yet to form the core of the business policy of quite many publishing firms.(p.11.)

Added to the challenges highlighted above facing the publishing industry is the favorite social media platform which has negatively affected the book publishers and the authors alike. The readership seems to have deeply seeped into the social media frenzy interactions at the expense of reading books. This paper is therefore prompted to explore the challenges book publishers, and authors face in the midst of this social media frenzy by focusing of Zambia in general and Kabwe, Kapiri Mposhi, and Ndola towns in particular.

#### Methodology

The study was conducted using qualitative research methods to

explore the respondents' attitude toward reading books and understand their perspectives and frequency usage of social media. Qualitative research is suitable for this study because it "is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2009, p.4). Data collection aims to draw out personal experiences and perceptions using questionnaires, observations, and interviews. The data collection methods were structured questionnaires, unstructured interviews, and observations. The participants consisted of 30 college students/ Secondary school pupils, 20 business people, and 30 public service workers. 20 were a combination of different categories of respondents ranging from homemakers to the unemployed on the streets.

#### **(a) Site Selection**

The study was conducted in Kabwe, Kapiri Mposhi, and Ndola townships among Students, business people, homemakers and the unemployed, and public service workers. The researcher chose this category of respondents because they are most likely to get involved in reading as well as social networking through social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and many other locations. Student respondents were drawn from Kabwe while business operators and public service workers were captured through questionnaires, observations as well as interviews.

#### **(b) Research Procedure**

The researcher visited the respondents' working domains to distribute questionnaires for some public service workers, business people, students, homemakers and the unemployed while others were subjected to interviews and observations. Before field work, the researcher enlisted the services of two research assistants who were based in Kapiri Mposhi and Ndola, respectively. The assistant researchers were guided on what they were expected to do while in the field. They were also reminded about the ethical issues and how best they could collect factual data.

#### **(c) Research Instruments**

The study used the Questionnaires, Interviews, and observations as research tools. The questionnaires were distributed to respondents randomly while Interviews and observations were done in those interviewed' domains. Prior appointments with participants were made before the interviews were carried out.

#### **(d) Data Collection**

For the data collection procedure, field research (observation), Questionnaires and Interviews were employed in this qualitative research. Field research means that a researcher goes "into the field" to observe a phenomenon. In this study, the field refers to the visits made to Shop operators, Universities/Colleges, Markets, Streets, and public service workers' offices in Kabwe, Kapiri Mposhi, and Ndola. Trochina (2006) states that in qualitative research the researcher usually observes and records actual behaviours by taking field notes which later can be coded and analyzed in a variety of ways. Participant observation provides personal first-hand experience to the researcher who seeks to explore the natural scene and blend in with the natural activity that he/she has access to the same places, people, and events as the subjects (Woods, 2006). Thus, the researcher observed and participated in the activities at the same time especially with students, Public Service Workers, and shop operators.

### **Research Findings**

#### **University/Secondary School/ College Participants**

Through talking with people, qualitative research allows researchers to learn about individuals' thoughts and feelings through formal interviews or casual conversations (Woods, 2006). However, talking with people does not have only to take the form of speaking. Conversations can also occur in writing, such as online chatting. In this study, interviews with students were conducted via online chatting to make them more comfortable and for convenient and due to the distance between the researcher and the respondents. Also, face to face interviews were conducted. The

findings out of this interaction with students indicate that 100% of the respondents owned a mobile phone out of which 89% had access to the internet. 44% said they use Facebook and WhatsApp social sites at a frequency of 33.3%.

As for the purpose of accessing these social networking sites, 80% indicated that they access Facebook and WhatsApp to find new friends, Chat with current friends and family members, and just for funny. 72% of the respondents said they access social network sites to access educational materials, research for assignments, and news of current affairs. When asked about reading books other than educational ones, only 10% said they had read novels, story books, etc. other than school material in the last two weeks. All these were females who gave this response. For those that had movies of certain books, they preferred to watch the movies to reading the actual books.

#### **Public Service Workers participants**

This category included teachers, technicians, drivers, Lecturers, healthy personnel, men in uniform, and other government workers. This group was subjected to questionnaires and observations because of the nature of their work. Most of them were busy in their offices or classrooms teaching such that there was no time to conduct face to face interviews. In this category, the study revealed that 100% respondents owned a mobile phone or laptop computer while 42%, 58%, and 10% had access to Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social networking sites, respectively. Additionally, 58% had access to social media on a daily basis for more than three hours while 21.1% had access on a weekly basis for about Two hours. 71% indicated that they accessed social media networking sites for the purpose of chatting with friends, workmates, and family members while 47.3% used the social media for research and news purposes. In as far as access to reading materials such as books, newspapers, novels and much else, only 11% of the respondents indicated having read a hardcover book and the newspaper in the last Two weeks. Of the 11%, the majority had access to newspapers as they were said to be more affordable than novels and most of these were males. From observations done, female counterparts were not interested in reading newspapers as newspapers were viewed to be politically inclined, a province for men. Men were found reading newspapers in the corridors and their offices.

