

Technological Innovation and Development of the Publishing Industry: The Challenging Digital Transformation of Publishing Houses in Cameroon

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Abstract

In the digital age, performance-oriented publishing houses utilize digital tools to optimize their editorial activities. This optimization affects both editorial practices and products in terms of content and form. These products, now accessible through various media, bring significant changes, while the editorial function undergoes a metamorphosis due to digital exposure. In Cameroon, the book sector is predominantly focused on school textbooks, a legacy from the colonial period. This study investigates the impact of technological innovation on Cameroonian publishing by examining the processes of content selection, legitimization, and dissemination in the digital age. Using the sociology of technology as a framework, we hypothesize an interrelationship between the dominance of textbook publishing and the delayed digital transformation of publishing houses in Cameroon. To explore this hypothesis, we conducted direct observations, interviews with key industry stakeholders, and an extensive analysis of digital adoption metrics within the publishing sector. Our research reveals that the historical focus on educational publishing has created structural and cultural barriers to embracing digital innovations. Moreover, limited infrastructure and a lack of digital literacy among publishing professionals further hinder the transition. Despite these challenges, there are emerging opportunities for digital transformation, particularly in diversifying content and expanding access through digital platforms. Our findings indicate that a strategic shift towards embracing digital tools and improving infrastructure could significantly enhance the efficiency and reach of Cameroonian publishing houses. By addressing the specific challenges identified in our study, the industry can leverage digital technolo-

gies to foster a more inclusive, dynamic, and resilient publishing environment. This study provides a detailed examination of the specificities of digital transformation in Cameroonian publishing, offering insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders aiming to promote technological innovation in the sector.

Keywords

Editorial Practices, Book Publishing in Cameroon, Digitization, Digitalization, Digital Transformation

1. Introduction

Digital technology, now an integral part of our lives, transforms practices and their meanings [1]. Across various fields, it establishes new paradigms, notably in book publishing, which is increasingly influenced and restructured by digital advancements. The shift from an economy of scarcity to one of information overabundance is particularly significant. The scarcity economy once highlighted the exclusivity of books as the premier medium for information transmission, where rarity enhanced value. Conversely, overabundance arises from the democratization of information access, now available ubiquitously through various media, transforming the normative dimension of communication in cultural industries [2]. This transition facilitates a shift in publishing practices: remodelling knowledge production processes, content validation, and knowledge dissemination.

Understanding communication as a process of sharing and interaction necessitates examining the shared content. Thus, it is crucial to explore how publishing, as a cultural mediation practice, organizes information and communication processes transformed by information and communication technologies. Book publishing involves the reproduction, publication, and commercial dissemination of printed works under a guarantee label, engaging a network of actors who define its scope. These actors—authors, publishers, manufacturers, distributors, booksellers, and readers—collaborate in a process known as the “graphic chain.” This chain encompasses all participants and functions involved in the conception, production, and distribution/mediation of intellectual works. Positioned at both ends of this chain, publishers invigorate it through editorial projects, resulting in the creation of books as information carriers, cultural vehicles, and communication mediums.

In the digital age, editorial functions face numerous constraints: products, markets, and formats are in constant evolution (Chartier, 2009) [3]. While the primary concern of integrating digital technology into publishing practices is to make information accessible and sustainable, the advent of the internet and the web significantly advances the democratization of knowledge. Content is increasingly digitized and widely available through the internet (Epron & Vitali-Rosati,

2018) [4]. Consequently, content previously controlled and curated by publishing professionals now proliferates from various sources, blurring the roles of authors and publishers. The publishing world is shaken, disrupted, even revolutionized: the long-coveted audience is more accessible than ever, but by whom and at what cost?

In many African countries, particularly Cameroon, where the function of books is neither clearly defined nor stabilized, the prevailing logic prioritizes school textbooks. Despite some scientific initiatives assessing the integration of digital publishing practices on the African continent, few have examined the impact of digital transformation on editorial functions. The picture often painted is of a population resistant to change, lacking infrastructure suited to this new configuration, which seems paradoxical given the rapid digital penetration in other cultural industries (audiovisual, cinema, music, etc.). Moreover, if innovation is expected to provide solutions to previously identified problems, its widespread adoption would be logical. What explains the low integration of digital technology in the Cameroonian publishing environment? Especially since digital technology promises production based on readers' needs, facilitates the dissemination and distribution of editorial works, promotes a better reading culture, and fosters digital literacy conducive to the emergence of publishing initiatives.

This research paper aims to highlight the specificities of Cameroon that should be considered when studying the digital transformation of publishing houses. It begins with a preliminary question: how can we conceptualize the digital transformation of Cameroonian publishing houses primarily dedicated to school textbooks? Using the sociology of technology, the hypothesis posits an interrelationship between the dominance of textbook publishing and a delay in integrating digital transformation principles and practices in this field. This analysis is structured around conceptual clarification, an overview of traditional Cameroonian publishing and its specificities, an assessment of the digital transformation of publishing houses, and the challenges raised by this new paradigm.

1.1. Conceptual Clarifications

Any reasoning requires clarification to avoid scientific noise. In this case, it is essential to explicate the concepts of digital transformation and publishing house.

