Original Article

The African Writer at Digital Cross-Roads: A Preliminary Interrogation of Literary Production in Nigeria/the Global South within 21st Century Media Convergence

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Abstract: The 21st century convergence of media through technological, industry and market conflations has altered the traditional work environment of the creative writer in Africa and the Global South due principally to problems/issues of digital divide/negotiation or migration which have altered modes/technologies for the creation, production, distribution, and consumption of letters. The global visibility of the African writer, like many academics in African universities, is challenged by digital migration, digital illiteracy or aliteracy. This study problematizes this digital exclusion from the contemporary digital world on account of the multiple dimensions of digital divide; and social and intellectual denial of access to the global literary forum. This preliminary study re-articulates the Nigerian writer's creative environment, production process and distribution of the literary product; using interviews, ethnographic interactions, and observations, to assess the writers' (n: 62) digital literacy, competence, and issues of digital migration. Findings which were analyzed descriptively preliminarily point to the fact that media digitization actually challenges the Nigerian writer in ways that have impacted on his/her competence for literary creation/production,access and distribution within the 'global literary forum'; a situation that may probably be seen as a common 'disempowering' experience for many creative writers in developing Global South.

Keywords: Media Globalization, Digital Humanities, Cultural Production, Digital/Electronic Divide, Nigeria, Global South.

Whether in literature, psychoanalysis or philosophy, twentieth century thought is irrevocably hooked up to developments in technology and telecommunications. Contemporary literature faces new kinds of challenge in terms of how to represent, assimilate or think the increasing ghostliness of culture.

(Bennett and Royle 1999: 138)

Introduction: Media Digitization, ICTs and Convergence

The 21st Century has witnessed the convergence of media through the conflation of media technologies, industry and markets; due principally to digitization. While the technical exactitude of these terms may not be relevant here, the humanistic dimension of this phenomenon is privileged in this discourse; as convergence has among other multiple consequences, altered the traditional work environment of the creative writer, the modes/technologies for the creation, production, distribution, and consumption of literature. While convergence has a robust technological side, for us, in media studies, it has much more to do with a "change in the way that entertainment is produced, marketed, and consumed" (Johnson, 2010:15). Similarly, while "digital" connotes a computerized process, Jeffrey Cole, Director of University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication, Centre for Digital Future, also concedes that "digital is about how we work, how we play, how we communicate, and probably its most important long-term impact will be how we learn" (Johnson, 2010: 202). How have these developments, digitization, and media convergence particularly challenged the traditional literary production process of the African writer in the 21st century in the face of national developmental problems and issues of digital divide and negotiation or migration or survival? All these development issues are common to most developing economies of the Global South.

There are also issues about the African writer's global visibility and return-on-talent; like many African universities where he/she is often domiciled or works, the creative writer is hampered by problems associated with digitization, digital illiteracy, and aliteracy. This study problematizes this threat of digital exclusion of the African writer from our contemporary digital world and literary creativity on account of the multiple dimensions of the digital divide in an era of disruptive and unequal globalization; and *ipso facto*, the social and intellectual denial of access to the assumed democratic global literary forum. This problem arises from the African writer/researcher's poor access to/or unwillingness to use digital and online media resources (cf. Harle, 2012); most especially by writers working from within the humanities' faculties of African universities; which are becoming increasingly commercialized as Donald Dingwell implies when he advises that the "universities be becoming more enterprising and, like enterprises, they are well-advised to analyze the impact of their research output" (SciVerse-Scopus, 2007:3). This situation becomes acuter when viewed against the background of the diminishing digital visibility of many African universities and scholarship in annual World Rankings (cf. www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings)); coupled with the marginalization and invisibility of African media studies scholarship on global digital spaces (Jedlowski, 2016).[1] A preliminary overview of this problem had earlier been articulated by this writer in a theoretical exploration of 'digitalization and the challenges for Nigerian media industries' (Akoh & Inegbe, 2013: 404-418). The ubiquity of this phenomenon in the Global South has also been signposted by Ignacio Lopez-Calvo's (2018:15) interrogation of the criteria for "worldliness in a literary text," especially in contemporary Asian-American literature. He asks whether this "globalist" or "worldliness" that endows global canonity to a literary text is "inseparable from globalization, global circulation, translation into English, and unequal power relations between Western cores and non-Western peripheries?"(ibid: 15) Even though it is not directly bordering on digital exclusivity, Lopez-Calvo argues that the accidents of geography, global economics and hegemonies should not exclude the so-called "peripheral" Asian-American literature from the canonical status of world literature, as well as proposing that what should give world status to literature should be, "writing and reading practices that move beyond the framework of the national and of Eurocentrism, being molded instead by a critical, planetary consciousness. World literature would then become a decolonial literature beyond Eurocentric models" (ibid:15). He finally proposes a new model which is a "re-

conceptualization of Asian-Latin American cultural production and, by extension, other 'minor' literature as an alternative type of Weltliteratur" (ibid:15). Similar arguments on such mainstream or imperial media exclusivism of peripheries (Kuang, 2018) and Euro-American biases about authors/writing from the Global South have been severally raised by Günther & Domahidi (2017); and Coleman & Freelon (2015) who identify this important nexus between media digitization and politics when they state that "it makes sense to think of 'digital politics' less as an account of how technology serves predetermined political ends than as a complex, ongoing tension between replication and transformation in the social organization of power" (2). While these observed prejudices, biases and discriminatory tendencies may not be unconnected with politics and problems related to the digital divide, they also suggest the pandemic dimension among writers in the developing/peripheral economies of the Global South.

For the African creative writers, some of the reasons suspected for this diminishing visibility, beyond regional infrastructural deficiencies, is their inability to fully migrate to the digital platform; or the failure/inability to have their scholarship/creative works published in digital format or media; coupled with the intimidating presence of corporatizing publishing organizations, which publish for a digitized readership. The African writer in the 21st century is therefore faced with a real challenge of managing digitization and media convergence, which have deep running implications for the creation, production and distribution of African literature in an increasingly globalizing and digitizing world.

