

# Patronage of Online Bookstores by Postgraduate Students at Nigerian Universities

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## Abstract

The preference for online bookstores is increasing among students. However, research that focuses on online bookstores has not been given attention in the Nigerian university context. This study examined the patronage of online bookstores by postgraduate students at Nigerian universities. A survey design was adopted using a questionnaire to collect data from 969 postgraduate students selected from twelve universities from the South-west and South-south regions. Six research questions were developed. The findings reveal that Amazon is the online bookstore most often patronised by Nigerian postgraduate students. The books ordered most often are textbooks, works of fiction, and reference books. The factors driving patronage of online bookstores are convenience, the wide range of products available, the opportunity to purchase anytime and anywhere, the ability to save time, and cost advantages. Culture and censorship do not have an impact on the patronage of online bookstores. Overall, postgraduate students are satisfied with their experience of online bookstores, although the challenges include internet connectivity, long waiting times for delivery of ordered books, inadequate ICT skills, limited access to computers with internet access, loss of ordered books during transit, and the risks inherent in paying for books ordered online. Since only one bookstore in this study, Iksuwa, is based in Nigeria, it is recommended that Nigerian bookstores and booksellers create online platforms to reach out to customers.

**Keywords:** online bookstores; online shopping; online retailing; postgraduate students; Nigeria

## Introduction

The ubiquitous nature of the internet and advances in technology have enabled us to buy and sell all sorts of products and commodities in the comfort of our homes, including educational materials such as textbooks, journals, and magazines, to mention a few. This has led to the establishment of many online shops, of which online bookstores are one example. Today, on our campuses at universities and other tertiary education institutions, many students prefer to patronise these online bookstores/bookshops for the purchase of books and other educational products. Zhai and Lu (2017) describe the online bookstore as a trading platform or site customers can connect to through a computer. The customer then checks the information of the book they need to purchase. They register, select the book, submit the order, and make payment to complete the ordering process.

Online retailing has grown and is increasingly consumer-orientated. Online stores, including bookstores, are capitalising on this by developing media and providing customers with the opportunity to purchase at any time of the day or night (Muruganantham and Bhakat 2013). Customers, including postgraduate students at Nigerian universities, are now motivated by convenience and are likely to shop online for specific types of educational and information products and services, such as books and magazines.

Using multiple available online bookstores, web portals, and online auction networks, many students prefer the internet over other traditional media such as physical bookshops. In the market for books, students prefer to use the internet rather than television, radio, newspapers, and handouts. Features such as free search engines, limited cost of advertising or free advertising, limited commissions, web portals, ease of bargaining, and price comparisons enable many sellers to sell their products below the average cost. The past few years have witnessed an increase in the use of the internet for book purchases, ranging from fiction to comics, textbooks to novels, and so on. In other words, the internet has become an easier and cheaper method for buying and selling books (Muzumdar 2012).

Currently, on Nigerian university campuses, the bookstore is fashionable for purchasing textbooks. However, for most sellers, the internet is the preferred medium. For buyers too, who are mostly students, the internet still seems to be the most preferred medium. Krey, Clow, and Babin (2009) indicate that in their study, 96% of the students purchase or rent the required textbooks for college. In similar studies, Yang (2003), Bharathi (2013), Zhai and Lu (2017), and Nguyen et al. (2019) examined the probability of students purchasing textbooks online. They conclude that the online purchase of textbooks can be predicted by the student possessing a computer and internet skills, having a retentive attitude towards money, and being dissatisfied with the university bookstore.

In terms of the benefits of online bookstores, students do not need to go to various different places to find their books; instead, they only need to access a computer connected to the internet. They log on to the online bookstore (Xu 2012) and type in the details of the book in the search box to determine whether the site has the book. If the book is available, direct purchase follows, but if it is not, the customer can access another bookstore homepage to continue the search or they can suggest that the seller order the book in question. These processes result in consumers saving time and labour. Online bookstores reduce costs, enable consumers to save time and space, and enhance convenience. Another important benefit of online bookstores is the stock. Physical brick-and-mortar stores are restricted by space limitations and budgets, but online bookstores do not have these restrictions and can thus offer a huge variety of authors and titles, not only the popular ones but also the lesser-known ones. The convenience of online bookstores is a major consideration for most customers, especially those living in an area where access to a large bookstore is limited or where stores are quite far away. One can easily order books from an online bookstore without the restrictions of specific store hours, long queues at the check-out counters, or the hassle of finding parking at the store or negotiating traffic. This is coupled with the comfort of the customer sitting in their own home. The issue of cost is also worth mentioning here. As there are many online bookstores on the web these days, prospective customers can compare the prices of books and delivery charges online. This also makes the books and other items competitively priced. Customers can opt for deals, as most online stores offer discounts for newly released books, while others may offer free shipping if an order is above a certain amount. The ability to view the comments, feedback, and book reviews posted by other customers is another important benefit that cannot be overlooked when buying books from online bookstores. This allows the customer to research books and read reviews before making a purchase. This makes book shopping an interactive and informative buying experience.

