



Improving the Quality of Library
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The Challenges of Journal Marketing and Distribution in a Developing Economy

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Abstract

Developing countries face enormous social, political and economic problems in addition to being consumer economies that rely almost absolutely on importation. The knowledge production enterprise (in general) and the library and information science (LIS) profession (in particular) suffer due to inadequate media to communicate scholarly works in Nigeria. This paper identifies short lifespan, irregular issues of locally produced journals, and inability to sustain subscription to foreign ones as major shortcomings of LIS journal marketing in Nigeria. It posits that journal sustainability is mainly based on the returns made from journal marketing and distribution. However, the ability of institutions to subscribe to reputable journals is dependent on how well funded they are and every academic relies on the meagre monthly allowance s/he earns which is hardly enough to personally subscribe to one good local journal. Moreover, the content and physical qualities of the journals also affect the extent of their marketing and distribution. The cumulative effect of these limitations is the pauperization of the knowledge industry through the unavailability of quality media for communicating research results and limited exposure to foreign research findings. The paper suggests, among other things, that Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and other stakeholders in the librarianship profession should create a regulatory body that would be responsible for setting standards, vetting the quality of, and endorsing journals produced, marketed and distributed in Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Most developing countries face multiplicity of problems ranging from economic poverty through social and political instability to educational impoverishment. Some countries battle with huge debt burdens and inability to provide basic infrastructure. In Nigeria, education (among other sub-sectors) suffers greatly despite persistent agitation by the general public that the sub-sector should be adequately funded. This environment has its impact on the number and level of research studies conducted in the country. In addition to research studies being poorly funded, the channels for communicating research findings are getting fewer and diminishing in quality. Also, the knowledge production is hampered and its dissemination adversely affected. Journal production, promotion and sustenance are expected to thrive under this harsh economic climate.

The original objective of publishing any academic work is to encourage free flow of knowledge. Journals are serials “issued in successive parts that is intended to be continued indefinitely, usually multi-authored and sequentially numbered.” (Keenan and Johnson, 2000). They are communication channels used for conveying and disseminating current and research information within the academia.

Purpose of Journal Production

Journals are produced mainly by professional/learned societies or commercial organizations. The importance of journal publishing to research and scholarship is enormous. Journals are central to the knowledge production industry. They constitute the media through which research findings are disseminated. Researchers rely on journals to learn about on-going research studies in all disciplines and the level they have attained in order to know how further research studies could be done in those fields. Ultimately, the research studies lead to discoveries that are used for the development of humanity.

Researchers inter-change ideas and findings through journals. Journals therefore contain academic communications and information that should not be inhibited by national or international boundaries. They are supposed to be distributed and made accessible globally. In doing this, the bodies or organizations responsible for producing them evolve policies that will guide their journals. These policies include aims and objectives, authorship requirements, editorial provisions, prices, target audience, marketing and distribution channels, regularity, among others.

Sources of Funding for Journal Publishing

The cost of publishing journals is huge and the burden of sustaining its production is much. According to Snyder, (1980) “costs directly applied to journal publishing are quite comparable to books. They include production, editing, design and promotion. In addition, there are often costs associated with editorial board for a

journal... in some instances, advertising sales commissions are another direct cost of a journal. To a publisher, the major financial difference between books and journals is that book costs are principally one time investment while journal costs are continuous over the life of a journal." Depending on whether or not a journal is established for commercial purposes, income is generated from subscriptions, advertisements, grants and donations, support from professional societies, direct sales of current and back issues, and publication fees received from prospective authors whose articles have been accepted for publication.

2. Journal Marketing and Distribution

Essentially, journal marketing and distribution are efforts invested by journal publishers to advertise and sell the journals, and ensure that they reach the target audience. In other words, marketing and distribution serve the dual roles of promoting (popularizing) the journal as well as generating income. 'Wikipedia: the free encyclopedia' defines marketing as "the process of planning and executing the pricing, promotion and distribution of goods, ideas and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals." It is apparent from this that 'marketing' encompasses 'distribution'. Hence, distribution is inherently part of marketing. The encyclopedia further states that marketing theory and practice can be justified on the belief that customers use a product or service because they have a need or because a product has perceived value. Marketers are then challenged to recruit new customers and retain (or expand relationship with) existing ones. Ultimately, marketing is customer-centred and refers to the promotion of products, especially, advertising and branding. Products are often developed to meet the desires of groups of customers or, even, for specific customers.