The convergence of telecommunications, computing, satellite technology, fibre optics and lazers has created the network of networks: the Internet, leading to industry convergence which has also caused structural changes in the industry. Part of this rupturing change is market convergence which has produced newer hybrid markets that have evolved from the traditional media functions of entertainment, information and education; but with new rules of engagement (Dunn, 2005: 350). Media history also shows that a change in one technology affects other media as we for instance see how Guttenberg's invention of printing technology created impacts on the Renaissance and the Reformation in the same way the Digital Revolution has brought on Convergence. Grant's Umbrella Model of communication technology also shows that the individual media user is influenced by the social system, media's organizational structure and the hard/software of the media in question. As implied by Media System Dependency Theory, the above prevalent factors are also inter-dependent and each can exert some differential enabling, motivating, limiting or inhibiting influence on the user (Grant, 2002: 3-4).

Even though some African countries like South Africa and Rwanda have achieved relatively high Internet connectivity, one exemplary country in the South that has undertaken a proactive articulation of change occasioned by media convergence is Australia through her Australian Communication & Media Authority (ACMA). This nation's well-thought-out policy through her Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) articulates media convergence as

> the interlinking of computing and ICTs communication networks, and media content that has occurred with the development and popularization of the Internet, and the convergent products, services and activities that have emerged in the digital media space [where all aspects of social life and institutional activities] are increasingly conducted in this interactive media environment, across a plethora of networked ICT devices (*Report 118*, 2002).

The dimensions of convergence are therefore technological, industrial, social and textual; with the latter referring to the "re-use and re-mixing of media, into what has been termed a trans-media model where stories and media content…are dispersed across multiple media platforms" (ALRC Report 118, 2002). The Report notes that all "techno-economic

paradigms" have historically caused real shifts in society, as perceivable in the different Ages: Industrial Revolution (1780s-1830s), Steam & Railways (1840s-1870s), Steel, Electricity & Heavy Engineering (1880s-1920s), Oil, Automobile & Mass Production (1930s-1980s); and, the present Age of Information and Telecommunications (1990s to date). Significantly, the Report reiterates that the ascendancy of any of these techno-economic paradigms is "invariably disruptive…as it generates losers as well as winners" (ALRC 118). Frederick Williams had earlier tracked this trajectory when he noted that "the revolution in communications technologies […] is what antiquated the monopolistic structure of the telecommunications business" (1983:60). One of these disruptive tendencies is media digitization.

It suffices here to understand that "with the advent of the computer, the Internet, and other information technologies, we have [entered] the digital age', where 'activities, including research and development…are increasingly done in the digital environment" (Chu, 2007:14). Understood in binary terms, "digital" is the expression of a signal in positive and negative (on/off) values as opposed to traditional analogue linear system. This digitized "binary language allows for easy generation, processing, and transmission of signals with the assistance of microprocessors" (Rayport & Jaworski, 2004:494) thereby enabling data to be manipulable by computers. The gains that digitization has added to media production, distribution and consumption include greater digital compression-ability, increased volume of digital signals that run on less power requirements, production of digital copies that are exact copies of the original, and media interactivity and transportation, etc. Therefore, information representation/encoding, storage and retrieval have been significantly enhanced. Digital, new or convergent media are therefore computer-mediated within a network-enabled system. In the same way that deadlines had been set for digital migration in broadcasting, media production, which includes creative writing, production and distribution are also globally shifting towards the digital format. Microsoft Corporation's Bill Gates, observed with prescience the transcendence of this "digital lifestyle" when he said back in 2001, that "the PC [Personal Computer] is going to be …the center of control…But it won't just be the PC, it will be all these things connected to the PC, both in wired and wireless fashion" (Rayport & Jaworski, 2004:426).

But we need not forget that media convergence or new media forms have continued to inter-negotiate with old traditional media through hybridization; but like Burton notes, "convergence does not simply generate new media. It opens up new possibilities for old media" (2010:211) in a "transgressive" manner as Quail (2010) would put it. We now have new hybrid formats like *edutainment, infotainment* and *infotorial* media products; as well as telethons and radiothon programmes enabled by telecommunications; while the notions of "audienceship" and "authorship" have mutated towards "producer-user", modes, etc. This inter-negotiation has long sign-posted the antiquation of some media or communication industries as we see with global posts and telegraph services. We also perceive these media inter-marriages in the persistence of traditional voice media and folklore (as perceived in tribal accents as ethnic markers in broadcasting, storytelling and the novel/narrative and e-books); text and video (as seen in painting, photography, film/video, multi-media and first language transliterations); and, sound & movement (where Internet communication has in some ways signaled the death of traditional transportation systems). Traditional communicative symbols have also persisted in writing, semiotics, advertizing/subliminal codes (Malik, 1986: 151-68). The prevalence of a vibrant citizen-media expressed through citizen journalism, social media and blogging are products of convergence; which has seen an ascendance of an irrepressible public sphere/will over political/corporate hegemonies that have dominated old media for many decades (cf. Ivanyi, 2017). Beyond what Coleman & Freelon (2015) have identified as the creation of a digital civic and political space, and the emergence of the "Fifth Estate of pluralistic accountability", digital media has also engendered class inequality.

