



E-commerce readiness of booksellers in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Booksellers in Kenya have traditionally sold printed books through physical stores. However, this is changing as e-commerce technology disrupts the industry. Booksellers need to adopt e-commerce and eBook selling to remain competitive and profitable. This paper investigates the barriers and benefits of publishers adopting e-commerce and eBook selling and the level of readiness for the same. The study adopted the Technology, Organization, and Environment [TOE] framework for technology adoption. The study targeted booksellers in Nairobi, Kenya; it was a survey of bookshops within the central business district of Nairobi and targeted 38 bookshops. Quantitative data collected using questionnaires was analyzed quantitatively using SPSS Version 29 software to provide both descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings of the study showed that the barriers to the adoption of e-commerce were inadequate funding, which correlated to poor online marketing systems (P value 0.017); high delivery costs, which correlated with lack of data protections (P value <0.001); and lack of awareness among booksellers about eBooks. Benefits were higher customer loyalty (P value 0.015), which correlated with new revenue streams (P value 0.015), and higher visibility of the stores. Only 3.7% of booksellers sold eBooks, and only 48.1% of the booksellers indicated readiness for adoption of e-commerce. There was a significant correlation between gender and the likelihood of adoption of eBook selling (P value 0.034). The study recommends that booksellers take advantage of funding initiatives by the government for SMEs to enable them to fund the expansion of their business into eBook selling and e-commerce. It also advocates for a campaign by the Kenya Publishers Association to increase awareness of eBooks and e-commerce among booksellers. The study provides empirical data on the adoption of e-commerce and eBook selling among booksellers in Kenya. It provides insights into the challenges they face as well as the benefits open to them through eBook selling. These findings contribute to the scarce body of data about the publishing industry in Kenya in particular and Africa in general.

Keywords: Booksellers, E-Commerce, E-Publishing, eBooks, Kenya

I. INTRODUCTION

The advent of digital publishing has led to the disruption of the book trade. The change to digital production has brought unprecedented changes to bookshops because of changes in reading habits and, consequently, in the purchasing habits of readers. Bookshops that rely on selling printed books are declining as more readers adapt to reading eBooks (Caine, 2023; Schwabe et al., 2023). The shift to eBooks has become more apparent in the developed world, where most readers can access digital devices and the Internet. For instance, a survey conducted in America revealed that 7% of the readers only read eBooks, with 27% saying they read both printed and eBooks (Jess, 2022). In addition to eBooks, booksellers have had to adapt to e-commerce to remain relevant. This has led to the growth of industry giants such as Amazon, which sells eBooks and currently holds 72% of the e-reader devices market. This shift has not been without casualties. Many brick-and-mortar bookshops have been pushed out of business for failing to adapt to the new e-commerce and digital publishing environment (Stern, 2021).

In developed world bookshops are more than distribution points for books. They act as a third space in which members of a community can interact away from work and home (Philips, 2023). They are a centre for events such as book launches, poetry readings, book club meetings among others that providing readers with opportunity to meet and have intellectual discourse. Readers can also get on the spot advice and expert recommendations from booksellers while at the store (Leitch, 2021). They also form the nexus of community outreach and are instrumental in promoting literacy by providing access to books for schools and supporting reading activities (Laing, 2020). In developing nations, the role of bookshops is reduced but essential nonetheless. They are an essential part of the distribution chain especially in countries like Kenya where all the publishers are based in the capital city and rely on distributors to reach



their consumers countrywide. Most bookshops in Kenya are set up as small business enterprises often as sole proprietorship. Similar to other SMEs they face challenges with access to credit and credit facilities such as loans, high taxation, poor adoption of technology, and inadequate managerial training leading to high failure rates (Bilal, 2023).

In Kenya, bookshops have been the mainstay of the country's book distribution channels. This is especially the case with school textbooks, the primary type of books sold by most bookshops in the country (Momanyi, 2017). Recently government changed the textbook procurement policy limiting schools to buying only one textbook per subject, this reduces the market for textbooks by focusing only on the vetted and approved titles reducing options for readers (Sigei, 2020). Additionally, the business to government procurement model set up by the textbook policy means that publisher often by pass booksellers and sells directly to government who then distribute the books to schools. Bookshops are therefore facing a challenge of disintermediation and the adoption of e-learning and digital publishing is going to exacerbate be the issue. This means that books now face stiffer competition to remain relevant.