Considering the benefits highlighted above, it is not surprising that the preference for online bookstores is increasing by the day (Nguyen et al. 2019; Zhai and Lu 2017). Although the literature confirms that the preference for and patronage of online bookstores are increasing among students, there is a lack of research that focuses on this phenomenon in the Nigerian university context. Considering this, this study sought to examine, through an empirical analysis, the patronage of online bookstores by postgraduate students from Nigerian universities.

## Research Questions

To achieve the objectives in this study, the following research questions were developed and answered:

1. Which online bookstores are being patronised by postgraduate students?
2. What are the categories of books being purchased from online bookstores by postgraduate students?

3. What are the rationales behind the patronage of online bookstores by postgraduate students?
4. What is the impact of culture and censorship on the patronage of online bookstores by postgraduate students?
5. How satisfied are postgraduate students with their patronage of online bookstores?
6. What challenges are associated with the patronage of online bookstores by postgraduate students?

## Literature Review

An online bookstore is a virtual store on the internet where customers can browse a catalogue and select books of interest. The selected books may be collected in a shopping cart. Upon checkout, the items in the shopping cart will be presented as an order (Agal 2011). An online bookstore system is the main function of the trading platform for the site. Consumers can connect to the internet through a computer in order to access the online bookstore and then check the information for a book or books (Zhai and Lu 2017). Customers that need to make a purchase online must first register to land, then select their books, submit their order, and pay to complete the process. The online bookstore is a shopping process where consumers directly buy goods or services from a seller in real time, without an intermediary service, over the internet (UK Essays 2018). If an intermediary is involved, the process is called electronic commerce. An online shop, e-shop, e-store, internet shop, webshop, webstore, online store, or virtual store uses the analogy of buying products or services at a brick-and-mortar retailer or in a shopping mall. As UK Essays (2018) emphasised, the process is called business-to-consumer (B2C) online shopping. On the other hand, when a business buys from another business, it is called business-to-business (B2B) online shopping. Notably, both B2C and B2B online shopping are forms of e-commerce.

The literature presents evidence of the preference for online bookstores rather than traditional bookshops (Bharathi 2013; Nguyen et al. 2019). This preference is due to the benefits associated with online bookstores, such as, among other aspects, their relatively small size; the cost savings; the fact that transaction activities can be carried out anytime, anywhere; and improved service efficiency (Meng 2011). Similarly, online bookstores are preferred because they offer customers distinctive shopping attributes such as convenience, a wide range of products, reduced prices, and special offers (Laing and Royle 2013). Bharathi (2013) adds that online bookstores have no time and space limitations. As a result, customers can browse the available books and informational products and can easily place their orders. The development of online bookstores has thus been extremely rapid.

Several online bookstores have been identified in the literature. Mention can be made of Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Backwell, BookFinder, Books-a-Million.com, Abe Books, Alibris, Angus and Robertson, Book Depository, BookPeople, Border Books and Music, Dymocks, and Powell's Books, among others. Some of these are described in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Details of some popular online bookstores