1.1.1. Digital Transformation

José Allouche and Romain Zerbib (2020) [5] define digital transformation as the process that leads a company to integrate digital technologies into all its activities to enhance its performance. It is a data-centered approach that relies significantly on the use of a set of more or less sophisticated algorithms. The ultimate goal is to attract new prospects, facilitate their conversion into clients, and ensure their loyalty through optimal and enhanced exploitation of the company's various functions (marketing, supply chain, finance, HR, etc.). A successful

transformation is expected to guarantee a coherent and ‘intelligent’ organization capable of preventing customer attrition, anticipating prospect expectations, and developing a dedicated offer.

Peter C. Verhoef *et al.* [6] identify three external drivers of digital transformation: digital technology, digital competition, and digital consumer behavior. Thus, digital transition involves three phases: digitization, digitalization, and digital transformation. To achieve this, the digital transformation process requires digital resources, an organizational structure, a growth strategy, evaluations, and objectives. In this study, we will analyze the digitization, digitalization, and digital transformation of publishing houses and their impact on editorial practices dedicated to publishing book products.

1.1.2. Publishing House

A publishing house is a company or organization dedicated to producing and disseminating intellectual works, primarily books. According to La Compagnie Littéraire [7], a publishing house is somewhat at the crossroads of tomorrow’s literary releases. A discreet intermediary between the author and the reader, faced with the exponential increase of new individuals trying their hand at writing, they are forced to select their future releases among an ever-growing competition... As such, publishing houses can be considered as structures that transmit texts and uncover talents, seeking to publish manuscripts that best fit their editorial line as well as the demands of readers, who are themselves increasingly solicited. Therefore, it is within the publishing house that the editorial activity takes place. Beyond editorial activity and depending on its size, a publishing house may employ various actors in the graphic chain, from creation to production to dissemination/distribution. Its digital transformation would thus require consideration of its different components and especially the impacts on its mission.

1.2. Theoretical Frame Work

Our study explores the digital transformation of publishing houses in Cameroon, focusing on the dominance of textbook publishing and its impact on the adoption of digital practices. Grounded in the sociology of technology, the framework examines the interplay between technological innovation and social structures within the publishing industry. The sociology of technology investigates how societal factors and technological advancements influence each other, providing a lens to understand the integration of digital tools into publishing practices and their reshaping effects. Key concepts from the sociology of technology include the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) and Technological Determinism. Initiated by Wiebe E. Bijker (1989) [8], SCOT through its recent approaches like that of posits that technology development is not autonomous but shaped by social forces. In Cameroonian publishing, the predominance of textbook publishing is a significant social force influencing digital transformation. Technological Determinism explores how technology drives societal changes, helping analyze

how digital tools can transform editorial practices and content dissemination. Historically, books were rare and highly valued (economy of scarcity), but the digital age has transitioned to an abundance of information, changing the value and accessibility of books. This shift affects how publishing houses operate and their content dissemination strategies. Publishing, as a form of cultural mediation, organizes and validates knowledge. Digital transformation impacts this mediation process, influencing content selection, legitimization, and sharing.

The study hypothesizes that the dominance of textbook publishing in Cameroon has delayed the digital transformation of the publishing industry. This hypothesis considers the historical context of colonial-era education systems, limited access to digital infrastructure and resources, and cultural and institutional resistance to changing established practices, especially in an industry dominated by educational publishing. Analytical dimensions include content selection and validation, examining how digital tools influence editorial decisions through algorithms, data analytics, and user feedback. Dissemination and accessibility analyze the impact of digital platforms on content distribution, involving e-books, online libraries, and digital marketing strategies. Economic and social implications assess the broader impacts of digital transformation, including potential increased readership, changes in revenue models, and effects on literacy and education. This theoretical framework provides a structured approach to understanding the digital transformation of publishing houses in Cameroon. Content selection and validation are influenced by digital tools like algorithms and data analytics, which are shaped by social forces and reshape editorial decisions (Fauchié, 2017) [9]. Dissemination and accessibility are examined through the impact of digital platforms on content distribution, reflecting how new technologies drive changes in traditional methods. Economic and social implications are assessed to understand the broader impacts of digital transformation, including changes in revenue models and literacy rates. It also analyzes how digital transformation impacts publishing as a form of cultural mediation. Digital tools democratize content creation and dissemination, challenging traditional gatekeeping roles and reshaping the organization and validation of knowledge (Doueihi, 2010) [10]. The transition from an economy of scarcity (print era) to an abundance of information (digital age) changes the value and accessibility of books, influencing how knowledge is curated and disseminated. This structured approach helps uncover barriers to digital integration and supports the development of strategies to facilitate digital adoption in Cameroonian publishing. By applying the sociology of technology, the study aims to uncover the complex interplay between technological advancements and entrenched practices within the industry, particularly the dominance of textbook publishing.

2. Literature Review

This literature review examines the existing research on the impact of digital tools on the publishing industry, with a specific focus on the Cameroonian book

sector. Globally, the shift towards digital publishing has been well-documented. The unique challenges and opportunities presented by technological innovations in this region are explored, alongside the historical and cultural factors that have shaped the current state of the industry.