Swindells (2022) posits that books lend themselves particularly well to e-commerce because what customers see is what they get. There is no need to test-fit or measure dimensions since these are standardised. They are not perishable or delicate; hence, they can be delivered easily. eBooks are even more suited for e-commerce since they can be delivered quickly over the Internet without complicated logistics. Costa and Castro (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of the adoption of e-commerce by small and medium enterprises (SMEs). They concluded that they must go online to remain competitive and dynamic. Adoption of e-commerce is, however, not without its challenges. Some of these include high delivery costs, which make goods costlier to consumers (Mogire et al., 2022); poor cybersecurity, and lack of data protections which lead consumers to distrust online platforms hence the reluctance to purchase (Dodevska & Nuredini, 2021; Kurniasandi et al., 2024; Ogolla et al., 2023); inadequate funding, high level of competition faced by other business online, and resistance to new technologies by the consumer (Talwar et al., 2020).

Bookshops in Kenya, like other small and medium enterprises, have had to grapple with the change in the market, with consumers shifting to online rather than in-store purchases. This shift was further accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which only firms already set up for e-commerce could continue operating while most had to shut down, resulting in losses. Therefore, for bookshops to remain visible, attract and retain consumers, and remain competitive through reaching new markets, they need to adopt e-commerce. However, there is little information on the status of the adoption of e-commerce by bookshops in Kenya, the challenges they face in adopting e-commerce, and the factors that may influence the adoption of e-commerce. This paper, therefore, investigates the adoption of e-commerce among booksellers in Kenya, perceived benefits and challenges of adoption of e-commerce by booksellers.

1.1 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- i. Investigate the extent of adoption of e-commerce among booksellers in Kenya
- ii. Identify the perceived challenges and benefits of e-commerce to booksellers in Kenya and their impact on adoption of e-commerce by booksellers in the country
- iii. Investigate the state of readiness and likelihood of adoption of e-commerce by booksellers in Kenya

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.2.1 Technology, Organization and Environment [TOE] Theory

The study adopted the Technology, Organisation and Environment (TOE) theory of technology adoption by Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990). The theory posits that the adoption of new technology is affected by the technology available, the organisation characteristics such as age, size and organisational structure, as well as the environment in which it exists, which includes competitors and government policies (Religia et al., 2021). The adoption of e-commerce among small and medium businesses, such as bookshops, depends on the technologies available to both the organisation and consumers. Kenya boasts of being among Africa's best-connected countries, often called the Silicon Savannah (Kwanya, 2023; Muchiri, 2024). The International Trade Administration (2024) ranks Kenya as Africa's third-largest e-commerce market after South Africa and Nigeria, respectively. This has been made possible by the high level of internet penetration, with 22.71 million internet users in the country and an internet penetration of 40.8%, meaning nearly half of Kenyans have access to the Internet. This access is mainly through mobile phones, of which there are 66.4 million active cellular connections in Kenya in 2024, which is 118.7% of the population (Kemp, 2024; Kwanya et al., 2022). Additionally, Kenya has a unique mobile banking system, MPesa, which uses mobile phones instead of bank accounts to transact. This technology has greatly impacted e-commerce by revolutionising financial transactions and making them accessible to the Unbanked population. It has also provided seamless payment options



for e-commerce platforms in the country (Abdulhamid, 2020; Faster Capital, 2024). Therefore, it is clear that Kenya is uniquely adaptable to e-commerce through having access to the requisite technology and technological infrastructure.

The economic environment for e-commerce in the country is primarily affected by the laws and regulations governing the same. The widespread participation of citizens in e-commerce in Kenya has led to developing and implementing laws to govern the activity. However, these laws are not a comprehensive legal framework but rather laws affecting specific aspects of technology use and information access (Gitari, 2020). For example, the Data Protection Act 2019 focuses on public and private organisations' general protection of personal information and is not specific to e-commerce. The Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act 2018 is focused on cyber security and cybercrime and is not specific to consumer protection while engaging in e-commerce. The Consumer Protection Act 2012 does not define e-commerce business but refers to internet agreements for online transactions. Because of the fragmented nature of the laws that affect e-commerce, enforcement is difficult; therefore, the e-commerce industry is plagued with fraud, user privacy violations and poor customer protection (Ralarala, 2020). These challenges have become a barrier to businesses adopting e-commerce in Kenya. Additionally, the government of Kenya introduced a digital service Tax of 1.5% of the gross transactional value. This further reduces the profits for businesses engaging in e-commerce and has further slowed its adoption (Opiyo, 2022).