| S/N | Name                      | Description and URL                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.  | AbeBooks                  | This online bookstore deals with the marketing of used books. It is owned by Amazon and was established in 2008. See <a href="http://www.abebooks.com/">http://www.abebooks.com/</a> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 2.  | AddAll                    | This is an online marketplace for used and new books. It is a free service that searches for books online. AddAll is an independent and impartial website, not owned by any bookstore. The search results are therefore totally objective. See <a href="http://www.addall.com/">http://www.addall.com/</a> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 3.  | Alibris                   | This is the premier online marketplace for independent sellers of new and used books as well as rare and collectible titles. Alibris was founded in 1998. It connects people who love books with thousands of sellers worldwide. See <a href="http://www.alibris.com/">http://www.alibris.com/</a> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 4.  | Amazon                    | This is the world's largest bookstore. It started selling books online in 1995 (Bharathi 2013). It was the first online bookstore. Currently, Amazon operates in countries such as Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, and the UK. Amazon.com provides millions of rare, used, and out-of-print books through its online bookstore. It allows customers to browse books by subject, new releases, and best sellers. Amazon.com is one of the most successful online shopping websites which uses an e-catalogue to feature its products. The home page shows the different types of books available. The information available for each book includes the book cover on the left-hand side, plus the book description, which includes information such as the book title, book author, book price, the number of copies available to be sold, and ratings from customers. See <a href="http://www.amazon.com/">http://www.amazon.com/</a> . |
| 5.  | Barnes & Noble.com        | Barnes & Noble.com offers customers the web's premier destination for books, including e-books, magazines, and related products.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 6.  | Blackwell Online Bookshop | Blackwell Online Bookshop (or "BOB") was launched in 1995. Since then, it has evolved into a leading website for specialised book sales. Blackwell offers the widest range of academic books, textbooks, and specialist books. See <a href="http://bookshop.blackwell.co.uk/">http://bookshop.blackwell.co.uk/</a> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 7.  | BookFinder                | BookFinder.com was launched in 1997. BookFinder.com is a one-stop e-commerce search engine that searches over 150 million books for sales of new, used, rare, and out-of-print books as well as textbooks. Customers can save time and money by searching every major catalogue online to find out which booksellers are offering the best prices and selection. Customers can then buy the book directly from the original seller. See <a href="http://www.bookfinder.com/">http://www.bookfinder.com/</a> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 8.  | Books-a-Million.com       | Books-a-Million is a book retailer that sells on the internet. It sells different books, e-books, and bargain books. It is the second-largest bookstore in the United States. See <a href="http://www.booksamillion.com">http://www.booksamillion.com</a> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 9.  | iKasuwa.com               | This is a Nigeria-based online book mall established in September 2019. iKasuwa sells digital books in PDF and ePUB format, audiobooks, and hard-copy books. iKasuwa was set up as a platform where publishers, authors, and booksellers can sell books to consumers who are keen to purchase books of all sorts.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

Besides the online bookstores discussed, there are many others, including but not limited to Booktopia, Borders Books and Music, Bx-zone.com, Chegg.com, Half, Powell's Books, Rahva Raamat Rare Book Hub, Thriftbooks, and Vialibri.

On the issues of censorship and cultural impact as related to online bookstores, censorship, at its core, deprives book readers and buyers of choice and of agency (Kaplan 2018). The decision is made without the customer's consent. As Brophy (2017) pointed out, in the past networks of publishers, printers, booksellers, and agents provided channels through which they smuggled books from abroad and circulated banned domestic literature. Brophy explained that bookshop owners enabled the hand-to-hand transfer of contraband materials, owing to their crucial role in developing culture. Considering this important issue, it is part of the focus of this current study to find out whether postgraduate students, in the process of patronising online bookstores, purchase books that have been banned or censored because of cultural practices or political or religious factors.

Related studies abound, as revealed by the extant literature on the patronage of online bookstores. For instance, Nguyen et al. (2019) explored the assessment of the attributes of online bookstores among young consumers in Vietnam, using a survey to obtain data from consumers aged 24 years old who had recently purchased books online. The results revealed seven key attributes of bookstores, namely website design, order fulfilment, communication, merchandise, security, privacy, and promotion. The findings also show that consumers hold unfavourable views concerning website communication and website security and privacy. This has implications for publishers and retailers who aim to increase their online sales. Nguyen et al. (2019) focused on the assessment of the attributes of online bookstores, while the current study focuses on the patronage of online bookstores. In terms of similarity, the attributes of an online bookstore may determine or improve patronage by customers; in the current study those attributes are described as preference factors or the rationales behind patronage.

Gäde and Petras (2016) compared book search sessions from the ISBS track with observed bookstore search sessions to investigate similarities and differences in user behaviour and preferences. Their focus was on the observation and comparison of searching, browsing, and recommending strategies. The results reveal a significant difference in session duration as well as a strong preference for browsing strategies in bookstore sessions. No such strong preference for one strategy could be observed in the online session, even though browsing was still preferred.

Zhang (2014) examined the motivations that drive university students to buy books online, based on utilitarian and hedonic motivation values. A questionnaire was used to collect data from Chinese students. The results show that two utilitarian values and one hedonic value could be identified. Ease of access and cost savings are utilitarian values, and the results show that both have a significant positive influence on the utilitarian motivation of online book shopping. Ease of access has a much more significant impact

on the utilitarian motivation than cost savings. Authority and enjoyment have a significant impact on the hedonic motivation for online book shopping. Hedonic motivations have a positive influence on search intention in the context of online book shopping, while utilitarian motivations do not affect search intention. Both utilitarian and hedonic motivations have no impact on the purchase intention during online book shopping. The results show that search intention triggers purchase intention. Hedonic motivations could generate search intention and directly generate purchase intention, which is called impulse shopping. Concerning the current study, the motivation that was focused on during Zhang's (2014) study could be likened to factors that influence preference. The factors that motivate patronage or drive a buyer to patronise an online bookstore can similarly lead the same buyer to prefer buying from a bookstore. In terms of similarity, both Zhang (2014) and the current study collected data using questionnaires.