The emergence of online books and libraries has also become a present day reality as a "universal library" system with continual access for writers and researchers. Many Nigerian universities like many others in the Global South, have collaborated with virtual book organizations like SciVerse's ScienceDirect, (cf. www.sciverse.com), the Nigerian Research and Education (NgREN) to secure access to EBSCOHOST e-content at one time or the other (cf: http://search.ebscohost.com); apart from many other free access sites and services (e.g, www.pdfdrive.net). It's impossible to separate what is commonly referred to as "scientific or scholarship" research from creative writing. This is because apart from the fact that many African creative writers work within the universities, and much of scholarship from the humanities draws from critical interpretation of the creative artists' works, a tradition that dates back to Greek drama and its criticism, or for instance, the relationship between Freudian psychoanalysis with Sophocles' Oedipal Complex, digital literacy levels are inextricably linked with low literacy levels. UNESCO (2010:2) had long noted this holistic bind when it observed that "failure to address inequalities, stigmatization and discrimination linked to wealth, gender, ethnicity, language, location and disability is holding back progress towards Education for all". Regrettably, inasmuch as creative writers, researchers and universities in many parts of the Global South try to migrate to new global media platforms and connectedness, they are also continually bedeviled by poor national infrastructural or developmental issues, which sometimes are not unconnected with the capitalist monopoly contracts of media organizations, dependent national policies and their slavish relationship with the World Trade Organization which also controls the global trade in cultural goods and services (cf. Dunn, 2005: 354).

Enrique Bustamante articulates a more comprehensive notion of "digital divide" as being more complex and wide-ranging than mere inaccessibility to digital technology. These digital divides as experienced in much of the Global South include gaps in purchasing power, possession of strategic knowledge by developed nations that exploit others' cultures, increased regional industrialization and concentration of global capital. Other dimensions include evolution of new global marketing/management principles like vertical and horizontal integration and pursuit of multiple revenue streams; encouraged by organizations (like WTO, World Bank, IMF and other oligopolies) which have made it possible for a "complete conversion of the cultural industries into institutions defined by finance" (2004: 804); as well as increasing organizational convergence driven by corporate mergers. To these, Burton adds the "electronic divide" between media that can be transformed into, or distributed in electronic form and those that can only be materially managed (2010: 206). This electronic divide is significant especially for books or texts which can or cannot be electronically distributed within the production industry between perceived global "imperial centres" and the "peripheries" by corporate organizations and hegemonies.

From the perspective of the humanities, digital imbalance and the increasing corporatizing nature of the book publishing industry also make it more difficult for creative writers and critics in the third world to have their creative works or research published where most of the digital denizens read (cf. Harle, 2012; Betiang, 2013). This bleak situation does not only confront academic institutions and governments in Africa or the Global South, but also challenge the individual creative writer working in or out of universities. To complicate matters, many African writers within the continent are traditionally self-funded and self-motivated even when they work in/outside the humanities faculties of poorly-funded and largely digitally-invisible universities. So how does this creative writer cope with or negotiate the issues and problems of poor infrastructure, near-absent electricity power supply, poor Internet connectivity and de-motivating work environment, coupled with the larger techno-authoritarian issues of digital migration via corporatized publishing companies? Is it possible for such a writer's work to gain global attention and recognition without access to the global *agora* which corporate publishers and networks provide? It's becoming obvious that many

aspects of man's social existence today are continually invaded by "digital determinism" (www.digitalhumanities.org/companion) whereby many "digital aliens" are excluded from participation in the public sphere. Can the humanities and the African writer in the Global South afford to be hermetically sealed from these relentless exclusivist phenomena?

One is inclined to agree with Pierre Macherey's theorization of Literary Production that "the knowledge of the conditions of a process, is the true programme of a theoretical investigation- the demonstration that change and simultaneity […] are not incompatible, but are in a necessary alliance" (1978:10). This is not arguing that "digital determinism", "techno-determinism" or "economic-determinism" would necessarily determine the course of culture in a manner that we sometimes would link the Arab Spring to authoritarian regimes, depressive socio-economic conditions and the facilitating role of social media; but one can see a clear linkage between the march of technology (in this case digitization and media convergence) with the increasing yawning chasm between the richer North of the world and the poorer South. Yekinni links technology to social change when he rightly asserts that "technological development is basically an outcome of the efforts to make things better in human societies" because development in "reality applies to political, social and technological progress" (Yahaya, 2008:248). Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have also brought about deep running changes "in the way individuals and organizations interact, in terms of time, cost and distance" (Yahaya, 2008:250). These derive from the very nature of ICTs which are characteristically pervasive and cross-cutting, possessing network creation-ability, being disseminators of information and knowledge, with minimal marginal cost of operation/access, and efficiency gains in terms of information processing, storage, retrieval and sharing; as well as having potentials for innovative business models and creation of new businesses (Yekinni, 2008). These characteristics give ICTs their inherent ability for intermediation and global inter-connectedness, which derive from their inherent operative principles and unique architecture, embodying such *connector* concepts like the Web, Intranet, Extranet, E-mails and List-services; and *Infrastructure* like the Internet, Ethernet, WLL, Bluetooth and Mobile networks. ICTs also have connection devices with such many appliances like personal computers, laptops, palms, mobile phones and multi-media devices; and, *enabling software tools* for browsing, publishing, chatting, collaborating, messaging and conferencing. All these material and immaterial characteristics have positively pre-disposed ICTs to serve as catalyst for development in diverse spheres including decision making process, marketing outlook, improvement of rural communities, interventions among marginalized groups, as well as employment creation (Odiaka, 2011: 373-383).

Digital technologies have also made it possible for a "reduction in the cost of content creation and services, which might permit the initial hope of a democratization and expansion of creativity and expression" (Bustamante, 2004: 806), including the "technique and marketing" of the creative products. This has potentially opened up access into the creative industry to many and probably will significantly, internationalize markets and reduce prices for publications; but the potentiality for "cloning" and piracy have also increased, thereby violating "the fundamental right of *creators and communicators to make a living from their work*" (Bustamante, 2004:812, emphasis added).