2.2 Empirical Review

There is a dearth of literature on bookselling and bookshops in Kenya. Early publications on the subject focused on the national textbook policies that influence the procurement and selection procedures of textbooks both at the school level and at the ministry of education level, bookshops were inadvertently left out of the investigation (Adakai, 2018; Babu, 2011; Kimanga, 2011; Rotich, 2000). This gap translates to the adoption of new technologies specifically the adoption of e-publishing by publishers in the country where the focus has been on publishers while ignoring the larger eco-system of book distribution (Chacha & Okinda, 2012; Muita, 2017). The existing studies that alluded to booksellers and adoption of e-publishing or e-commerce have examined specific aspects of e-publishing adoption—such as publishers' organizational readiness, readers' technological preparedness, or distribution challenges however these investigations remain fragmented and narrowly focused. Little attention has been given to how adoption of e-publishing transforms the broader publishing ecosystem, including the interdependent roles of authors, publishers, distributors, readers, and regulators. Adebite-Badmus and Folayan (2020) found that adoption of e-publishing benefits publishers more than authors and booksellers pointing to an imbalance of benefits across the publishing value chain, showing uneven effects on different stakeholders in the ecosystem. Ifeduba (2020) highlights disruptions in the distribution ecosystem, where end-users leap ahead of traditional intermediaries. Gaigher (2012) examined trade publishers in South Africa and noted that e-publishing was disruptive, lowering production costs but being constrained by lack of investment and supportive structures. This points to structural changes in the publishing ecosystem, where cost efficiencies alter competition but institutional readiness lags.

On the global stage, the discourse around e-commerce and bookselling is focused on the disruption of bookselling by digital platforms such as Amazon which currently dominates the market for both print and eBooks globally in an almost monopolistic fashion (Fundación GSR, 2024). Alarm has been raised over the place of the bookshop in the new world order of digital book platforms, specifically ways in which independent bookshops can fight to reclaim market share in a world that is dominated by multinational digital platforms such as Amazon, Adlibris, (Creamer, 2025). This discourse while important and productive as indicated by the setting up of bookshop.org as a multi-store bookselling platform is only applicable if booksellers are willing and able to adopt e-commerce practices in the first place which is a challenging prospect especially in less developed countries. Hendricks and Mwapwele, (2024) investigated factors influencing the adoption of e-commerce in developing countries and found that major barriers to adoption were inadequate infrastructures, ever expanding digital divide, low IT skills, unreliable logistics infrastructure, and low awareness. There is need to investigate if the same challenges face booksellers in Kenya.

III METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational research design. Consequently, it uses quantitative methods for data collection, specifically a survey. The study population was bookshops in Kenya. There were 941 registered bookshops in the country as of 2017 (MOE, 2017). These bookshops were stratified according to the chapters of the Kenya Booksellers Association (KBSA) they belonged to; thus, they were categorised into 20 regions, which form the chapters of the KBSA. These are: Kisumu, Makueni, South Nyanza, Baringo, Kisii, Kitui, Murang'a, Narok, North Rift, Machakos, Bomet, Nyeri, Kakamega, Mombasa, Nakuru, Meru, Embu, Bungoma, Central Rift, and Nairobi. The researcher purposefully selected the bookshops registered under the Nairobi chapter, which has 91 bookshops. The researcher further used convenience sampling to narrow the sample to bookshops within Nairobi's Central Business District and immediate environs, as these locations were easily accessible to the researcher. The sample for bookshops, therefore, was 38 bookshops within Nairobi's CBD. This study used a quantitative research design, which focused on

collecting data that can be statistically analysed. The study, therefore, used questionnaires as a data collection tool. The questionnaires were self-administered to the bookshop managers of the 38 bookshops, and 27 were filled and returned. The data was then coded and analysed using SPSS, as well as both descriptive and inferential statistics.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Products Sold by Booksellers

The research investigated the products booksellers sold in their bookshops to ascertain if they also sold digital publications as part of their stock. The study showed that almost all bookshops, 19(73.1%) sold stationery and art supplies. Only three (11.5%) stores sold digital books. School textbooks and novels were a significant part of the stock sold in 18(69.2%) bookshops. Additionally, only 3(11.5%) bookshops sold audiobooks. Table I summarises the data on products sold by bookshops in Kenya.