#### **Business operator Participants**

This category involved shop attendants, marketeers, and street vendors. These were subjected to observations and to some extent interviews. The majority of the business operators such as shop attendants and street vendors could not accord the researcher chance to interview them because of the nature of their activities. Interviewing them would mean disrupting the flow of customers. The study revealed that 100% of the participants had mobile phones. 80% had access to the internet, while 20% did not have access to the web. 60% were able to access social networking sites daily while 20% had access on a weekly basis. 20% did not rate this aspect. The study also indicated that 33.3% had access to Facebook while 53.3% had access to WhatsApp social networking site at least once per day. For instance, out of 20 business operators visited by the researcher, only 6 (30%) were found reading either a newspaper, a novel or a magazine. Instead, the majority were found glued to their mobile phones either Facebooking or WhatsApping.

Only 27% accessed the internet for research purposes while 67% use social networking sites for constant connection with friends, family members, and business partners/ customers. They also use social media to remain abreast with current affairs through the news. Those interviewed said that social networking sites such as WhatsApp and Facebook are not only user-friendly but also cheaper than purchasing printed business books or novels and save them business time.

#### **The Unemployed Participants**

This category included the housewives and those who were on the job search. The researcher included this group because it was hoped

that this category had enough time to be able to read books such novels, magazines, newspapers and other story books. The study showed that 67% of the unemployed respondents owned a mobile phone or laptop computer and had access to social media networking sites such as WhatsApp. No one indicated having access to Facebook while 33.3% were able to use WhatsApp once or twice in the space of two weeks. Half of the respondents did not rate this aspect. Those who had access to the internet on their phones or computers indicated the primary purpose of accessing the social media networking sites was to connect with friends and family members. Meanwhile no one indicated research as the reason for accessing the social media sites.

### Discussion of the findings

The results of this study are quite interesting as they are consistent with some studies done by some scholars elsewhere, an indication that probably the impact of social media on publishing is a global problem. The study apparently signals that the advancement of technology and indeed the popularity of social media have relegated the book-mindedness and reading habit to the lowest ebb. The realisation of the Zambian citizens' aspirations and successes through education and advancing themselves through reading is being hampered by the social media syndrome. In fact, reading is an important tool to poverty eradication and therefore, if inculcating the reading habit and sustaining reading skill in young people is not given preferential attention, it becomes difficult to fight poverty. This is because it pays to read so that the nation maintains high literacy levels. The findings speak volumes about the future of publishing in our beloved nation if no deliberate mechanisms are put in place to redress the current situation as revealed by this study in the three townships indicated in the methodology.

Regarding percentage aggregate, the study demonstrates that 98% of the informants owned phones and other gadgets such that 89% of them were able to access the internet (social media) on a daily basis. The most preferred social networking site was WhatsApp which stood at 52.17% access compared to Facebook placed at 37%. 48% of the total respondents accessed the internet (social media) for social communication with friends and family members, whereas 46% used social media for research purposes. The research aspect was high among students probably because of their search for solutions to their academic assignments. The study revealed that this was a one-off activity since often students spent much of their time chatting and having fun with existing friends on social media. The implication of spending longer time on social media is little time was left to devote to reading books. This entails that people will be unable to realize their aspirations and successes through education and will be unable to advance themselves, hence fail to eradicate diseases, increase food security and nutrition and indeed, alleviate poverty. The finding of students spending longer time on social media is consistent with Ellison et al. (2009) whose survey of teens and College Students in the USA indicated that students' use of social media was meant to stay in touch with friends and make new friends.

15.21% of the total respondents did not mention the reasons for accessing social media and one can only assume that they equally used social media to connect with friends and family members, to a larger extent. For those who had downloaded book movies, they opted to watch movies at the expense of reading actual hardcover copies. They, of course, found it more interesting watching book movies than reading the books. Only those who were doing courses that required them to read novels were compelled to read the books because they had no option since the courses dictated so. Even then, most of them had not read all the required books citing lack of enough time. Surprisingly, time to stay on social media for hours to chat with friends would be found. This shows the attitude of the current generation seeped into social media toward reading. This puts book publishing in the spotlight of this social media frenzy as a victim of the circumstances. It also becomes difficult, in this case, to create the Africa we want through reading- it becomes an uphill task

to achieve Africa Agenda 2063 in the midst of the social media frenzy.