Bharathi (2013) analysed the growth of online bookstores in India and reported that there has been an increase in the use of the internet for book purchases over a period of a few years. Books purchased range from works of fiction to comics, textbooks to novels, and book purchasing over the internet has been characterised as the easiest and cheapest method of buying and selling books. It was reported that traditional bookselling has drastically declined, as most buyers have started to buy from online bookstores.

Muruganantham and Bhakat (2013) investigated various aspects of online impulse buying, including hedonic shopping, website quality, trust, situational factors, and variety-seeking in the Indian context. Through the data collected from an online survey, the different antecedents of impulse buying were analysed and ordered based on significance. Hedonic shopping was found to be the major factor impacting on impulse buying in online bookstores. The study also discussed managerial issues, suggestions, and implications for future researchers. It was concluded that an understanding of the behaviour of online shoppers in terms of impulse behaviour would be helpful for marketers and academicians. This study focused on impulse buying in online bookstores, while the current study examines the factors responsible for the patronage of online bookstores by postgraduate students.

Muzumdar (2012) explored the increase in the use of online media for textbook sales. The researcher used the basic commerce transactions, incorporating them into a model to explain their effects on different media of textbook sales. The theoretical approach was used to explain the influence of the advantages and disadvantages of each medium on transactions occurring through it. Two different models were designed, with each representing a single medium. The method of flowchart analysis was used to describe the various processes occurring in each medium and the transactions incorporated at the point of sale in both models. Overall, the study concluded with an explanation of the theory behind the growth of online media when compared to other media. The current

study differs from the Muzumdar study in that it adopts the survey method and not a theoretical approach to explain postgraduate patronage of online bookstores.

From a review of the literature, it is clear that studies focusing on the patronage of online bookstores by postgraduate students are rare or do not exist. In addition, there does not seem to be any study that examines postgraduate students' patronage of online bookstores in the context of Nigerian universities. It can also be observed that most of the studies that have addressed online bookstores from one perspective or another have been conducted in India, Vietnam, China, the UK, and the USA. Since an online bookstore was launched in Nigeria in September 2019, it is important to determine the levels of patronage, so that the owners can know what needs to be done to improve their services to customers. Since there are limited or no studies focusing on this in Nigeria and in Africa generally, examining the patronage of online bookstores from an African perspective using the population of Nigerian postgraduate students will add to the literature in this area.

## Methodology

### Design

The study adopted a survey method. The survey method was commonly used to collect self-reported data from study respondents in the related studies discussed in the previous section. A survey may focus on information about individuals, or it might aim to collect the opinions of the survey respondents.

A survey design was considered appropriate for this study because it enabled the researcher to reach a substantial percentage of respondents (postgraduate students) in the universities that were covered in the study and to generalise the outcomes from the study. Moreover, a survey was chosen because it usually provides broad capability, which ensures a more accurate sample to gather targeted results from which to draw conclusions and arrive at important decisions (DeFranzo 2012; Fincham and Draugalis 2013).

### Population and Sample

The target population for the study comprised postgraduate students at Nigerian universities—that is, the students at the higher levels of study, which are master's and doctoral degree programmes. The study focused on South-west and South-south universities that run postgraduate programmes. From these universities, a total of twelve (six federal and six state) were purposively selected. From each of these universities, a sample of all the postgraduate students that were available (on each day the researcher visited the postgraduate school and hall of residence of each university) were involved in the study.

The breakdown of the sample is presented in Table 2. A total of 973 postgraduate students represent the sample for the study.

**Table 2:** Sample selection

| <b>University</b> | <b>Sample</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|-------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| A                 | 155           | 15.9                  |
| B                 | 136           | 14.0                  |
| C                 | 127           | 13.1                  |
| D                 | 85            | 8.7                   |
| E                 | 74            | 7.6                   |
| F                 | 21            | 2.2                   |
| G                 | 51            | 5.2                   |
| H                 | 55            | 5.7                   |
| I                 | 35            | 3.6                   |
| J                 | 23            | 2.4                   |
| K                 | 117           | 12.0                  |
| L                 | 94            | 9.7                   |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>973</b>    | <b>100.0</b>          |

### **The Instrument for Data Collection**

A questionnaire developed by the researchers was used for the collection of data. The development of the questionnaire was informed by the literature review and variables in the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A required respondents' demographic characteristics such as age, gender, school, and programme of study, while section B comprised the items. Section B was subdivided into six sub-sections, each of which featured items on each of the objectives of the study:

- Sub-section A featured items on the online bookstores that postgraduate students have been patronising. Several bookstores were identified, and the respondents were required to tick the ones they were familiar with and have patronised before.
- Sub-section B featured items on categories of books the postgraduate students have purchased from online bookstores. Respondents were asked to tick as applicable and were also given the opportunity to indicate other categories of books which they had bought but which were not reflected in the table.
- Sub-section C contained items on the rationale behind the postgraduate students' patronage of online bookstores. There were six items in this section. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a five-point rating scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Not Sure, Disagree and Strongly Disagree). They were also allowed to indicate other rationales which they thought were relevant but which were not listed in the table.
- Sub-section D featured items on the impact of culture and censorship on the patronage of online bookstores by the postgraduate students. It adopted an open-

ended format and asked respondents to explain whether they had been persuaded to buy books such as those forbidden due to culture, religion, or politics.