Table 1
Products sold by bookshops in Nairobi, Kenya

Products	Responses	
	N	Per cent
School textbooks	18	19.1%
Novel or storybooks	18	19.1%
Stationery and art supplies	19	20.2%
Office equipment	9	9.6%
Computers and computer equipment	5	5.3%
Self-help books	12	12.8%
Higher education books	7	7.4%
Audio Books (CD-ROM, tapes)	3	3.2%
E-books (PDF, Epub, Mobi)	3	3.2%
Total	94	100.0%

4.2 Consumers Served by Booksellers in Nairobi, Kenya

The study's findings showed that parents were the main customers for booksellers, with 15(39.5%) booksellers indicating that they sold books mainly to parents who purchased textbooks for their school-going children. There were 7(18.4%) stores were wholesalers and sold directly to retail bookshops while only 7(25.9%) of the booksellers sold directly to schools. The booksellers who indicated that they sold books to others (9, 33.33%) further specified that they sold them to churches, clubs, and the general public. Table 2 summarises the customers served by booksellers in Nairobi, Kenya.

Table 2
Customers Served by Bookshops

Customer	Responses	
	N	Per cent
Schools	7	18.4%
Parents	15	39.5%
Other booksellers	7	18.4%
Others	9	23.7%
Total	38	100.0%

4.3 Channels used for sales by booksellers in Nairobi, Kenya

Almost all the booksellers, 25(92.6%), used their physical stores as their primary distribution channel. Of these, 13(48.1%) felt that their physical stores were a very effective channel for sales. The number of booksellers sold books through the websites for their bookshops was 15(55.6%). This indicates that more than half of the booksellers engage in e-commerce and sell books through their online channels. Despite website sales, only 7(25.9%) of the booksellers felt that their websites were moderately effective as a sales channel, while 3(14.8%) felt that the websites were not an effective channel to sell books. The booksellers also mainly used social media as a channel for sales. Facebook emerged as a favourite, with 9(40.7%) booksellers using it. However, 4(14.8%) of the booksellers observed that it was moderately effective as a channel for sale. Table 3 summarises the channels used by bookshops to sell their products.

Table 3

Channels for Sales for Bookshops in Nairobi, Kenya

Channels	Not effective	Less effective	Moderately effective	Very effective	Valid%
Physical store (n)	1	3	8	13	25
%	3.7	11.1	29.6	48.1	92.6
Bookshop website (n)	4	1	7	3	15
%	14.8	3.7	25.9	11.1	55.6
Facebook(n)	4	2	4	1	11
%	14.8	7.4	14.8	3.7	40.7
Instagram (n)	3	2	3	1	9
%	11.1	7.4	11.1	3.7	33.3
YouTube (n)	3	1	0	0	4
%	11.1	3.7	0	0	14.8
LinkedIn (n)	2	1	0	0	3
%	7.4	11.1	0	0	11.1
Other (n)	8	1	0	0	0
	29.6	3.7	0	0	0

4.4 Challenges of E-Commerce Faced by Booksellers in Nairobi, Kenya

The research further sought to investigate the challenges that booksellers faced when engaging in e-commerce and the level of seriousness of these challenges. The findings were presented in Table 4.

Table 4*Challenges of E-Commerce Facing Booksellers in Nairobi, Kenya*

Challenges	Not serious	Less serious	Moderately serious	Very serious	Valid %
High delivery cost (n)	5	4	6	5	20
%	18.5	14.8	22.2	18.5	74.1
Lack of data protection (n)	4	1	4	7	16
%	14.8	3.7	14.8	25.9	59.3
Inadequate financial structures(n)	6	3	2	5	16
%	22.2	11.1	7.4	18.5	59.3
Poor online marketing systems (n)	6	6	2	2	14
%	14.8	22.2	7.4	7.4	51.9
Lack of skilled personnel in e-publishing (n)	8	1	2	3	14
%	29.6	3.7	7.4	11.1	51.9
Inadequate funding (n)	4	4	7	4	19
%	14.8	14.8	25.9	14.8	70.4
High level of competition (n)	1	1	5	11	18
%	3.7	3.7	18.5	40.7	66.7
Poor customer management relations (n)	4	2	6	4	16
%	14.8	7.4	22.2	14.8	59.3
Resistance from customers who prefer physical stores (n)	5	4	1	6	16
%	18.5	14.8	3.7	22.2	59.3

The findings in Table 4 showed that high delivery costs were a major challenge for booksellers, with 20 (74%) indicating it was a significant issue. Six (22.2%) of these booksellers felt it was a moderately serious challenge, while 5(18.5 %) felt it was very serious. The second most selected challenge by booksellers was inadequate funding. This was indicated by 19(70.4%) of the booksellers. However, only 4(11.1%) felt it was a serious challenge. The majority, 7(25.9%), felt it was a moderately serious challenge. Lack of data protection, inadequate financial standards, poor customer management relations, and resistance from consumers who prefer physical stores were all selected as a challenge by 16(58%) of the booksellers.