2.1. From Traditional Publishing to Digital Transition in Cameroon

2.1.1. The Emergence of Publishing in Cameroon

For Mintza-Ze (1979) [11], like most African countries, Cameroon inherited the culture of writing through the influence of civilization. The history of publishing in Cameroon can be divided into several periods: pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial. During the pre-colonial period, aside from the Bamoun language project, it was the early missionaries who introduced a culture of writing to the indigenous populations. The first work exposed to them was the Bible, translated into local languages, edited, and printed abroad. This initiated mechanisms for transmitting the evangelical message, teaching indigenous peoples to read in their native languages such as Bulu, Duala, Ewondo, and others. These efforts laid the foundation for the first formalized education systems, initially focusing on evangelization rather than developing a robust local publishing industry.

The colonial period marked the formal introduction of publishing within Cameroon. Although it did not involve establishing local publishing houses, local printing presses were set up, such as Harsley Memorial Press and the Protestant Printing Press for the Paris Mission, to produce translated foreign works in local languages. The colonial education system, driven by the need for a local workforce and formalized through dedicated institutions, centered the book around schooling. This educational focus persists, with textbooks still dominating the market.

The post-colonial era saw the establishment of the first francophone publishing house in Africa, the Centre of Evangelical Literature (CLE) in Cameroon, originating from a 1962 initiative in Kampala. CLE aimed to foster African literature, publishing works by both African and foreign authors and becoming a key player in francophone literature for many years. The 1990 declaration of freedom of expression spurred the creation of several private publishing houses, enriching the publishing landscape, particularly in Yaoundé, Limbe, Bamenda, and Douala.

To formally understand the emergence of publishing in Cameroon, one must consider the post-colonial period. However, this perspective overlooks the significant historical heritage shaping the structural peculiarities of Cameroonian publishing. Thus, examining the advent of books and reading in Cameroon is essential to understanding its publishing industry. Unlike the 17th-century European rise in publishing due to printing innovations, Africa's involvement began in the 19th century. The history of African and Cameroonian publishing reflects embryonic patterns still influencing the sector today (Zogo, 1996) [12]. Textbooks remain predominant, with other genres struggling due to unstable economic models.

2.1.2. Traditional Publishing and the Digital Realm

Octavio Kulesz (2011) [13], in a study by the Alliance of Independent Publishers, explores the publishing landscape in developing countries within the digital context. The study questions whether southern countries can develop their own publishing models independent of northern paradigms and what policies could support traditional publishers through digital transformation. Based on an economic adaptation theory that an adaptation is efficient if its benefits exceed its costs, Kulesz hypothesizes that incorporating digital technologies in traditional publishing in developing countries could address many issues in the sector. Using questionnaires, observations, and semi-structured interviews, he finds northern digital publishing models unsuitable for the south. Given traditional publishing practices and an underdeveloped editorial market, new technologies offer more opportunities for dissemination. To effectively harness digital opportunities, southern publishers must create models tailored to their communities' needs. Kulesz's study highlights the challenges of adopting northern models and suggests that digital infrastructure is not the primary barrier, as evidenced by the rapid growth of other digital sectors in these regions.

2.1.3. Specificities of the Cameroonian Publishing Landscape

Understanding Cameroonian publishing involves re-examining its origins. CLE remained the sole publishing house in the region for many years and is one of the few general publishing houses to survive despite competition. However, its inability to significantly expand its catalog limited its capacity to publish all noteworthy authors, particularly under the traditional publishing model. According to Raphael Thierry (2013) [14], traditional publishing aims to catalyze literary creation by allowing potential authors to present their work to the world, fostering a diverse literary environment. Unfortunately, many publishing houses rely on a small group of in-house authors, limiting opportunities for new talents. The rise of self-publishing partly results from this exclusivity. Self-publishing has grown alongside the printing industry, with foreign and later local entrepreneurs investing in this potential-rich economic environment. Imprimatur services expanded beyond national presses, leading to the establishment of SOPECAM and other local printers.

Although originally aimed at facilitating the evangelist mission, these printing facilities also serve literary authors, particularly those not favored by existing publishers. Self-publishing becomes the go-to option for authors who can fund the production and distribution of their works. Unlike publishing houses, printers only provide the mechanical production of books, leaving other publishing tasks to the authors. This strategy has led to the "clochardization" of authors, creating a jungle of varied-quality works. By bypassing editorial contributions, self-published authors develop closer distribution and dissemination mechanisms for their target audiences. While traditional publishers cater mainly to urban areas, self-published works reach wider audiences, subtly undermining the role of editors in the book production chain. This practice has fundamentally impacted

the perception and understanding of the editorial function and its implications.

To grow, many printers now offer more comprehensive services, including editorial support. Consequently, alongside self-publishing, author-pays publishing has emerged, accessible only to financially capable authors. This situation marginalizes less affluent potential authors, posing a threat to spontaneous literary creation. Overall, traditional publishing, author-pays publishing, and self-publishing share a common trait: sectarianism. Limited opportunities for new talents arise from relational networks and financial resources. While the genius of published authors is not in question, the selection mechanisms require scrutiny to enhance content selection, intrinsically linked to the editorial function. This approach is essential to understanding the complex nature of the Cameroonian publishing ecosystem.