- Sub-section E featured items on the level of satisfaction of the postgraduate students with their patronage of online bookstores.
- Sub-section F featured items on the challenges encountered by postgraduate students when patronising online bookstores. Some challenges were identified as reflected in the literature and the respondents were required to tick those applicable to them and indicate others that were not listed.

### Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was tested for validity. It was given to colleagues who are experienced in researching online information and retailing. Based on the outcomes of the validation, some items in the questionnaire were modified and reworded, while others were removed and/or replaced.

To achieve reliability, the instrument was administered to thirty postgraduate students at a private university in a region that did not form part of the study. A split-half reliability method was adopted to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. This method was chosen because it provides an estimate of the reliability of the test scores and some support for the quality of the test scores, and because the split-half method is a quick and easy way to establish reliability (McLeod 2013). The overall reliability co-efficient, indicated through Cronbach's Alpha, yielded  $r = 0.74$ , while the reliability co-efficients of each of the sub-scales are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** The reliability co-efficients of each of the sub-scales

| S/N | Variables                                                  | No. of items     | Co-efficient |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------------|
| 1.  | Types of bookstores patronised                             | 20               | 0.95         |
| 2.  | Categories of books purchased                              | 6                | 0.93         |
| 3.  | Rationale behind patronage of online bookstores            | 6                | 0.89         |
| 4.  | Impact of culture and censorship                           | 4                | 0.91         |
| 5.  | Satisfaction with online bookstores                        | 6                | 0.78         |
| 6.  | Challenges encountered while patronising online bookstores | 6                | 0.88         |
|     |                                                            | <b>Total: 48</b> | <b>0.74</b>  |

### Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher and three research assistants covered three universities each. A visit was made to the postgraduate school at each of the participating universities. For three days, all postgraduate students found at the postgraduate school or college and the respective postgraduate students' hall of residence at each university were administered the questionnaire. No one was forced to complete the questionnaire; instead, the purpose of

the questionnaire and what the study set out to achieve were explained to them. Based on the sample, 973 copies of the questionnaire were administered. Of these, 969, representing 99.6%, were returned properly completed and appropriate for data analysis.

## Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed in terms of percentages, mean, standard deviation, and frequency count. The results are presented in the following sub-sections.

### Research Question 1: Which Online Bookstores Are Being Patronised by Postgraduate Students?

To answer the research question, respondents were asked to indicate the online bookstores they patronised from the list provided and to list others that were not mentioned. The results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Online bookstores patronised by postgraduate students

| S/N | Online bookstores          | Frequency  | Percentage |
|-----|----------------------------|------------|------------|
| 1.  | AbeBooks                   | 20         | 2.1        |
| 2.  | AddAll                     | 5          | 0.5        |
| 3.  | Alibris                    | 6          | 0.6        |
| 4.  | Amazon                     | 631        | 65.1       |
| 5.  | Barnes & Noble.com         | 3          | 0.3        |
| 6.  | Blackwell Online Bookshop  | 80         | 8.3        |
| 7.  | BookFinder                 | 17         | 1.8        |
| 8.  | Books-a-Million.com        | 12         | 1.2        |
| 9.  | iKasuwa.com                | 179        | 18.5       |
| 10. | Book Depository            | 1          | 0.1        |
| 11. | BookPeople                 | 3          | 0.3        |
| 12. | Booktopia                  | 4          | 0.4        |
| 13. | Borders Books and Music    | 0          | 0          |
| 14. | Bx-zone.com                | 0          | 0          |
| 15. | Chegg.com                  | 0          | 0          |
| 16. | Dymocks                    | 0          | 0          |
| 17. | Half                       | 0          | 0          |
| 18. | Powell's Books             | 8          | 0.8        |
| 19. | Rahva Raamat Rare Book Hub | 0          | 0          |
| 20. | Thriftbooks                | 0          | 0          |
| 21. | Vialibri, web              | 0          | 0          |
| 22. | Others                     | 0          | 0          |
|     | <b>Total</b>               | <b>969</b> | <b>100</b> |

As indicated in Table 4, most of the respondents patronised Amazon (65.1%). There is no significant patronage of other bookstores as such, although the findings indicate that respondents also patronised iKasuwa (18.5%), Blackwell Online Bookshop (8.3%), and

AbeBooks (2.1%). Less than 0.1% of the respondents patronised other bookstores. No other bookstore was indicated aside from the ones listed in Table 4. The results here imply that Amazon remains the online bookstore most patronised by postgraduate students at Nigerian universities.