The booksellers who felt that lack of data protection was a very serious challenge were 7(25.9%). Although lack of adequate financial infrastructure was indicated as a challenge, 5(18.5%) of the booksellers felt it was very serious. This could be attributed to the availability of digital financial systems in Kenya, such as mobile money (Mpesa, Airtel Money), which makes virtual payments easy for most buyers. There were 6(22.2%) booksellers who felt that poor customer management was a moderately serious challenge for e-commerce. This could be because conducting business online requires the seller to communicate with the buyer during sales constantly. The findings



also showed that 18(66.7%) of the booksellers felt that high competition in e-commerce was a challenge to selling books online. Of these, 11(40.7%) felt this was a serious challenge. This could be because being online opens a wider market for the booksellers but also brings them into direct competition with other booksellers than they would if they were to sell offline. Table 4 summarises the challenges of booksellers undertaking e-commerce.

4.5 Level of Awareness on E-Publishing by Booksellers in Nairobi, Kenya

The researcher sought to find out how aware the booksellers were about e-publishing. The findings showed that a majority of 9(33.3%) of the booksellers were moderately aware, while 5(18.5%) were extremely aware. Only 5(18.5%) of the booksellers were unaware of e-publishing. Table 5 shows the level of awareness of booksellers about e-publishing.

Table 5
Level of Awareness on E-Publishing by Booksellers in Nairobi, Kenya

Level of Awareness	Frequency	Per cent
Not at all aware	5	18.5
Slightly aware	8	29.6
Moderately aware	9	33.3
Extremely aware	5	18.5
Total	27	100.0

4.6 Benefits of electronic commerce to booksellers in Nairobi, Kenya

The research investigated the benefits of e-commerce to booksellers. This was specifically in the context of the sale of eBooks. The findings showed that 20(74.1%) of the booksellers indicated the main benefits of selling eBooks were that they were cheaper, the e-commerce enhanced the store’s online presence and visibility and opened it to worldwide and regional accessibility. Twenty (74.1%) of the booksellers indicated that the sale of eBooks would enhance the presence and visibility of a bookstore online and would open up the store's global and regional markets that they had no access to before. High customer loyalty and feedback were selected by 17(63.0%) of the booksellers. Of these, 9(33.3%) felt it was not a main benefit for booksellers. Table 6 summarises the benefits of e-publishing for booksellers.

Table 6
Benefits of E-Commerce (eBook selling) to Booksellers in Nairobi, Kenya

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Valid %
Reduced logistics and inventory management (n)	3	4	7	5	19
%	11.1	14.8	25.9	18.5	70.4
Cheaper to produce and sell (n)	2	2	13	4	20
%	3.7	7.4	48.1	14.8	74.1
Provide up-to-date current content (n)	1	3	10	5	19
%	3.7	11.1	37.0	18.5	70.4
Expand the range of books available (n)	4	7	7	18	18
%	14.8	25.9	25.9	66.7	66.7
Provide new revenue streams (n)	3	1	8	7	19
%	11.1	3.7	29.6	25.9	70.4
Enhance the store’s online presence and visibility (n)	4	5	0	11	20
%	14.8	18.5	0	40.7	74.1
Open worldwide and regional accessibility (n)	1	4	7	8	20
%	3.7	14.8	25.9	29.6	74.1
High customer feedback and loyalty (n)	2	9	6	0	17
%	7.4	33.3	22.2	0	63.0



4.7 Readiness of Nairobi Booksellers to Adopt eBook Selling

The study investigated the readiness of booksellers to adopt eBook selling. Only 1(3.7%) of the booksellers was ready to a great extent, while 8(29.6%) were not ready. The majority, 9(33.3%), were somewhat ready or ready to a little extent to adopt eBook selling. Table 7 shows the level of readiness for adopting eBook selling by booksellers.

Table 7
Readiness of Nairobi Booksellers to adopt eBook Selling

Readiness	Frequency	Per cent
Not at all	8	29.6
Very Little	9	33.3
Somewhat	9	33.3
To a great extent	1	3.7
Total	27	100.0

The study also sought to determine the likelihood of bookshops adopting eBook selling in the future. The majority, 13(48.1%) of the booksellers, said they would most likely adopt eBook selling in the future, while 1(3.7%) bookseller had already adopted and was selling eBooks. There were 3(11.1%) who said they were extremely likely to adopt e-bookselling in the future indicated that they had plans to adopt eBook selling soon. However, a similar number, 3(11%), said they were unlikely to adopt eBook selling in the future, indicating that they had no intention of adopting bookselling shortly. There were 6(22.2%) booksellers who indicated that they would be extremely unlikely to adopt eBooks in the future, which indicates that they were resistant to the idea of selling eBooks. Table 8 summarises the future of eBook selling among booksellers.