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to thoroughly investigate the digital transformation of publishing houses in Cameroon. This approach is structured into multiple phases, including data collection through direct observation, interviews, and document analysis. Utilizing a combination of these methods ensures a comprehensive understanding of the current state and challenges associated with the digital shift within the Cameroonian publishing industry.

Direct observation was conducted in selected publishing houses to capture real-time data on their operational processes and the challenges they face during digital integration. Observations focused on workflow patterns, the use of digital tools, interactions among staff, and the overall environment within these publishing houses. This method provided firsthand insights into the practicalities of digital transformation, offering a ground-level view of the changes and adaptations taking place. Interviews were carried out with key stakeholders in the publishing industry, including publishers, authors, editors, and IT specialists. These semi-structured interviews aimed to gather in-depth qualitative data regarding their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards digital transformation. The interviews explored various topics such as the current use of digital tools in editorial processes, perceived benefits and challenges of digital transformation, impacts on content selection, validation, dissemination, and the strategies employed to overcome digital integration obstacles. This rich qualitative data provided a nuanced understanding of the subjective experiences and opinions of those directly involved in the industry. Document analysis involved reviewing relevant documents such as policy papers, industry reports, and historical records. This analysis aimed to contextualize the findings within the broader landscape of the Cameroonian publishing industry. The review included government policies on digital transformation and education, industry reports on publishing trends and digital adoption, and historical records to understand the evolution of textbook publishing in Cameroon. This method helped to frame the study's findings within existing literature and policy frameworks, providing a historical and regulatory context to the digital transformation

efforts. The study used purposive sampling to select participants and publishing houses representative of the industry's various segments, particularly focusing on those primarily involved in educational publishing. The sample included five major publishing houses known for their prominence in textbook publishing and ten key stakeholders, such as senior editors, digital managers, and policymakers. This targeted sampling ensured that the study captured a range of perspectives and experiences relevant to the research questions.

3.1. Sample Size

To get a well-rounded understanding of digital transformation in Cameroon's publishing industry, we chose a focused yet diverse sample size. We selected five major publishing houses known for their pivotal roles, especially in educational publishing—a sector that has historically dominated the industry. This wasn't a random choice; these publishers are influential and have started integrating digital tools, making them ideal for studying real-time digital transitions. Additionally, we conducted interviews with ten key stakeholders: three publishers, two authors, three editors, and two IT specialists. This selection aimed to cover the full spectrum of the publishing process, from content creation to the technical management of digital tools.

3.2. Selection Criteria

When choosing the five publishing houses, we had specific criteria in mind to ensure we covered a broad spectrum of the industry. We looked for prominence in the industry, so we targeted well-known names that are influential, especially in the educational sector. We also considered how engaged these houses were with digital tools; we needed places that were already experimenting with or using digital technology. This allowed us to observe real-time integration and the hurdles they faced. Additionally, we sought geographical diversity to capture different regional challenges and opportunities in digital adoption across Cameroon.

Interviewees

For the ten key stakeholders, we wanted individuals with significant roles and influence in the industry. The publishers we selected had strategic positions and were involved in decision-making processes regarding digital tools. The authors were those actively creating digital content and could provide insights into how digital platforms are changing content dissemination. The editors were senior professionals who had navigated both traditional and digital editorial practices, giving them a unique perspective on the transformation. Finally, the IT specialists were crucial for their technical insights on implementing and managing digital tools. We also ensured these participants had direct experience with digital transformation efforts and were willing to share their experiences candidly.

3.3. Specific Metrics

3.3.1. Direct Observation Metrics

During our direct observations, we focused on capturing real-time data on the

operational processes and challenges these publishing houses faced with digital integration. We looked at workflow patterns, such as how often and for how long digital tools were used, and identified which tools were in play. We observed how these tools impacted the time taken for editorial tasks compared to traditional methods. We also paid attention to staff interactions, noting instances of collaboration facilitated by digital tools and how communication patterns and efficiency were affected. Observing the physical workspace setup helped us understand how these houses were adapting their environments for digital technologies and any resistance or adaptability among staff.

3.3.2. Interview Metrics

In our interviews, we aimed to gather in-depth qualitative data on various aspects of digital transformation. We asked about the current use of digital tools within their organizations, focusing on the types and functions of these tools and their perceived effectiveness. We delved into the benefits and challenges of digital transformation, capturing detailed accounts of advantages like increased efficiency and broader reach, as well as challenges such as technical issues and resistance to change. We also explored how digital capabilities were influencing content selection, validation, and dissemination, and discussed strategies employed to overcome digital integration obstacles, including training and capacity-building initiatives.

3.3.3. Document Analysis Metrics

For document analysis, we reviewed policy papers, industry reports, and historical records to contextualize our findings within the broader landscape of the Cameroonian publishing industry. We examined government policies related to digital transformation and educational publishing, regulatory frameworks impacting digital adoption, and industry reports on digital tool usage and adoption rates. Historical records provided insights into the evolution of textbook publishing in Cameroon and the historical context of technological adoption, framing our findings within a long-term perspective.