Beyond ICTs, media convergence has also encouraged the ascendance of Social Media with its capabilities for high connectivity and interactivity. Even though these social media have been accused of shifting society from a "participatory culture to a culture of connectivity" (Dijck, 2013:155), they have also liberated cultural content, its creation, ownership, distribution as well as the nature/volume of reward to artistic talent. The production of artworks including texts are "no longer be[ing] limited to professionals, as the tools for creative production [have been] yielded to amateurs and citizens" (Dijck, 2013:161). Beyond this, Djick adds that "content has been freed of cultural constraints…forms and formats…economic restrictions" as

well as free distribution (2013:161). Through vertical integration and inter-operability, Dijck argues, many search-engines and platforms for social media have "branched out into practically every type of platform, catching virtually every kind of social, informational, creative, and commercial niche" (2013: 163). These kinds of business moves have also begun to lead to the "gradual development of a few major platform chains –microsystems vertically integrated by means of ownership, shareholder, and partnership constructions– that are now dominating the ecosystem of connective media" (Dijck, 2013:163). Such corporatizing media include Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon, which may also be signposting the gradual triumph of global corporatization as we witnessed with the ascendance of traditional media corporations in the last two or three decades.

Another positive dimension to digitization is the deployment of multimedia for learning and pedagogy. According to Allessi & Trollip, the advent of the World Wide Web and the Internet in the 1990s has been transformed from a network that was predominantly used by academics and governments "for the exchange of textual materials, into a worldwide resource" such that "today, hundreds of millions of people use the Internet to pursue activities as diverse as shopping, dating, researching, forming associations, exchanging textual, graphic, and video information, and of course learning"; concluding that, "the Internet has and will continue to transform everything we do" (2001:4).

Specifically articulating how ICTs have empowered the African youth, Etieyibo enumerates inter alia the multiple benefits of ICTs beyond the making and re-making of youth identities/cultures to include "reading, writing and literacy; citizenship and participation; media production and formation; marketing and commerce"; without losing sight of the downside of ICTs like "media-fostered violence, anonymity and the development of dual personalities, individualization, internet addiction, psychological and financial stress, hate group membership, bullying and harassment" (2015: 144). He hastens to advise that in spite of these downsides, young Africans must not lose sight of how these digital media "implicates (*sic*) them in aspects of global citizenship and identity formation" (2015:145); and urging that in a world that is increasingly being globalized by ICTs', it becomes "imperative that young people in Africa find ways of appropriating and re-negotiating both the benefits and challenges that ICTs offers (*sic*)" (147). Marton Ivanyi's position that "given some particular cases in the context of self-categorization via digital media, the optimistic notion of the public sphere or public sphericules might be closer to reality than the pessimistic vision" (2017:8), suggests the possibility of engaging digital authoritarianism to local and specific needs.

Considering the hegemonic impact of creative writing as part of the media that shape impressionable minds and emerging global cultures, the Nigerian or African writer in the Global South cannot but be involved in the conscious shaping of these "digital futures". The African writer cannot therefore be immune to these techno-economic conditions in terms of his/her "private" process of literary creativity and the "public" production, distribution and consumption of the literary work. This is because, like Macherey puts it, the development of literature, like the "history of critical doctrines can only be understood when we have determined the complex question which is the condition of that history" (1978:11). Articulating these technological cross-roads where the African writer finds him/herself, Ugor (2015) further notes with significant insight that,

> the lopsidedness of economic and technological globalization is impeding robust academic cultures in Africa, especially in the humanities. Undoubtedly, the very nature of the African literary scene has changed. Part of that change comes from the fact that the new generation of African writers lives and writes in the context of the globalization of culture and the economy... which has huge implications for the themes, narrative styles and linguistic forms that they deploy in their works (*Personal Communication,* Oct. 23rd)[2].

This preliminary investigation therefore takes a closer, more critical ethnographic look at the challenges, dilemmas and complications the contemporary African creative writer in the Global South of the world is facing in the process of creating/producing the literary product in an environment that has increasingly become digitized and globalized, with production (writing and publishing) and distribution processes that are basically electronic and controlled by the forces of media conglomerates; and probably addressing a younger readership that is increasingly digital or audio-visual in orientation.

A divergent arguable second position may be ventured here: is it possible that the African writer can ignore this so-called techno-authoritarianism of media digitization, ICTs or convergence and still make his/her way in today's globalizing jungle? Global business strategist, Mike W. Peng posits that "in this age of globalization, one side of the debate argues that there's a great deal of convergence, especially towards more 'modern' Western values such as individualism and consumerism" (2009:74). This side of the argument insists that Westernization in consumption patterns does not necessarily mean adoption of western values. A middle position termed "cross-vergence" acknowledges the validity of both positions. Cross-vergence adopts a more "global" approach [reading: "uniform content and image"] when dealing with the younger population; and adopting a "local adaptation" of the global for more tradition-bound older population. Jedlowski and Oloko have also noted that the 21st century has also brought about "global mobility", whereby "inter-textuality, inter-genericity, quotation and remix" are on the increase in global cultural production; stressing that the "recent exponential increase in the use of digital media has modified the geography and economy of African cultural production in significant ways" (2015:4).

Understanding that due to cultural mobility and convergence, where most media work is collaboration and "inter-remediation" within a socio-economic system, can these positions and developments remain valid for literary production and distribution, including the choice of language of literary expression/markets in the manner Ngugi wa Thiong'o for instance, would ideologically profess? Studies show that English Language drives ICTs; while a "configuration of language (English Language), computer and MDGs…drive the development of a virile human capital for national and global needs" (Amanze & Bamah, 2012:142; also, Teilanyo, Olise in Osakwe, 2012). Within this complex, the big question also arises about the intended readership of the African writer in contemporary digital times where convergent media is being dominated by young digital citizens who tend to patronize it more because of its audio-visual appeal. The assumption following a UNESCO (2010) Report that 95% of books published in Africa are textbooks and not creative works; and that writing in an aboriginal language might make for wider readership is not founded in reality. In Nigeria specifically, the basic language of tutelage is English with slight combinations with local languages in elementary schools. But these local languages have an orthography which is mostly (except Arabic) based on the English alphabet. There is also a predominant use of pidginized or creolized versions of the "imperial languages" even in rural areas. Our experience shows that even when creative books are written in the local language, English, French of their pidgin forms, the basic English alphabets of their orthography plays a big part in their comprehension or otherwise. This situation has been further entrenched by the "hegemonization" of English as the language of the computer. The African writer writes for his audience wherever it is, hence the fact that literary translations and adaptations hardly change the essence of a literary product for global readers; because "global sensitivity", a sense of "placelessness" and "trans-cultural comparison" are part of the aesthetics and common attributes of "world literature" (Lopez-Calvo: 2018:18). The readership of authentic literature is therefore not necessarily "local" in a world that has become increasingly "de-nationalized" and virtual.