Table 8
Likelihood of Booksellers in Nairobi Adopting Ebook Selling in the Future

	Frequency	Per cent
Extremely Unlikely	6	22.2
Unlikely	3	11.1
Likely	13	48.1
Extremely likely	3	11.1
Already adopted	1	3.7
Total	26	96.3
Missing	1	3.7
Total	27	100.0

Further analysis of the booksellers' data showed a significant correlation (Pearson 0.417, P-value 0.034) between booksellers' likelihood of adoption of eBook selling and gender. Given that the majority of the booksellers are male, it is likely that male booksellers are more likely to adopt eBook selling than women. There was no significant correlation between the likelihood of adoption of eBook selling and the bookseller's age or level of education. Table 9 summarises the correlation between the adoption of e-publishing, age, gender, and level of education.

Table 9
Correlation between the Adoption of e-Publishing, Gender, Age, and Level of Education

		Likelihood of bookshops adopting eBook selling	Gender	Age	Level of Education
Likelihood of bookshops adopting eBook selling in the future	Pearson Correlation	1	.417*	-.220	.039
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.034	.280	.848
	N	26	26	26	26
Gender	Pearson Correlation	.417*	1	.064	.005
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.034		.752	.980
	N	26	27	27	27
Age	Pearson Correlation	-.220	.064	1	-.189
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.280	.752		.345
	N	26	27	27	27
Level of Education	Pearson Correlation	.039	.005	-.189	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.848	.980	.345	
	N	26	27	27	27

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).



On the correlation of the likelihood of the adoption of eBook selling and the benefits of publishing to booksellers, all the benefits indicated had positive correlations to the adoption of eBook selling. However, not all of them were statistically significant. The findings showed a significant positive correlation (Pearson 0.596, P-value 0.015) between the adoption of eBook selling and higher customer loyalty and feedback. There was also a significant positive correlation (Pearson 0.578, P-value 0.015) between higher customer loyalty and providing new revenue streams. New revenue streams positively correlated with enhanced stores' online presence and visibility (Pearson 0.476, P-value 0.046) and significantly correlated with cheaper eBooks to produce and sell (Pearson 0.558, P-value 0.016). There was also a significant correlation between the opening up of the bookstore worldwide and regional accessibility and reduced logistics and inventory management (Pearson 0.508, P-value 0.031). Table 10 summarises the correlations between the likelihood of adopting eBook selling and the benefits of eBook selling to booksellers.

Table 10:
Correlation between the Likelihood of e-Bookselling and the Benefits of e-Bookselling to Booksellers

		Likelihood of bookshops adopting e-book selling in the future	Reduced Logistics and inventory management	Cheaper to produce and sell	Provide up to date relevant content	Expanded range of books available	provide new revenue streams	Enhance the Store's online presence and visibility	Open up worldwide and regional accessibility	Higher customer feedback and loyalty
Likelihood of bookshops adopting e-book selling in the future	Pearson Correlation	1	.188	.196	.446	.033	.321	.007	.292	.596*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.455	.420	.064	.900	.194	.978	.225	.015
	N	26	18	19	18	17	18	19	19	16

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

It further emerged that there was no significant correlation between the likelihood of adoption of eBook selling and the challenges of e-commerce. However, there was a significant correlation between the lack of data protection and the high delivery cost (P-value <0.001). There was also a significant correlation between inadequate funding and poor online marketing systems (P-value 0.017). There also was a significant correlation between poor online marketing systems and poor customer management relations (P-value 0.029). Although not statistically significant, it was notable that there was a negative correlation between inadequate financial structures and the likelihood of the adoption of eBook selling. Table 11 summarises the correlations between the likelihood of adoption of eBook selling and the challenges e-commerce booksellers face.

Table 11
Correlation between the Likelihood of Adoption of e-Bookselling and Challenges of e-Commerce to Booksellers

		Likelihood of bookshops adopting eBook selling in the future	High delivery costs	Lack of data protections	inadequate financial structures	Poor online marketing systems	Lack of skilled personnel in publishing	Inadequate funding	High level of competition	Poor customer management relations	Resistance from customers who prefer a physical store
Likelihood of bookshops adopting eBook selling in the future	Pearson Correlation	1	.307	.290	-.418	-.109	-.136	.014	.309	.072	-.010
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.201	.294	.121	.724	.657	.957	.227	.799	.971
	N	26	19	15	15	13	13	18	17	15	15