3.4. Transparency and Reproducibility

To ensure our study was both valid and reliable, we implemented several key measures. Triangulating data sources allowed us to integrate information from observations, interviews, and document analysis, which helped us corroborate findings and enhance the study's credibility. We used member checking, sharing preliminary findings with participants to verify accuracy and gather feedback, ensuring the reliability of our conclusions. Detailed documentation of our data collection process, including observation notes, interview transcripts, and analyzed documents, ensured transparency and allowed for reproducibility. Our systematic data analysis involved thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for quantitative data, providing a balanced and comprehensive view of the digital transformation process.

3.5. Analysis and Interpretation

Qualitative data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, which involved transcribing interview recordings and field notes, coding the data to identify common themes and patterns, and grouping these codes into broader themes related to digital transformation, challenges, and strategies. This method allowed for a systematic and detailed examination of the qualitative data, highlighting key issues and trends.

Quantitative data analysis involved the use of descriptive statistics to analyze numerical data gathered from document analysis and any quantitative aspects of the observations. This included quantifying the extent of digital tool usage in publishing houses and measuring the frequency of digital practices in editorial processes. The combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses provided a balanced and comprehensive view of the digital transformation process.

4. Results and Discussion

The research findings indicate that the digital penetration within the Cameroonian publishing sector is significantly lagging compared to other cultural industries like audiovisual, cinema, and music. Despite the rapid adoption of digital technologies in these areas, the publishing sector remains predominantly traditional. This disparity highlights a critical gap in the digital transformation of Cameroonian publishing houses. These results are obtained through blending the historical perspective and a situational analysis of publishing in Cameroon.

4.1. State of Digital Transformation of Publishing Houses in Cameroon

Numerous studies highlight a time lag in the diffusion of technological innovations in developing economies. As a Southern country, Cameroon presents a unique case for studying the digital transformation of publishing houses. Without a directory of Cameroonian publishers, the online presence of publishing houses serves as an initial filter, though it has received little attention due to the context and nature of the data to be collected.

The empirical dimension of this research was constructed around the direct observation of three main stages of digital transformation: digitization, digitalization, and digital transformation. The observation grid is primarily based on the uses and applications of technical tools and their effect on human behavior. The collected data were analyzed using a framework encompassing the three stages of digital transformation, involving digital resources, organizational structure, and growth strategy. Additionally, a degree of flexibility was observed to account for the specificities of the Cameroonian environment. In this regard, considering both analog and digital aspects helps to elucidate a set of findings specific to Cameroonian publishing. The result shows the scarcity of publishing houses in Cameroon that have successfully navigated all three stages. More strikingly, the majority of these enterprises only consider the first stage in their transition. This sec-

tion is dedicated to presenting the research results through the lens of digitization, digitalization, and digital transformation of schoolbook publishing houses in Cameroon and **Table 1** summarizes the digital transformation stages as approached in this study.

Table 1. Digital transformation stages.

Digital transformation		
Digitization	Digitalization	Digital transformation
Digital resources	Digital resources	Digital resources
Organizational structure	Organizational structure	Organizational structure
Growth strategy	Growth strategy	Growth strategy

Source: author.

Digitization and Digitalization

Digitization involves converting analog media into digital formats. As a process of digital transformation, digitization aims to facilitate the processing and management of information. Beyond converting analog files such as text, photos, sound, and images into digital files (binary code), digitization also involves adapting systems and processes to digital requirements. These digital requirements encompass digital tools and their uses. In contrast, digitalization aims to transform analog processes into digital ones. In the context of a publishing house, elements primarily considered are from the graphic chain (manuscript acquisition, manuscript evaluation, manuscript editing, book production, book distribution, and dissemination).

1) Digital Resources

Digitization and digitalization within publishing houses require a set of digital resources. Calls for manuscripts are increasingly conducted online through digital forms communicated via various media and social networks. Whether commissioned or spontaneous, manuscripts are transmitted electronically via email or online submission forms. Digitized manuscripts are received and stored in a database, with an automatic manuscript deposit confirmation sent to the author. However, very few publishing houses utilize this process; the majority still receive manuscripts in physical form. Alongside the physical manuscript, a USB drive containing the digital version is often submitted. The manuscript deposit confirmation is manually filled out and handed to the responsible person immediately, even if it's not the author. With manuscript calls becoming rarer, publishing houses primarily seek authors with established reputations.

Tools used for manuscript evaluation and editing include plagiarism detection software, and in the most common scenario, manuscripts are photocopied or printed for evaluation, proofreading, and correction using conventional correction marks or internally referenced annotations. Text editing and layout software are employed to produce the final printable file. Cost estimates for production are created using cost simulators or spreadsheets, and in the latter case,

manual calculations are the norm. Post-production, physical terrestrial networks are utilized for the distribution of physical products (books). Digitally termed products (books) are often scanned but not remediated. These initiatives mainly stem from piracy and counterfeiting strategies.

In the textbook domain, Cameroonian publishers predominantly exclude the possibility of an electronic version. This is due to their perception of digital convergence as an avenue to all the book industry's woes, such as plagiarism, piracy, and counterfeiting. Publishers fear that digitizing textbooks will facilitate plagiarism. Indeed, an electronic version of a textbook is much easier to copy and modify than a paper version. Once a document is digitized, it becomes vulnerable to malicious acts like unauthorized content copying, which can be redistributed without acknowledgment or compensation to the original author. This jeopardizes both the intellectual and financial integrity of authors and publishers who depend on textbook sales to support their business.