Methods

This study was based on a combination of Self-Reflexivity and Survey of other creative writers, personal observations, interviews and a structured questionnaire. The self-reflexive dimension involved some kind of "self-positioning" and probably a projection of our personal experience in creative writing in relation to other writers concerning the problem being investigated. This may be considered as being "self-confessional" going by Douglas E. Foley's four-category classification of self-reflexive ethnography as being: "confessional, theoretical, textual, and deconstructive" (2002:469); since it incorporates auto-biographical experience and an objectification of self. This is because, "narrating the self, telling the stories of our identity, or autobiographies, are as much personal as they are visionary and spiritual as well as political acts" (Kremer, 2003:6). These writers' "being" or "positionality" here therefore becomes part of the instrument of research, hence our personal experience, assumptions, biases and choices have probably impacted on the study (cf. Paulus *et al*, 2013). The validity of ethnographic reflexivity or using "self" and "being" as part of the subject of research is in the post-modern time increasingly becoming part of the solution for the ethical issues that have often gone with "using others" as subjects of research; and for a subjective enterprise like creative writing, it hopes to foster respect for subjectivities for self and "the other" and encourage co-learning while preserving difference (Rawlins, 1998: 361); as well as constantly reminding us of the role of social constructs in making meaning of human communication.

As part of this preliminary survey of other writers, about 70 published and unpublished young authors were interviewed using a questionnaire on the problematic issue of digitization, literary production, and distribution within our local Nigerian context. Most of the respondents were attending a conference of the Association of Nigerian Authors in Abuja, Nigeria in 2016. Eight of these were invalidated and isolated leaving a valid number of sixty-two. The formal questionnaire consisted of 20 structured/clustered questions dwelling on the author's volume of creative output, publishing options, the method of manuscript processing, online publications, visibility and concerns about piracy, marketing of creative works, digitization and creativity, awards and incentives, publishers and choice of language of expression and more. It is noteworthy that the sampled authors were dominantly the younger crop of writers often found in many authors' or writing conferences.

Findings & Discussion

The research problem is articulated here along significant clusters of the authors' creative experience, literary production or publishing, distribution or marketing; and, rewards and return-on-talent; and the language of expression, all within contemporary digital dispensation. This discussion freely combines quantitative data with qualitative responses and their interpretation is expectedly colored by these writers/authors' self-reflexivity and experience; hence the difficulty of separating the discourse.

The responses from this preliminary sample show that more writers tend to express themselves through Prose (45/62); followed by Poetry (31/), and then drama (18/62). While the structure of this output may not be central to the study, it could be understood that while the genres of prose and poetry are often individual and personal creations that can also be consumed individually and privately; the dramatic genre requires collaboration with others within a production environment to realize its full potentials. Dramatic writing, therefore, becomes a more restricted genre practiced mainly by trained or active practitioners. The ideal situation is the existence of in-house drama producers in broadcasting houses and dramaturgs in professional Theatre and Film production outfits, who usually will re-write to fit the specific

requirements of dimensional formats. It is unfortunate that when the word 'drama' is mentioned, it is considered only in terms of stage, ignoring the whole volume of dramatic writing that goes on in broadcasting and film industries; which also has led to industry fragmentations like broadcast and screenwriters' guilds. Beyond this, publishing dramatic works is hardly the primary objective of any dramatic author; instead, its final production on stage, screen or broadcast media often amounts to publication. Fractionalization and compartmentalization of writers of other literary genres are hardly noticeable among writers of poetry and prose.

Most writers (45/62) admit that they process their manuscripts with a computer; while some others (18/62) do not. However, asked what word processor they use, 30 out of 62 had an idea of a word processor while 29 had no idea or any word processing skills. Therefore the claim above that they process their manuscripts becomes questionable. As to whether the computer or word processor encumbers the writer's creativity, a dominant 38 (62) declined, while 15 (62) admitted. A significant 11 (62) did not respond. A clearer picture probably emerges when we tie the above scenario to the online visibility of the writers. Out of the total sampled, 18/62 admitted to having online publications, while 39 (62) did not have any online publications, with 6 (62) declining any comment. Put differently, 20 (62) admitted having titles online with 37 (62) admitting non-online visibility.

Even though these online titles were not verified by the researchers, some of these online publishers/distributors cited include Konga, Amazon, Portridge Apina, Word Rhyme & Rhythm (wrr.ng), Igede.org, d2d, Poem Hunter & Poetfreak, Bannes & Nobles, E-zines, E-book Africa.com, Xlibris, Booktopia, Kokobooks, E-Bay, lulu.com, and Partridge Africa Publisher. Some cited social media and Facebook. Significantly, only 16 (62) of the sample had named online distributor while 45 (62) presumably hadn't because they gave no response. We may probably link this to the large number of writers (43/62) who admitted having fears about piracy in online publication, as against the 19 (62) who had no fears. The question arises as to what qualifies a writer to belong to or partake of or work in an online literary production community. The qualifications may not exclude the negotiation of the multiple constrictions of systemic digital divide, personal digital literacy and often the author's personal option of "aliteracy", and, probably the hegemonic imposition of the regime of English as the language of the computer/Internet.