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4.7 Discussion

The research findings showed that a majority (73.1%) of the booksellers in Nairobi, Kenya, sold stationery and art supplies, while 69.2% sold school textbooks. Given that the publishing industry in Kenya is biased towards educational publishing, it is not surprising that most bookshops sell mainly school textbooks and related school supplies (Zell, 2020). Only 3% of the booksellers in the study sold digital publications either directly online or in compact disks. This depicts a low level of adoption of eBook selling in Kenya. Ifeduba (2020) indicated that compact disks are a format of eBooks sold in bookshops by booksellers in Nigeria. The main customers of booksellers in



Kenya were parents (55.6%) rather than schools (25.0%). The study found that the leading distribution channel for booksellers was their physical bookstores. However, 55.6% of the booksellers used websites to sell their books, and 40% used social media, specifically Facebook, as a channel to market and sell their books. Amornkitvikai and Lee (2020), in their study on barriers hindering e-commerce adoption among SMEs in Thailand, acknowledged that the use of websites and social media is a significant indicator of the adoption of e-commerce.

Some of the barriers to adopting e-commerce by booksellers that emerged from the study showed that 74% felt that high delivery costs were a major challenge when engaging in e-commerce. Mogire et al. (2022) agree that Kenya's e-commerce scape is plagued with logistical problems such as high costs of delivery as well as poor last-mile delivery service. This reduces consumers' trust in purchasing goods online and raises the cost of goods to prohibitively high (Chebichiy & Odhiambo, 2020). There was a significant correlation between the high cost of delivery charges and the lack of strong data protection frameworks. This could be because consumers are leery of spending large amounts of money online. This may necessitate using credit cards or other financial instruments that require them to share information with the seller, exposing them to hacking or privacy violations. This is a sensitive matter, especially concerning the leakage of consumers' financial information and their exposure to fraud. While Kenya has enacted data protection laws, enforcement has lagged, significantly reducing their effectiveness (Kogos & Kwanya, 2023; Wanekeya, 2023; Ziwa, 2021). Lack of adequate funding to set up e-commerce platforms was a challenge mentioned by 70.4% of booksellers as a challenge for e-commerce. This corroborates the findings of Mwendwa et al. (2024), which show that venture capital has a significant impact on the success of an e-commerce venture. They agreed that low venture costs would increase the entry and sustainability of e-commerce businesses in the country. Lack of adequate funding significantly impacts the quality of online marketing systems and consequently may lead to poor customer management, as indicated by the significant correlations. Chebichiy and Odhiambo (2020) and Muthee (2021) concur that strong customer service is critical to e-commerce business success. The challenges perceived by booksellers, when engaged in e-commerce, hinder the adoption of e-bookselling, thus limiting consumer options in the e-publishing industry.

The study's findings showed that 51.8% of booksellers in Nairobi, Kenya, were aware of e-publishing. This shows that nearly half of the booksellers knew how eBooks, eBook selling, or digital publishing worked. Lack of awareness is a barrier to small and medium enterprises adopting open innovations such as bookshops (Indrawati, 2020; Kumar et al., 2023). The lack of awareness delays the adoption of eBook selling because the booksellers cannot plan for the changes required to adopt new technology, which may include hiring or upskilling personnel and investing in hardware and software, among others. Hadi (2020) posits that a business can be reactive, adaptive, or proactive regarding changes in the business environment; a lack of awareness about changes in technology means that businesses will be reactive rather than proactive in their adoption. Booksellers who are unaware of eBook selling or digital publishing, in general, will not take active steps to adapt their business to the same but will rather only react to the technology when it becomes necessary for the survival of their business. They, therefore, run the risk of becoming obsolete. In the current business environment, technologies have shortened product lifecycles and dissolved industry barriers where customers have begun to compete with incumbent businesses, such as social media influencers competing against established media houses. Businesses have to identify the threats and strategise how to deal with them (Ogolla & Kwanya, 2024). In the publishing industry, digital publishing is a disruptive technology changing the role of publishers and booksellers. This can be seen in the rise of self-publishers who produce and sell their books without using bookshops and booksellers (Burch, 2017; Hviid et al., 2019). The lack of awareness of e-publishing and eBook selling displayed among booksellers in this study leaves them vulnerable to being a casualty of industry disruption. Already, publishers that produce digital books in Kenya prefer to work with digital booksellers rather than the bookshops. As the adoption rate rises, the bookshops will likely be locked out of the industry unless they adapt.