Piracy is another major concern. Electronic versions of textbooks can be illegally pirated and distributed on a much larger scale than printed versions. Publishers believe this could lead to significant revenue loss, making it difficult, if not impossible, to recover production and distribution costs. The ease with which digital files can be shared on unauthorized online platforms exacerbates this threat, reducing economic incentives for authors and publishers to produce new high-quality educational content. Counterfeiting is also perceived as an increased risk with electronic textbooks. Counterfeiters can create nearly perfect copies of digital textbooks, distribute them at low prices, or even for free, thus depriving legitimate publishers of their revenue. Furthermore, the quality and accuracy of counterfeit textbooks are often compromised, which can harm students' educational experiences and the reputations of legitimate publishers.

Beyond these specific concerns, Cameroonian publishers are also aware of the technological and logistical challenges related to distributing digital textbooks. In many regions of Cameroon, internet access is limited or unreliable, making it difficult to distribute and use electronic textbooks. Moreover, the penetration of electronic devices such as tablets and laptops is still low, especially in rural areas, which would limit the potential impact of digital textbook versions. There is also a cultural dimension to consider. Transitioning to digital textbooks requires a significant shift in teaching practices and acceptance of digital technologies in the educational process. Teachers and students need to be trained in using electronic textbooks, and there may be resistance to change from those more comfortable with traditional paper-based teaching methods.

While digital textbooks offer potential advantages in terms of cost, accessibility, and easy updates, Cameroonian publishers are hesitant to adopt this technology due to risks of plagiarism, piracy, and counterfeiting, as well as associated technological, logistical, and cultural challenges. These concerns must be addressed holistically for digital textbook digitization to become a viable and beneficial option for the Cameroonian educational system.

2) Organizational Structure

In the process of digitizing textbooks, it is common for only the editorial secretary, the editorial manager, and the graphic designer to be involved. While this distribution of roles may seem restrictive, it is justified by the nature of the work and the specific skills required at each stage of digital production.

The editorial secretary plays a crucial role from the outset of the process. As the first person to receive the manuscript, they act as an interface between authors and the publishing house. The editorial secretary conducts an initial check to ensure the manuscript is complete and meets the publisher's submission guidelines. This role as guardian of the manuscript is essential as it filters out errors or omissions before the document proceeds to the next stage.

The editorial manager, on the other hand, is responsible for evaluating and editing the manuscript. This stage is fundamental as it determines the quality of the final content. The editorial manager reviews the manuscript, corrects errors, adjusts the style, and ensures the content is coherent and suitable for the target audience. This process may involve back-and-forth communication with the author to clarify points, rewrite sections, or incorporate changes. The depth of this revision requires particular expertise in content, pedagogy, and often a deep understanding of the subject matter covered in the textbook.

The graphic designer comes into play once the manuscript has been edited and approved by the editorial manager. Using text processing and layout software, the graphic designer transforms the manuscript into a visually appealing and easy-to-read document. This includes adding graphics, illustrations, tables, and any other visual elements necessary to complement the text. Proper formatting is crucial as it directly influences reader engagement and understanding. The graphic designer must not only have technical skills but also a developed aesthetic sense to balance visual and textual elements.

Once the document is ready, the role of the business manager becomes central. They are responsible for the distribution and dissemination of the digitized textbook. The business manager develops strategies to market the product, identifies the most effective distribution channels, and ensures the textbook reaches its target audience. They may also manage copyrights and licenses to protect content against unauthorized use. Digital distribution often requires knowledge of online platforms, digital marketing practices, and consumer preferences. However, concentrating tasks among a limited number of individuals raises certain questions and challenges. For example, involving only a few people in digitization can limit innovation and diversity of ideas. Including additional roles such as digital pedagogy specialists, cybersecurity experts, or market analysts could enrich the process and increase the efficiency and security of digitized textbooks. Moreover, this concentration can lead to workload overload for those involved, especially if they have to juggle multiple projects simultaneously. Furthermore, continuous training of personnel involved is essential to keep pace with technological advancements and new industry practices. Text processing and layout software are constantly evolving, as are digital marketing techniques and distribution platforms. Regular training would enable teams to stay updated

and continuously improve the quality of digital textbooks.

While the editorial secretary, editorial manager, and graphic designer are the main actors in the textbook digitization process, involving a broader range of professionals could enhance this process. Textbook digitization should not only be seen as adapting paper content to digital format but as an opportunity to enrich the educational experience through smart use of digital technologies. For this, a collaborative and multidisciplinary approach is necessary to overcome challenges and maximize the benefits of digitization.

3) Growth Strategy

The growth strategy for the digitization process within publishing houses is based on two main pillars: empowering employees and acquiring sophisticated software. These elements are essential for a publishing house to effectively engage in digital transformation. Instead of outsourcing a set of services—which often leads to additional costs—these companies choose to enhance the skills of their employees or recruit versatile profiles, particularly focused on digital expertise.