Factors that will Promote Journal Marketing and Distribution

As earlier stated, there are commercial and professional journals. Both categories are supposed to meet certain basic elements of marketability for them to be acceptable by the target audience. Of what use is a journal that has no perceived value to its audience? It should not have come into circulation in the first instance. Snyder (1980) noted that "publishing companies' reputations rest with their products, be they journals or books. To survive over a long term, a publisher's reputation can not be tarnished by a series of publications of questionable merit." For any journal to meet basic standards and be acceptable by the target group, it must have been tested and seen to be beyond doubtful integrity. The elements of merit, which is by no means exhaustive, include:

- *Authority*: This can be seen from two perspectives, the publishing authority and the contributors. Before a journal can be adjudged as meriting customers/ consumer patronage and acceptability, authority in terms of statements of

responsibility would have been considered. Who are responsible for the publication? What are their qualifications? What are their research records? Are they well known in the discipline they are engaging/covering? What is the editorial profile? Also, the calibre of contributors will be checked. Generally, the issue of credibility will be examined before the journal can be certified as acceptable in the market.

- *Quality:* There are three aspects to journal quality – the content, physical and publishing qualities. The three add value to the journal. Content quality refers to the standard of articles, research findings, communications, reviews, etc. contained in the journal. How rich is the content of the journal? How deep are the research findings reported in it? How good is the language of communicating the content? The physical qualities will include the quality of paper used in producing the journal. Are they high quality or newsprint papers? How good is the cover design? Is the cover glossy or ordinary? Publishing qualities include typeface and prints. How are the tables, charts, photographs, diagrams, etc rendered? How neat is the final product? How is the binding? Will it endure or not?
- *Regularity:* Journals are expected to be published regularly. The number of issues to be produced per annum should be ascertained. Consumers want to know when to expect the journal.
- *Price Regime:* The price of the journal has to be commensurate with the quality. A poorly published journal that has very high price tag is not likely to be acceptable in the market. The end users/buyers will want to measure the standard of the journal with the price to determine whether it is exorbitant or moderate and affordable. According to Hichcock (1997), "... unlike most commercial publishing, the market for many academic journals are increasingly small (although the overall market has become increasingly profitable for some publishers), and consequently high price-tag is a barrier... that impedes the free flow of academic knowledge, which was the original objective of publishing academic work."
- *Focus:* The journal will be subjected to scrutiny to determine whether or not it is an all-comers journal or a journal that is focused and subject-specific. This is done to ensure that the subject coverage is accurate and acceptable to the end-users.
- *Delivery Service:* What kinds of distribution channels are used for delivering the journals. Is the delivery system effective or not? Does the journal arrive when it is expected? Is the journal delivered intact and prompt? These questions will enable the buyers to rate the reliability and stability of the journal.

Problems of Marketing and Distribution of Nigerian LIS Journals

In journal marketing and distribution, things are not static. Change and dynamism could be constant. *The Research Institution of Marketing and Distribution* submits that "some environments surrounding marketing and distribution, such as economy, society, legislation, politics, culture and technology are changing rapidly and dramatically. Thus, not only fundamental research but also applicable studies are keenly felt to fulfill the demands of the times." We have seen how journals generally become acceptable by the target audience. This shows that certain parameters have been set to establish patterns for marketing and distributing journals. These norms are not restricted to any country or to any particular journal.

A number of LIS journals are published in Nigeria. Some were established decades ago while others came into existence a couple of years ago. Most of the journals are epileptic. They are published only when the publishers can afford the cost! Some of them have ceased entirely to exist. Some Nigerian LIS journals are:

- 1 Abuja Infolib: Journal of Library and Information science.
- 2 African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science.
- 3 Communicate: Journal of Library and Information Science.
- 4 Frontiers of Information and Library Science.
- 5 The Information Technologist: an International Journal of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).
- 6 Journal of Information Communication for Education in Africa.
- 7 Lagos Journal of Library and Information Science.
- ~~8 Lagos Librarian.~~
- 9 The Information Manager.
- 10 Middle Belt Journal of Library and Information Science.
- 11 Nigerian Libraries.
- 12 Nigerian Library and Information Science Review.
- 13 Owena Journal of Library and Information Science.
- 14 Samaru Journal of Information Studies.