### **Research Question 2: What Are the Categories of Books Being Purchased from Online Bookstores by Postgraduate Students?**

**Table 5:** Categories of books and other items purchased from online bookstores

| S/N | Categories of books       | Frequency         | Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) |
|-----|---------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1.  | Textbooks                 | 512               | 1.9                |
| 2.  | Fiction                   | 180               | 5.4                |
| 3.  | Comics and graphic novels | 24                | 40.3               |
| 4.  | Novels                    | 30                | 32.3               |
| 5.  | Reference books           | 157               | 6.2                |
| 6.  | Periodicals               | 57                | 17                 |
| 7.  | Audio-visual materials    | 9                 | 108                |
| 8.  | Maps                      | 0                 | 0                  |
| 9.  | Atlases                   | 0                 | 0                  |
|     |                           | <b>Total: 969</b> | <b>100</b>         |

Table 5 reveals the categories of books ordered by postgraduate students from online bookstores. The results show that textbooks are the most prominent books usually ordered by the respondents. Other popular categories are fiction books and reference books. Very limited numbers order periodicals, comics, and graphic novels.

### **Research Question 3: What Are the Rationales behind the Patronage of Online Bookstores by Postgraduate Students?**

To answer this research question, a list of the rationales was presented for the respondents to choose from. They were also given the opportunity to indicate other rationales that were not listed. The results obtained are presented in Table 6.

The rationales for patronising online bookstores, or the postgraduate students' preference for online bookstores, centre on convenience and the availability of a wide range of books and other materials which the customer can choose from. Other motivations include the opportunity to purchase books anywhere and at any time, saving money, saving time, and price reductions and special offers during promotions. This implies that the major factors stimulating the patronage of or preference for online bookstores are convenience and the wide range of products available, as well as the opportunity to purchase anytime and anywhere, saving time, and saving on costs.

**Table 6:** The rationales behind patronising online bookstores

| S/N | Rationale behind patronising online bookstores    | Strongly Agree | Neutral   | Strongly Disagree |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1.  | Saves costs                                       | 917 (94.6%)    | 23 (2.4%) | 29 (3.0%)         |
| 2.  | Saves time                                        | 911 (94.0%)    | 41 (4.2%) | 17 (1.8%)         |
| 3   | Transactions can be carried out anytime, anywhere | 950 (98.0%)    | 5 (0.5%)  | 14 (1.4%)         |
| 4.  | Improved service efficiency                       | 890 (91.8%)    | 60 (6.2%) | 19 (2.0%)         |
| 5.  | Convenience                                       | 960 (99.1%)    | 2 (0.2%)  | 7 (0.7%)          |
| 6.  | Availability of wide range of products            | 966 (99.7%)    | 3 (0.3%)  | 0 (0.0%)          |
| 7.  | Reduced prices and special offers                 | 901 (93.0%)    | 55 (5.7%) | 13 (1.3%)         |
| 8.  | Others                                            | 0 (0%)         | 0 (0%)    | 0 (0%)            |

#### **Research Question 4: What Is the Impact of Culture and Censorship on the Patronage of Online Bookstores by Postgraduate Students?**

To answer this research question, respondents were given the opportunity to express and explain their views on the impact of culture and censorship on their patronage of online bookstores. The results reveal that there are no limits or restrictions on the students' patronage and the books they order. One respondent explained: "Culture and censorship only have an impact on the physical bookshop. That is where whoever can monitor what they sell or what not. In the case of online bookstores, I can order any books I want. All I need is to fulfil my payment obligation thereafter, and my books are shipped to me." Another respondent added: "I cannot imagine anyone stopping what I have ordered. No one can even know, because the order is properly packaged and shipped. How can anyone know what the parcel is or what was sent to me?"

This implies that culture and censorship issues do not affect the patronage of online bookstores. One respondent also discussed the advantage that online bookstores offer in terms of providing students with the opportunity to acquire so-called censored books and materials. The respondent explained: "Most often, the consent of people is not sought before placing embargoes and restrictions on some books, but thank God for the opportunity of ordering books online. This has cancelled and rendered the embargo useless and unworkable."

The results imply that culture and censorship do not in any way affect the patronage of online bookstores by postgraduate students.