The research findings indicated that most (74.1%) booksellers felt that eBooks were cheaper and thus easier to sell. Additionally, a similar number of booksellers felt that e-bookselling enhances the stores' visibility online and opens up their business for global and regional markets. Taher (2021) stated that e-commerce technologies enhance the availability of business to customers not just geographically but also around the clock. Bookshops that sell eBooks could have consumers view and buy their publications even if their physical store is closed, thus increasing sales. Many (63.0%) booksellers also indicated that eBook selling could lead to higher customer loyalty and feedback to the bookstore. This corroborates the findings that e-commerce engenders customer trust. Once customers can successfully purchase products from a retailer online, they tend to trust the retailer and are likely to buy from them again; trustworthiness is a core element of customer loyalty. Therefore, booksellers will likely increase customer loyalty by selling eBooks and participating in e-commerce (Othman et al., 2020).

The research findings showed that the level of readiness among booksellers to adopt eBook selling was generally low, with only 33.3% of the booksellers somewhat ready to take up eBook selling. Additionally, only 7% of the booksellers were selling eBooks, while 48.1% said they would likely adopt eBook selling in the future. These findings corroborate Ifeduba (2020), who found that authors and consumers had a higher digital readiness than



libraries, schools, and bookshops. This shows that booksellers are lagging in adopting digital publishing and may find themselves disintermediated in the book chain.

This study's findings show a significant correlation (P-value, 0.034) between the adoption of eBook selling and the gender of booksellers. This indicates that the gender of the bookseller may influence their adoption of eBook selling. There was no significant correlation between age and the likelihood of adopting eBook selling. There were more men than women booksellers in the study. Therefore, it is plausible that male booksellers are more likely than women to adopt eBook selling. This corroborates the findings of Alam et al. (2022) that gender had an effect on digital transformation among small and medium enterprises. They found that women were more likely to use social media. However, they were less likely to be competent in other ICT skills than their male counterparts and thus needed help with technical strategies.

The study findings also showed a positive correlation between the likelihood of adopting eBook selling and the benefits of e-bookselling. There was a significant correlation between higher customer loyalty and feedback (P-value, 0.015) and the likelihood of adoption of eBook selling. Higher customer feedback was, in turn, significantly correlated with providing new revenue streams (P-value, 0.015). This indicates that adopting e-commerce will likely lead to increased revenue for bookshops. This is supported by the findings of Githui and Njuru (2024) that using e-commerce as a business tactic increased sales for small and medium enterprises in Nairobi. By adopting e-commerce, booksellers in Nairobi can generate more revenue. Although not directly correlated to the adoption of eBookselling, there were significant correlations between eBook selling providing new revenue streams to books and eBooks being cheaper to produce and sell (P-Value, 0.016); there was also significant correlation between eBook selling increasing worldwide and regional accessibility and reduced logistics and inventory management (P-value 0. 031). These findings show how e-commerce increases a firm's profitability by reducing overhead costs and reduced productivity costs for books, increasing their profitability.

The adoption of e-bookselling among booksellers in Kenya is low, with only 3.7% of them adopting it. Only 33.3% of the booksellers were relatively ready to adopt eBookselling, and only 48.1% indicated that they were likely to adopt eBook selling in the future. These findings show that the adoption of eBook selling and e-commerce among booksellers in Kenya is low. This supports the findings by Ooko (2018), who conducted a study on the adoption of e-commerce among publishers in Kenya and concluded that booksellers were not e-commerce-ready. The low level of readiness for booksellers to adopt e-bookselling means that the publishers who adopt digital publishing will have to either sell the eBooks themselves or contract digital booksellers to do so on their behalf. Their current book chains are not set up to perform the role of distributors since most of them are still set up to sell printed books only.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The level of readiness for e-commerce and eBook selling among booksellers in Kenya is low. This is especially concerning as the world continues to move online. Bookshops as a business need to adapt or perish. The main barriers to the adoption of e-commerce and ebook selling by booksellers in Kenya were a lack of awareness of eBooks and ebook selling and a lack of adequate funding, affecting booksellers' ability to set up proper online marketing systems and adequately manage customer relations. The main benefits of booksellers adopting eBook selling and e-commerce were higher customer loyalty, increased revenue streams, and enhanced online visibility of the bookshops. The gender of the bookseller influenced the adoption of e-commerce but was not affected by the bookseller's age or level of education.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends creating awareness among booksellers about the changing landscape of publishing and the need to adopt eBook selling. Without a booksellers' association in Kenya, the Kenya Publishers Association can sensitise booksellers about adapting to digital publishing. Additionally, booksellers should be encouraged to seek funding for their businesses to expand into e-commerce and eBook selling. They can do this by taking advantage of government initiatives to fund small and medium enterprises in the country.

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