The development of internal skills is a crucial aspect of this strategy. Publishing houses invest in continuous training for their employees to master the tools and technologies necessary for digitizing content. This includes training on word processing software, layout tools, and digital distribution platforms. By training their employees, publishing houses ensure not only that they can use the tools effectively but also that they can adapt and optimize processes according to the specific needs of the company. Simultaneously, recruiting new talents with diversified digital skills is also a priority. Publishing houses seek individuals with expertise in IT, graphic design, digital project management, and digital marketing. These versatile profiles help create synergy within the company, thus facilitating the implementation and management of digitization projects. Skill hybridization, where an employee can manage multiple aspects of the digital process, is particularly valued. This approach reduces dependence on external consultants and allows greater flexibility and responsiveness to technological challenges.

Another key component of the digital growth strategy for publishing houses is the acquisition of sophisticated software. These tools are essential to ensure high-quality digitization of content, efficient resource management, and smooth distribution of digital products. However, acquiring such software poses challenges, particularly in terms of costs and legality. High-quality software is often expensive and requires annual or monthly licenses, which can represent a significant financial burden for publishing houses. Due to the high costs and challenges associated with legal software payment processes, some publishing houses opt to use pirated versions. Although common, this practice carries significant risks. Pirated software may contain malware or be less stable, compromising data security and the efficiency of digitization processes. Moreover, the use of pirated software exposes companies to legal action and fines, which can damage

their reputation and credibility.

The combination of employee skills and sophisticated tools defines the growth strategy of publishing houses undergoing digital transformation. Adequate training of employees and the use of high-performance software optimize the production and distribution processes of digital content. This synergy between expertise and technology not only facilitates the adoption of new digital practices but also fosters innovation in content creation and dissemination. Digital transformation poses major challenges but also promising prospects for publishing houses. By integrating digital skills and advanced technologies, these companies can enhance their competitiveness and meet the expectations of an increasingly digital-focused consumer base. However, for this transformation to be sustainable, it is crucial to address issues related to the use of pirated software and find viable means to finance legal tools.

Moreover, the digital growth strategy of publishing houses relies on empowering employees and acquiring sophisticated software. By investing in continuous training and recruiting versatile talents, publishing houses can strengthen their ability to manage internal digitization processes. Concurrently, the acquisition and use of legal and high-performance software are essential to ensure the quality and security of digital content. These two elements enable publishing houses not only to succeed in their digital transformation but also to adapt to market developments and consumer expectations.

4.2. Challenges of a Difficult Digital Transformation of Cameroonian Publishing Houses

Mentioning the digital transformation of Cameroonian publishing houses would be putting the cart before the horse. Indeed, the collected data indicates that this process is largely limited to digitization and rarely to digitalization. Speaking of digital transformation would involve addressing both the remediation of publishing products and the adaptation of the general environment, as well as changing consumption habits. This is far from the reality in Cameroon, where educational textbooks dominate, far removed from digital transition concerns. The few initiatives identified for our study are exclusively focused on children's books and general literature. This section focuses on outlining the legal, structural, and socio-economic challenges posed by the digital paradigm in the Cameroonian publishing universe.

4.2.1. Legal and Structural Challenges

To date, Cameroon lacks a specific legal framework defining and standardizing the publishing function. This legislative gap has significant repercussions on the organization and professionalization of the publishing sector. The first attempts to regulate the publishing function in Cameroon date back to **Law No. 2015/007 of April 20, 2015**, which governs audiovisual activities. This law introduces two relevant definitions: that of the publisher and that of the service publisher. The publisher is defined as a natural or legal person who

owns one or more channels for which they assume editorial responsibility. Furthermore, the service publisher is defined as a legal person, public or private, assuming editorial responsibility for one or more audiovisual services composed of programs it has produced, co-produced, commissioned, or purchased for broadcast. These definitions, although pioneering, focus exclusively on the audiovisual field and omit the book sector. This shows the initial focus of the legislator on mass media dissemination, without considering the specificities of book publishing. Thus, a large part of editorial activities, especially those related to literature and printed publishing, remain outside this legislative framework.

It took **Law No. 2021/024 of December 16, 2021**, on the organization and promotion of the book sector in Cameroon to obtain a first definition of publishing. According to this law, publishing is the “legal presentation and reproduction of the intellectual, literary, or artistic production of an author in printed or digital form.” This definition finally encompasses activities related to the creation and distribution of books, whether in printed or digital format. However, it does not specify the responsibilities, qualifications, or specific practices associated with the profession of publisher.

The absence of a specific regulatory framework for the publishing function has several consequences. In the absence of clear standards, publishing practices vary widely from one publishing house to another, creating heterogeneity in quality standards and production processes. Furthermore, without specific regulations, the pathways to becoming a publisher are not formalized, leading to disparities in terms of skills and qualifications. The lack of precise rules regarding the practice of the profession leaves room for varied interpretations of roles and responsibilities, which can affect the coherence and reliability of the editorial services offered. Moreover, without a legal framework, the official recognition and status of publishers remain unclear, complicating efforts to professionalize and structure the book industry in Cameroon.

To address these shortcomings, it would be necessary to develop a specific regulatory framework for the publishing function. This framework should include a precise description of the roles, responsibilities, and qualifications required to practice this profession, as well as the establishment of quality standards for editorial processes, from manuscript reception to publication and distribution. The implementation of recognized training programs and professional certifications for publishers, as well as regulations to protect the rights of publishers and authors, particularly against plagiarism, counterfeiting, and digital piracy, would also be essential. The lack of a specific legal framework for the publishing function in Cameroon creates a situation of uncertainty and hybridization of professional practices. Existing definitions focus primarily on the audiovisual domain and, more recently, on publishing, without addressing the specific aspects of the book publishing profession. To support the growth and professionalization of the publishing sector, it is essential to develop dedicated legislation that clarifies roles, sets quality stan-

dards, and provides official recognition to professionals in the field.