Reading increases awareness about diseases and other communicable diseases – so it pays to read. However, from the data gathered in the field, the public service workers equally did not read books but spent most of their free time on WhatsApp and Facebook, chatting with their workmates, friends, and family members. In fact, most of them did not have books on their tables for reading save for those that related to their work. There was no evidence of real reading or research going on in their offices except for those who were pursuing some studies were found with study material with them. This was a clear indication that people only read when they have an examination or when they are researching for assignments, an implication that Zambians no longer read for pleasure. In fact, only 2% of the respondents were found reading for pleasure. 80% of the interviewees had not accessed books, journals, novels, etc. for the last two weeks at the time of data collection but they had access to social media nearly every day for chatting purposes. This scenario places book publishing in limbo since there seems to be no zeal among the readership to access either soft or hard copy books and read them. This reduces the contribution towards employment creation because the high demand for books has a corresponding contribution toward creating jobs. The more people shun reading books, the less the demand for books. Hence, less human resources required in the production of books.

Moreover, the prohibitive cost of books in Zambia appear to be a contributing factor to the above scenario as the majority indicated that social media is affordable, efficient, and user-friendly. Hence, the frenzy being witnessed of late. What was interesting also about the findings was that women were disinterested in reading even newspapers but opted to chat with friends, if not gossip about their buddies' wardrobe, at the expense of reading. This becomes a threat to development agendas as the citizenry lack exposure to reading and access to information. There was a feeling that newspapers were politically inclined, hence a province of men. Also, those books in bookshops in Zambia were expensive to buy.

Regarding business operators, social media was found to be their favourite mode of information dissemination and social interactions. It helped them to connect with their clients as well as getting in touch with current affairs. Hence, they did not see the need to buy books not even those books dealing with business issues. Taking time to read books would mean neglecting their businesses but resorted to reading newspapers to keep themselves informed about the political situation in the country. Others read newspapers to scout for advertisements on jobs and scholarships. The unemployed and homemakers, on the other hand, were expected to have enough time to attend to reading books since they were usually in their homes. But the opposite was the case. Even job seekers did not take a chance to read books as they were pre-occupied with how they survive in their jobless status. To make matters worse, they had no money to buy the books which were allegedly beyond their purchasing power. This picture shows the circumstances publishers and authors of books find themselves in. It is a known fact that reading increases revenue inflows for the book industry players by creating or generating wealth from author/publisher/bookseller perspective. Therefore, social media frenzy poses an adverse effect on revenue inflows for the Book Industry players.

In a nutshell, the study showed that 98% of the respondents had access to social media and therefore spent most of their time interacting with friends and family members. This social media frenzy has a ripple effect on the reading culture of the Zambian people this time around. Ultimately, it dampens the authors' spirit of writing books since the target readership seeps into the social media frenzy. The study further revealed that students and other potential cadres of readership are tempted to abandon books and reading times in preference to chatting online with friends. Many students and other readers alike are now addicted to the online rave



of the moment with WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and many others as revealed by the study. This defines what a small readership remains of the authors and publishers-. A small readership, therefore, implies limited and costly printings; high costs, in turn, mean books are available to fewer people.

Reading contributes to the creative economy which includes, among other players, the book industry that has in its book value chain: authors who are the creators of the works; publishers whose activities are to exploit intellectual property; the illustrators and designers; booksellers or distributors; librarians who gather, process and promote wide access to reading and information materials; and the users who include school children, academics, adults, researchers, educational and training institutions, religious institutions, private and public business enterprises, universities, colleges, research institutions, and government and non-government institutions. Therefore, the book industry is cardinal in the provision of income to all participants in the above book value chain and earns revenue to the government in the form of taxes- hence, it pays to read the book. But with the current social media syndrome, income to all participants in the book value chain is under serious threat. Under this circumstance, Making the Book Pay becomes a significant challenge, and it requires a multisectoral approach from various stakeholders.

### Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

- The Zambia Publishers and Authors should form an association dubbed "Zambia International Book Fair Association (ZIBFA) which will champion inculcation of the sense of reading among the Zambians through organising local and International book fairs. This association should also be responsible for championing the need to promote indigenous knowledge through research and publication- the way Kenya is doing it.
- Establishment of Zambia Literature and research bureaus to enhance research and publication
- Putting in place a clear policy on publication so as to minimise the cost of production of reading materials. At the same time, quality control mechanisms should not be ignored as the policy on publication is being drafted.
- The need for vigorous sensitisation of the value of reading books as opposed to spending quality time on social media chatting and having funny.
- Enforcement of mechanisms on anti-book piracy and revision of copyright laws.
- Reduction in the cost of reading materials to enable the readership access books at affordable prices.
- The introduction of an annual award for excellence in printing and book design by the Ministry of information and broadcasting in conjunction with the Ministry of Education to promote book publishing and reading.
- Promotion of book-mindedness and reading habit through competitions among school going children.

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