Some of them face enormous problems that make them unmarketable. The problems include:

- *Poor Authorship*: Most of the journals have budding or unrecognized editorial teams with substandard articles that are not properly edited. Poor authorship occurs in Nigeria for a number of reasons. First, the Nigerian economy is not attractive enough to retain some of the best intellectuals produced in the universities. They end up becoming expatriates in foreign countries where they are more productive because of the conducive environment under which they work. The prospective contributors -authors and editors alike- are being forced into diaspora. Second, most foreign journals are more sophisticated in

terms of content and physical qualities. Nigerian researchers prefer to publish internationally rather than contribute to local journals particularly now that academic staff promotion requirements in most universities are stringent concerning publishing in foreign journals. That is a tacit acceptance of the inferiority of Nigerian journals to foreign ones. This regulation has forced prospective Nigerian academics to publish in foreign journals rather than in local ones.

- *Economic Factors:* Journal publishers are faced with the problem of funds. In identifying sources of income in the publishing enterprise, subscriptions and publication fees from authors are central. It is evident that with low quality and substandard journals, very few organizations and individuals would subscribe to local journals. In the first instance, libraries that should ordinarily subscribe to the journals are poorly funded and so operate shoestring budgets. Individuals can hardly purchase journals from their meagre income. The journal allowance paid to academics is hardly able to purchase one good journal. Moreover, since most prospective authors now prefer to publish in foreign journals, publishers no longer get much income from publication fees. On the other hand, per unit cost of publishing a journal has increased therefore jerking up the price of journals. These economic factors have implications for the regularity and sustainability of local journals. It is not uncommon to find a journal that is published bi-annually or quarterly to have all the issues collapsed into one (Volume 1, Nos. 1-4). Most of the local journals can simply no longer be sustained!
- *Poor Quality:* The quality of authorship and the diminishing fortunes of journal publishing have great impacts on the quality of the journal produced locally. As discussed earlier, authors now patronize foreign journals thereby jettisoning local ones. Most local journals are left with substandard articles to “manage”. And due to poor income, local journals are of poor physical qualities. Only very few journals can afford to get published by renowned publishers. Most end up with roadside printers thereby compromising the quality.
- *Distribution Problems:* These are associated with lack of trained personnel to manage the distribution of journals: lack of basic infrastructure like functional office, directories and other reference tools of book trade, mailing lists, directories of institutions and organizations, review and publicity outlets etc; poorly remunerated staff; and poor distribution and communications network. The local communication, especially postal, system is wrought with a lot of uncertainties. Nigeria Postal Service (NIPOST) is highly unreliable as one cannot be certain whether mails will get to its destination safely, be delayed or not delivered at all. On the other hand, speed posts are usually fast and reliable but very expensive.

- *Competition with Foreign Journals:* Increasingly, journals produced outside the country are getting more prominent in local academic circles and markets. Nigerian researchers patronize foreign journals by contributing articles and struggling to subscribe to them. In short, foreign journals have virtually taken over local markets from journals published locally. In most cases, they are of better quality -both content and physical-; they are regular and well sustained: and their prices are moderate. Ironically, most local journals have no international market. The demand for local journals in international market is really low. So, the kind of revenue generated by foreign publishers is not open to local publishers. The lack of international market can be ascribed partly to the concentration on local themes and contents. And because of lack of exposure to foreign literature some of the research studies reported in the journals may have been overtaken by events.

These problems are not restricted to LIS journals, other journals published in Nigeria face similar problems. It is difficult to treat Nigerian LIS journals in isolation (or exclusively) since the problems are pervasive.

3. Suggestions for the Improvement of LIS Journal Marketing and Distribution in Nigeria

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the challenges confronting LIS journal marketing and distribution are posed by poor authorship, funding problems, poor quality, distribution problems and inability to compete with foreign based journals. The following suggestions are being proposed:

- *Planning:* It is not desirable for LIS journals to be proliferated in the country. Efforts should be geared at strengthening the sustenance of existing journals and making them more stable and reliable. However, if the need arises that new LIS journals should be established, careful and proper planning should be done. In planning, a number of considerations and posers should be made in terms of:
 - Reliability in terms of publication schedule.
 - Financial viability of the journal.
 - Who will be responsible for the distribution and marketing?
 - What distribution and marketing channels exist for the journal nationally and internationally?
 - Will the journals be distributed directly from the editorial office or through commercial publishers, booksellers and subscription agent, or by direct sales?
 - Are local communication channels sufficiently efficient for distributing and marketing the journals?