The *Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication* defines publishing as "the activity of mass producing and disseminating information via the medium of print, or electronically on the Internet" (Chandler & Munday, 2011:345). The electronic dimension of book publishing may still be suspect to many creative writers even though this "new" dimension has the potentiality for wider dissemination. One of the more popular options for publishing for many writers is "self-publishing"; a term that is being confused with "vanity publishing". For instance, Author House is said to be "the leading provider of supported self-publishing services for authors in the United Kingdom and around the globe, with over 70,000 titles released" (www.authorhouse.co.uk/packages). It distributes books to a worldwide audience with a big bouquet of author services and packages with books distributed through hard and digital platforms. Author House's self-publishing interpretation gives the author a "creative control" of the book from editing, cover-design, page layout through royalties and distribution to marketing and publicity; which is not the tradition with traditional publishing which takes absolute control of the publishing and distribution process but at no cost to the author.

Jo Herbert, veteran editor and writing trainer, notes that traditional publishers "only take on work they believe is worth investing their own money in, confident it will make a return when the book hits the shelves" (www.writersandartists.co.uk/writers/advice). Herbert cites the selling potential of the book as one major reason why it's difficult for new authors to get published. On the other hand, he explains that "vanity publishers" are only interested in the

author's money. "They take your manuscript, take your money and print several (usually poor quality) copies [....] they won't consult you and…won't offer any help marketing or distributing your book". These publishers neither stock your book nor have any relationship with bookshops, real or virtual; and most of these types of publishers wrongfully refer to themselves also as "self-publishers"; concluding that "there is a vast difference between the way they operate and the way a reputable self-publisher operates". It's interesting to note that Self- publishing dates far back to its earliest patrons like Virginia Woolf, Mark Twain, James Joyce and William Blake, and in fact, Jane Austen's first book. Self-publishing "is considered to be a perfectly respectable way to get your book into the marketplace", as it shows that the author is "ambitious, organized and serious". Alison Baverstock, former publisher and writer, also notes that "times have changed from when self-publishing meant vanity publishing"; revealing that in the US alone in 2016, more titles (240,000) were self-published than (the 230,000) traditionally published (www. writersandartists.co.uk).

      This survey shows that most writers (43/62) prefer self-publishing; with many not even being able to get published yet (12/62). Reasons given for these writers' preference for self-publishing include: "non access to renowned publishing companies, lack of willing publishers, and rejection from major publishers for the reason that the author is not known, dearth of publishing companies in Nigeria, the belief that self-publishing is faster; and the fact that often writers have to borrow to publish." Other reasons include: absence of trusted publishers, while others believe it's becoming trendy to self-publish; many think traditional publishing is so frustrating because many publishers are reluctant to read new narratives from young "nameless" authors. Many others opt for self-publishing because royalties from established publishers hardly come. The others who write and have not been published finger reasons like: lack of funds or financial support, absence of publishing platforms, and the high cost of self-publishing. A few of those who prefer traditional publishing say it's less stressful and it promotes academic and artistic excellence.

      From the foregoing reasons, one is inclined to believe that many authors do not really understand the difference between traditional, self and vanity publishing. This is because from experience, traditional publishing is free; while self-publishing is not that expensive as the books are sometimes based on print-on-demand. One strongly suspects that when authors blame cost as reason for failure to publish, their prospective publishers of choice are actually vanity publishers who make one-off monetary demands that many authors can hardly afford. In addition, the names of "publishers" our sample patronizes here show very few credible publishers. A writer's first publisher signals the author's "point of attack" into the publishing industry. It's also significant who and where this publisher is; and what determines the writer's choice of publisher. There are about 42 (62) named, and 17 "unnamed" first publishers in our sample. Note also that the majority of them are local and digitally "invisible".[3]

      The writers justify their choices of publishers to include the publisher's creativity, proven credibility, quality print, affordability, editorial and production quality, proximity and effectiveness. Other reasons include the writer's finances, publisher's experience and accessibility, availability and cheaper printing cost, honesty and expertise, convenience and access to mentoring services, popularity, excellence and professionalism; and marketing reach as well as commitment to paying royalties, etc. While about 43 (62) writers gave reasons for their choice of publisher, some (18) had no reason whatsoever.

      On the real issue of creative writers' capability to make a living from their literature, 49 (62) declined with only a paltry 13 (62) accepting that their creative craft gives them subsistence. About 40 (62) of these writers admit having made sales that range from 50 to 50,000(?) copies of their books from a single publication; while 21 (62) have made no sales at all from any single publication. This is further clarified with 19 (62) claiming they have received some "royalty" ranging from 50 – 3 million Naira; with 43 (62) who have never

received anything like royalty. Most (35/62) of these writers market or distribute their books personally, as against the 22 (62) who do not engage in personal sales, even though a majority (35/62) would prefer to be marketed by their publishers, as against the 27 (62) who prefer self marketing.

The questions of writing, distribution and making a living from one's writing remain fundamental to the creative industry; even though this is also tied to what the primary motivation for literary or artistic creativity is. Does the writer write to live or does so to fulfill a creative urge or some social responsibility? Answers to these questions also touch on basic reasons why authors choose to publish with which publishers: for money, fame or the fulfillment of a "teaching" role? The didactic role of the writer has engaged many a mind since the time of Horace, through Carl Jung, communist writers, Sigmund Freud, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, etc.; all of whose writings or theories have represented the artist as a "compulsive" voice with a mission to "engineer" human souls in the society. Many a writer has died in penury, with fame or prestige coming thereafter. Many since Sophocles have also reaped pecuniary rewards through sales and prizes.

But none of the above has proffered any answer to basic questions as to the writer's primary motivation. Does catering for a local audience/readership amount to global consciousness and socio-cultural engineering through local action? What is the real value of a writer within local/global contexts: Is the significance of a writer measured by global recognition or local significance in a globalizing world, considering the place of radical fundamentalism in postmodern local/global inter-negotiation? Larger questions also arise about the future of the creative industry in the relentless postmodern commoditization of culture and its products in contemporary era of human and material flows (cf. Jedlowski, 2015). The issue of return-on-talent has also been complicated by the challenge of copyright control in the digital age where "copies of copies of originals" can be replicated, multiplied without losing value and being possibly transmitted/distributed electronically; a real fear that has dissuaded writers and even some publishers from venturing into online publishing.