#### **Research Question 5: How Satisfied Are Postgraduate Students with Their Patronage of Online Bookstores?**

The results in Table 7 show that respondents are very pleased and contented with their patronage of online bookstores and that they enjoyed ordering books from online

bookstores. They also considered the choice of ordering books from online bookstores a wise decision. This implies that, overall, postgraduate students are satisfied with their patronage of online bookstores.

**Table 7:** Satisfaction with online bookstores

| S/N | Items                                                                            | SA             | A              | NS           | D            | SD           |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1.  | I am very satisfied.                                                             | 617<br>(63.7%) | 298<br>(30.8%) | 46<br>(4.8%) | 5<br>(0.5%)  | 3<br>(0.3%)  |
| 2.  | I am very pleased to buy books from online bookstores.                           | 611<br>(63.1%) | 301<br>(31.1%) | 51<br>(5.3%) | 4<br>(0.4%)  | 2<br>(0.2%)  |
| 3.  | I am very contented with online bookstores.                                      | 541<br>(55.8%) | 366<br>(37.8%) | 63<br>(6.5%) | 16<br>(1.7%) | 10<br>(1.0%) |
| 4.  | I am delighted with online bookstores.                                           | 540<br>(55.7%) | 361<br>(37.3%) | 51<br>(5.3%) | 11<br>(1.1%) | 6<br>(0.6%)  |
| 5.  | I truly enjoyed ordering book materials from online bookstores.                  | 547<br>(56.5%) | 378<br>(39.0%) | 45<br>(4.6%) | 11<br>(1.1%) | 8<br>(0.8%)  |
| 6.  | Ordering book materials from online bookstores was a wise decision.              | 567<br>(58.5%) | 353<br>(36.4%) | 50<br>(5.2%) | 13<br>(1.3%) | 6<br>(0.6%)  |
| 7.  | I am satisfied with most of the books I recently ordered from online bookstores. | 539<br>(55.6%) | 358<br>(36.9%) | 55<br>(5.7%) | 9<br>(0.9%)  | 8<br>(0.8%)  |

### **Research Question 6: What Challenges Are Associated with the Patronage of Online Bookstores by Postgraduate Students?**

Table 8 reveals the challenges postgraduate students encounter when ordering books from online bookstores. Significant challenges are poor internet connection, followed by a long delivery time for the books ordered, and a lack on the part of the student of the skills required to patronise online bookstores. Other significant challenges are inadequate access to computers with internet access, which makes the patronage of online bookstores impossible; the loss of orders during transit; and risks associated with paying for goods purchase online, such as the dangers posed by hackers. The results here imply that the challenges associated with the patronage of online bookstores by postgraduate students are a poor internet connection, long delivery time, inadequate ICT skills, limited access to computers with internet access, loss of ordered books on transit, and risks inherent in paying for books ordered online.

**Table 8:** Challenges associated with the patronage of online bookstores

| S/N | Challenges                                                       | Frequency         | Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) | SD  |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----|
| 1.  | Poor internet connection                                         | 243               | 128.3              | 3.7 |
| 2.  | Inadequate information and communication technology (ICT) skills | 157               | 16.2               | 4.5 |
| 3.  | Long delivery time                                               | 221               | 22.8               | 6.4 |
| 4.  | Loss of order in transit                                         | 87                | 9.0                | 2.5 |
| 5.  | Risk of making payment online due to hackers                     | 76                | 7.8                | 2.2 |
| 6.  | Inadequate access to computers with internet access              | 97                | 10.0               | 2.9 |
| 7.  | Expensive nature of mobile devices                               | 57                | 5.9                | 1.6 |
| 8.  | Lack of interest in online shopping                              | 31                | 3.2                | 0.9 |
| 9.  | Others                                                           | 0                 | 0                  | 0   |
|     |                                                                  | <b>Total: 969</b> | <b>100.0</b>       |     |

## Discussion of the Results

### Online Bookstores Most Often Patronised by Postgraduate Students

Amazon remains the online bookstore most patronised by postgraduate students at Nigerian universities. This result is related to what was earlier reported in the literature. It is not surprising, as Amazon is not new in the business of selling books and other educational materials online. After all, the literature refers to it as the largest online bookstore in the world (Bharathi 2013). The results might be due to the popularity of Amazon and its spread in terms of availability in most industrialised nations of the world, such as Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, and the UK.

### Categories of Books Most Frequently Ordered from Online Bookstores

The most popular categories of books ordered from online bookstores are textbooks, works of fiction, and reference books. This result is also not surprising, because Bharathi (2013), who analysed the growth of online bookstores in India, reported that books purchased from online bookstores range from fiction to comics, textbooks, and novels. The similarity in the results of the two studies may be as a result of the developing-country context in which the two studies were conducted and the use of university students as respondents.