On the whole, it is important to have a good knowledge of the market before a journal publication can survive in developing country like Nigeria. It should be borne in mind that most journals do not make profit and many never become financially self-sustaining. Nevertheless, the journals should not incur heavy financial losses. Therefore, journal publishing should be run in a business-like manner. Also, it usually takes some time, at least three years, before a journal can really become established and the editor can begin to think about breaking even.

- *International Support and Partnership:* Efforts should be made to garner international support and partnership for the marketing, promotion and distribution of Nigerian LIS journals. "One option for the future might be to promote one-to-one partnership between publishers (or individuals journals) in the developed world and publishers (or journals) in the developing world. ...Such a project is currently being planned by the Association for Learned and Professional Society Publishers. The approach may facilitate information exchange and sharing of expertise in a variety of areas." (INASP-Health Information Forum: Workshop 20).
- *Motivating Authors:* Authors should be motivated and encouraged to write for Nigerian LIS journals. Motivation can be in terms of waiving the publication fees charged by some publishers, improving physical qualities of the journals, providing free offprint articles to authors, among others. As part of initiatives to encourage authors and editors, the 'International network for the Availability of Scientific Publications' (INASP) in conjunction with *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science (AJLAIS)* have, in the recent past, organized workshops for authors, potential authors and editors on how to improve the quality LIS journals emanating from this country.
- *Involving Authors in the Publishing Process:* In traditional publishing process, the author is usually involved in authoring and reviewing of papers. The responsibility for the production process, marketing and distribution, however, squarely falls on the shoulders of the publisher. According to Hichecock (1997), the advent of desk top publishing tools has now widened the scope for authors to be involved in the production of their papers up to the point of producing almost the typeset quality copy. Hence, the author is involved in authoring, reviewing, editing and production of paper while the publisher is still responsible for the core functions of marketing and distribution. Increasingly, academics are making their impact felt in journal marketing and distribution through their 'informal networks' on which the publishers base their marketing efforts.
- *Publishers' Responsibilities:* Publishers can find ways of improving the marketing and distribution systems of Nigerian LIS journals. This can be done

by creating standard mailing lists, advertising and publicizing the journals, ensuring fast and safe delivery, creating international markets and contacts through their e-mail promotion and home page online adverts; displays at conferences resources of catalogues and brochures; cooperation with professional societies and organizations.

- *Quality Control System:* The quality of some Nigerian LIS journals, as discussed above, is below standard. One way of controlling quality is for the Nigerian Library Association to set up a regulatory body to be responsible for setting minimum standards for LIS journals in the country. The Association should not certify journals that are unable to meet the standards.
- *Electronic Journal Marketing:* Nigerian LIS journals should be accepted globally like their foreign counterparts. To achieve this, the opportunity created by the Internet should be explored. This practice is now gaining a lot of grounds. For instance, Stanford University in co-operation with five leading scientific publishers has launched the High Wire Marketing Group. "The group will promote and distribute a wide range of scholarly journals currently published with the assistance of High Wire Press. In a departure from current distribution models, the marketing group features online prices that are lower than many print prices." This marketing group has established distribution arrangements with some of the leading scholarly publishers in the scientific and technical fields. The African Journal Online (AJOL) is also another example. AJOL promotes African journals on the Internet. Nigerian LIS journal publishers should adopt this marketing strategy.

4. Conclusion

Developing countries that are basically consumer-oriented have dual disadvantages in the knowledge production enterprise. They are unable to retain their best intellectuals and they jeopardize the development/growth of prospective intellectuals. It is clear that local journals can hardly be in the international market for reasons of inferiority, poor communications and distribution system. Even then, their marketability locally is dwindling because foreign journals are more attractive and of superior quality (in most cases). Thus, journal subscribers and individual buyers prefer to patronize foreign journals that have international recognition. It is therefore imperative for journal marketing and distribution to be improved. This is applicable not only to LIS journals but to all journals published in Nigeria.

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