This leads us naturally to the question of whether media digitization has affected the writer's work. A dominant 42(62) admits that digitization has enhanced their literary creation, publishing and distribution output, with 11(62) refusing any "affect" while 10 (62) remain unsure of any influence. While understanding that the way digitization can "affect" a creative writer can be multi-dimensional, but if the above scenario holds, what again therefore is the possible reward for the writer in the Nigerian or African setting? As interrogated above: is it increased inflow of revenue, awards of recognition or fame? The responses to the question have not stated in precise ways what this "affect" is but a holistic reading of the investigation gives us some idea of the nature of influence.

While fame cannot be quantified, and many writers also hardly bother to submit their works for literary competitions, how many of our sampled writers have received any prize or award for any of their works? A tiny proportion (12/62) agrees to having received some prize, a dominant (51/62) number have received none. Even though these prizes and awards were not verified, they include the Samuel Goldwyn Creative Writers Award, South African Children Literature Award, and New Nigeria Award for Indigenous Languages, Rivers ANA (Association of Nigerian Authors) Poetry Prize, Kenabe-ANA Benue Award for Poetry, Radio Nigeria Ambassadorial Award, Chief of Army Staff Commendation Award, and ANA Bayelsa Prose & Drama Prizes. Others include, ANA-Ken Saro Wiwa Literary Award, Writers in Focus, etc. Incidentally, many of these prizes carry just a little cash component except major ones like the NLNG Prize for Literature ($100,000) instituted since 2004, or the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature ($20,000), and the low-cash prized privately sponsored range of ANA (Association of Nigerian Authors) Prizes; which number about 14, with the "least cash prize being 50,000 Naira and the highest being 2500 dollars" (www.ana-nigeria.com/prizes).

Many major regional or "global" awards give the writer a little financial lift. Some of these include the Nobel Prize for Literature (having been won only by Wole Soyinka in Nigeria), Man Booker International Prize (#60,000), the Man Booker Prize (#50,000) , the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award (E85000), The Folio Prize (#40,000), David Cohen Prize (#40,000), Costa Book Award- Book of the Year (#35,000), The Women Prize for Fiction (#30,000), The Dylan Thomas Prize (#30,000), and Sunday Times EFG Bank Short Story Award (#30,000),etc. (cf. www.telegraph.co.uk/top-literary-prizes). While most of the above prizes are European or UK-based, many are international or Euro-American in origin. Like the Chair of Booker Prize Foundation, Jonathan Taylor explains, "we are embracing the freedom of English in its versatility, in its vigour, in its vitality, and in its glory wherever it may be" (*The Telegraph*). As expected with grants and fellowships, there are always restrictive rules of engagement for prizes and awards, mostly available to "globally/digitally" visible writers and publishers, and above all, in "English" as the language of expression. So how does a typical locally situated Nigerian writer in the Global South, digitally invisible with little access to the global literary community access these spaces and markers of literary recognition? Inevitably, the local writer goes home without the much needed subsistent cash, fame or recognition; even as we insist that literary recognition should also be local and culturally contextual.

On the problematic issue of the African writer's choice of language of expression which in contemporary commoditized world has become the shibboleth to global digital culture, this survey shows that 41 (62) prefer a global language for creative expression; while 8 chose to write in their mother-tongue; and, with an insignificant 9 writing in both global and mother-tongue; and about 8 having no specific preference for any language. In the manner Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2013), likens the imperial mother-tongue in the post-colonies to patriarchal repression of women in African cultures, competency in English Language becomes the digital password to access the resources of post-industrial digital age. But what is the implication of the narrowing choices of language in the digital age where the English Language has become more privileged over others; particularly when we remember that "languages are also one of the essential sources of the vital force that animates human communities" (Hagege, 2009:4)? Like UNESCO (2006) puts it, "the acquisition of literacy is complicated not only by the challenges of particular scripts, but also by the common necessity to master a number of different scripts." So how does a writer whose mother-tongue is dying from atrophy capture the reality around him through the conceptual lenses of another linguistic culture without losing voice and authenticity in an increasingly homogenizing world? This appears to be the dilemma of the African writer from the Global South caught between mother-tongue and "master-tongue".

Conclusion

This preliminary study (initially designed with a Pan-African/Global South scope) interrogated the cultural shift brought about by digitization of media and their subsequent convergence in the last decade of the 20th century, which have significantly altered many aspects of human existence, and how these have impacted explicitly on the Nigerian creative writer's creativity, production and distribution of the creative cultural product. With creative writing merging with media studies in the communication world of contemporary 21st century, new "cultural hybrids and cultural trends" continue to emerge, creating "not only new audiences but also new awareness of the relationship between writer and reader" (Henderson & Hancock, 2010: xix) in the same way changes in communications technologies have over time altered modes of cultural production, participation, and consumption.

Using a combination of auto-ethnography and survey to re-examine this problematic; we found that there are indeed various impacts and challenges on the Nigerian creative writer regarding creativity, processing, publishing, and distribution of the creative product. There's also limited access and participation in the global digital literary culture and its reward system for home-based Nigerian/African writers publishing from home. Other impacts and problems arise in part from socio-economic issues of government's negligence of necessary infrastructure that enable digital competence; as well as the writers' lack of access to publishers with digital infrastructure for promotion and distribution; and the reward system. There is also writers' inability or unwillingness to migrate towards digital literacy and competence.

While the study raises more questions than answers because of its preliminary disposition, problematic issues like determining or distinguishing between popular and literary writing (commercial success and literary value); and what constitutes the creative author's return-on-talent come up even as many authors understand that the creative writer's work revolves around cultural intangibles like being the social conscience, creating communal identities and voicing for the voiceless. However, how do all of these translate to literary professionalism for a Nigerian writer living in the Global South?