### Rationales for Patronising Online Bookstores

Factors behind the patronage of or preference for online bookstores are convenience, the wide range of products available, the ability to purchase anytime and anywhere, time saving, costs savings, and reductions in price during promotions. The motivation and drive for patronising online bookstores were used in this study, and these are likened to

the rationale and preference for patronage. Zhang (2014) found that the motivations that drive university students to buy books online include cost savings, and Nguyen et al. (2019) identified promotions as one of the factors. These findings are all in support of the findings of the current study. On the other hand, ease of access, authority, and enjoyment were reported by Zhang (2014), and Nguyen et al. (2019) identified factors such as website design, order fulfilment, communication, merchandise, security, and privacy. These findings contradict the findings of the current study. The contradiction might be due to the difference in the approaches adopted by the studies.

### **The Impact of Culture and Censorship on the Patronage of Online Bookstores**

Culture and censorship did not in any way affect the patronage of online bookstores by postgraduate students. This is in line with the position taken by Brophy (2017), who pointed out that in the past networks of publishers, printers, booksellers, and agents provided channels through which they smuggled books from abroad and circulated banned domestic literature. The case here is not about smuggling, but rather about the legal ordering of books. When ordering books online, the question of what an individual orders does not arise, and all the customer is required to do is to satisfy all the payment obligations, such as tax, and so forth.

### **Levels of Satisfaction with Online Bookstores**

Overall, postgraduate students are satisfied with the patronage of online bookstores. The issue of the overall satisfaction reported in this study is not a surprise. If an individual prefers a certain item, and that item can fulfil what drives the preference for it, satisfaction will always result. This is exactly the case in this study. The postgraduate students indicated a preference for online bookstores, and the online bookstores are able to meet their demand in terms of expectations. Hence, they indicate overall satisfaction. This supports the findings by Tella and Ngoaketsi (forthcoming), who concluded that satisfaction increases the patronage of online bookstores by research students at Nigerian universities.

### **The Challenges of Patronising Online Bookstores**

The challenges associated with the patronage of online bookstores by postgraduate students are lack of internet connection, long delivery times, inadequate ICT skills, limited access to computers with internet access, loss of ordered books on transit, and risks inherent in paying for books ordered online. Where the internet in Nigeria is concerned, there are many shortcomings. This is because there are peculiarities in developing countries when talking about the issue of the internet. It is not surprising that many of the challenges identified, such as poor internet connection, inadequate ICT skills, limited computers with access to the internet, and so on, are peculiarities of developing countries relating to the internet and ICT infrastructure.

## Conclusion

This study examined, through empirical analysis, the patronage of online bookstores by postgraduate students at Nigerian universities. The study considered the types of bookstores patronised, the categories of books ordered online, the factors motivating students' preference for and patronage of online bookstores, the impact of culture and censorship on patronage, satisfaction with online bookstores, and the challenges associated with patronising online bookstores.

Based on the results of the study, it is concluded that Amazon remains the online bookstore most often patronised by postgraduate students at Nigerian universities. The most popular categories of books ordered from online bookstores are textbooks, works of fiction, and reference books. Factors motivating students to patronise or prefer online bookstores are convenience, the wide range of products available, the ability to purchase anytime and anywhere, time saving, and cost savings. Culture and censorship do not have any impact on the patronage of online bookstores. Overall, postgraduate students are satisfied with the patronage of online bookstores. The challenges associated with the patronage of online bookstores are internet connectivity, long delivery times, inadequate ICT skills, limited access to computers with internet access, loss of ordered books during transit, and the risks inherent in paying for books ordered online.

## Recommendations

Considering the types of online bookstores patronised by the postgraduate students in this study, out of the twenty-one listed in the study, only one is based in Nigeria: iKasuwa. Therefore, other Nigerian bookstores and booksellers are encouraged to create online platforms through which they can reach out to customers, since this study has proven that the patronage of online bookstores by postgraduate students is on the increase.

It is also recommended that network providers at Nigerian universities work on improving their networks so that the speed at which they connect to outside networks can be increased.

Online bookstores must work on the issue of items being lost during transit in the process of delivery. This will reduce customer uncertainty and give customers a greater guarantee when they order from online bookstores.

Greater access to computers with internet connectivity should be provided at the various Nigerian university campuses, especially for postgraduate students. This is crucial, since they require contact either in the form of collaboration or through buying or ordering books, research materials, and other items.

Furthermore, postgraduate students should improve their ICT skills. This would be useful not only for patronising online bookstores but also for other purposes, such as

collaborating with colleagues abroad in research and communicating with colleagues in a discussion group when working on a research project, classwork, assignments, and so forth.

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