The study suggested some remedial action for some of the problematic issues raised. Embracing and institutionalizing the culture of digital humanities and libraries in Universities and Colleges will help to build an impact digital media competency or application as part of media literacy orientation. This becomes imperative as e-books/libraries continually strengthen their unique advantages of accessibility, flexibility, search-ability, and convenience (SciVerse 2009:6). The new generation of young writers that often emerge from these departments will not have to contest with issues of digital migration, themselves being digital denizens and no longer immigrants. A global academic study on the value of content and online books by Elsevier & SMS shows that researchers will use e-books if they have access to them; reminding writers of Darwin's evolution thesis that "it's not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change" (SciVerse, 2009:2).

However, one must understand that developing digital humanities will also involve hardware/software that requires regular power supply, functional computers, big data and local/wide area networking; even as digital media scholars and critics have also begun to bother about digital waste in the ecosystem, and how to manage the impact of this "material output of our digital lives" which spans the whole gamut of "extraction, processing, assembly, distribution, consumption and disposal" (Aslinger & Huntemann, 2014:11; also, <www.digitalhumanities.org>); without excluding the human impact on the teachers/writers who will either have to re-train, upgrade or lose their jobs within ill-funded education systems.

Creative writers on their part must exorcise the morbid suspicion of new media technology, and move from the acquisition of ordinary media literacy to media competence, to become diverse and active gardeners in the digital ecosystem as Dijck would put it (2013:176). This will empower creative writers to not only understand the digital *langue* but also master the intricacies of its passageways and inter-negotiation with the mega-community where the local action would make a global impact with appropriate rewards. Local chapters of Writers' guilds should actively meet and organize writing workshops and critique sessions to upgrade members' writing and critical skills. This might also be another way of encouraging reading culture and discouraging media 'aliteracy' in the Global South; even as writers themselves must recognize the convergence of media and the necessity for digital migration, even if only to access the stream of global literary culture.

Whereas digitization impacts on the creative industry in a technological manner, local writers' guilds and policymakers for creative culture should strive to balance the notion of "indigenizing" literature towards local developmental needs since media "content must be appropriate to the audience [without which] development will not occur" (Rogers in Williams,

1987:210); and making it easier for writers to access travel grants to writing workshops to enable local writers occasionally connect with the global literary community outside virtual connectivity. The cultural content of localizing literary products may not necessarily take away the notion of a "national literature" or "world literature" as feared (Eghagha, 2004:51) because literature must have local/humanistic relevance to thrive in any economic sense.

Furthermore, local captains of industry and political elite should imbibe the global culture of investing in the development of literary culture by going beyond quick-returns investment in advertising media and popular actuality programmes. They can also establish research and writing grants, juicy endowments and literary awards, all of which will encourage the evolution of local benchmarks for artistic excellence which will in time also begin to influence other entrenched national artistic benchmarks that have tended to exclude the "other" writers especially from Africa and the Global South. In an era of hyper-capitalism, where intangible cultural goods are receiving more attention than old modernist notions of gross material wealth and acquisitions, it will benefit Nigerian capitalists and political-money moguls to join the global shift towards investment in post-industrial culture which Jeremy Rifkin describes as the "age of access"; wherein, "the struggle between culture and commerce is a struggle between intrinsic and utility values"; and remembering that it's "only by making a local culture a coherent, self-aware political force will we be able to establish its critical role in the scheme of human society" (2000:257). This will also give voice to local creative participants to contribute to the regional/global emergence of "innovative policies that encourage creativity through deliberative cultural politics that are inclusive and emancipatory" (Singh, 2011:146). The choices we make today in different capacities as cultural creators/writers, producers, consumers, teachers or policymakers, especially for global literary culture, may determine our common future and survival of our national/global culture, because the latter is fast becoming the indisputable "crude oil" of our global post-industrial, neo-liberal economy.

Notes

[1]This work partly inspired by Jean & John Comaroff's *Theory from the South: or, how Euro-America is evolving Toward Africa;* also examines the disruption of traditional geographies, cores and peripheries; and stresses the need to relocate southwards and eastwards in order to understand other productive modes as a way of making sense of contemporary global transformations.

[2]In a personal communication, Paul Ugor's comments in part about the initial pan-African design of this project which, according to him, "calls our attention to this generational change [which] has something to do with larger/global technological and scientific shifts linked to the ever-growing forces of ruthless financial capitalism that continue to heap material resources on one part of the world, the north, leaving the so-called developing south in chronic economic, cultural, and … intellectual decline. [This study…] throws up important questions about what digitization might mean for intellectual work in Africa, a topic rarely broached in the ongoing debates about media globalization in Africa" (October 23rd, 2015).

[3]Some of these publishers and their operational locations include: Minson, Port-Harcourt; McMillan, London; Words, Rhyme & Rhythm, Online; New Nigeria Press Supplement; Treasure Books, Yenagoa; Sienne Books, Uyo; Sevhage Publishers, Makurdi; Chapuga Publishers, Benue; Gossamer Publishers, Makurdi; NPS, Ibadan; Imlag Publishers, Kwara;

Oscar Publishing Co. & Izu Prints; Kunlaj Publishers, Ibadan; Divine Publishers, Benue; Roselight Publishers; Euneeks & Associates, Kaduna; Kraft Books, Ibadan; Isis Communication & Windmill Book Company, Lagos; Stone Touch Communications; NDA Kaduna Press; Okson; Cape Publishers, Owerri; JAS Publishers, Anyigba; Noble Publishers, Onitsha; and, Classic Books, Minna. Others are Blissbay Publishers, Lagos; Liberty Press, Bauchi; Innerock, Ebonyi; Nnamndi Press, Imo; Xlibris, USA?; Cel-Bez Publisher; Minarib Accord Ltd, Abuja; Pacific, Obosi; Mareshah Ltd, Lagos; Caltop Publishing, Ibadan; Dignity Publishing Ltd, Owerri; Cheery Brain, Owerri; and, ROM Publishers, Lagos. Not many of them are publishers in the real sense of the word.

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