4.2.2. Socio-Economic Challenges

Numerous initiatives dedicated to promoting books and literary activities contribute to highlighting various publishing houses in Cameroon. Over the past decade, book fairs and exhibitions have been regularly organized throughout the country, providing valuable platforms for promoting publishing houses and their products. These events have become essential gatherings for book professionals, authors, readers, and literature enthusiasts, thereby energizing the entire Cameroonian publishing sector.

Book fairs and exhibitions, such as the International Book Industry Fair of Yaoundé (SIILY) and the International Forum of Book Industry Actors of Yaoundé (FORALY), allow publishers to showcase their works, meet potential business partners, and introduce themselves to the general public. These events create an environment conducive to discovery and exchange, highlighting the diversity and richness of Cameroonian publishing production. Thanks to these events, many publishing houses benefit from dedicated spaces to showcase their activities, expertise, and products and services. This increased visibility contributes gradually to enriching the Cameroonian publishing landscape by making visible publishers who might otherwise struggle to gain recognition. Additionally, these fairs and exhibitions offer networking and collaboration opportunities, allowing publishers to share experiences, discuss common challenges, and explore innovative solutions to cope with market developments. They also facilitate the emergence of new talents and the discovery of promising authors, thereby enriching the country's literary panorama.

Long before the rise of book fairs and exhibitions, there were numerous co-publishing projects between local and foreign publishing houses aimed at promoting local talents. A notable example is the "Terres Solidaires" co-publishing project, which highlighted the works of Cameroonian authors while benefiting from the expertise and distribution network of foreign partners. These collaborations not only helped promote local authors but also contributed to improving the quality standards of Cameroonian publications by integrating advanced editorial practices and production techniques. Co-publishing projects also help reduce production and distribution costs, making books more accessible to the public. By working together, local and foreign publishers can share resources and knowledge, strengthen their capacities, and enhance their competitiveness in the international market. These partnerships are essential for the development of a sustainable and prosperous book industry in Cameroon.

These initiatives, whether national or international, have played a crucial role in diversifying the Cameroonian publishing landscape. By creating opportunities for different types of publications, they have gradually dissociated publishing from educational textbooks, which historically dominated the market. Today, Cameroon boasts a variety of publishing houses, including generalist publishers, publishers of children's literature, publishers of scientific works, publishers of

religious books, and publishers of fiction or non-fiction books. This diversification reflects the evolution of Cameroonian readers' expectations and needs, as well as publishers' willingness to meet these expectations by offering a wider range of content. Generalist publishers publish a variety of works covering multiple genres and themes, while specialized publishers focus on specific niches, such as children's literature, scientific works, or religious books. This specialization allows publishers to position themselves as experts in their respective fields and provide high-quality content that meets the expectations of their target audiences.

Promoting books and literary activities in Cameroon presents several challenges and prospects. On the one hand, it is essential to continue supporting and developing book fairs and exhibitions to make them even more effective platforms for promoting and enhancing the visibility of local publishers. On the other hand, it is important to strengthen co-publishing projects and international partnerships to improve the quality of publications and expand the scope of Cameroonian works globally. It is crucial to implement policies and support measures for the book industry, such as grants, professional training for publishers and authors, and awareness campaigns to encourage reading and book purchasing. The development of infrastructures, such as libraries and bookstores, and access to digital technologies are also key factors in fostering the growth of the publishing sector.

Initiatives dedicated to promoting books and literary activities play a decisive role in highlighting and diversifying publishing houses in Cameroon. Book fairs and exhibitions, as well as co-publishing projects, have created an environment conducive to discovering and promoting local talents, thereby enriching the Cameroonian publishing landscape. To continue on this path, it is essential to support these initiatives and implement policies to support the book industry, promoting a culture of reading and literary creation in Cameroon.

The transformation of publishing houses through digital strategies represents a pivotal shift in the industry, driven by the imperative to adapt to evolving consumer behaviors and technological advancements. Central to the digital growth strategy of publishing houses is the empowerment of employees through skill development. By investing in continuous training programs, publishing houses ensure that their workforce is proficient in essential digital tools and technologies such as word processing software, layout design tools, and digital distribution platforms. This not only enhances operational efficiency but also enables employees to adapt and optimize processes tailored to the specific needs of the publishing house. The emphasis on skill hybridization is particularly noteworthy as it enables employees to manage multiple facets of the digital transformation process, reducing dependency on external consultants and fostering organizational flexibility.

The acquisition of sophisticated software constitutes another cornerstone of the digital growth strategy. These tools are indispensable for achieving high-quality

digitization of content, efficient resource management, and seamless distribution of digital products. However, the implementation of this aspect is fraught with challenges, primarily concerning costs and legality. High-quality software often commands substantial financial investments in terms of upfront costs and recurring licensing fees, posing a significant financial burden for publishing houses, especially those operating within constrained budgets. Moreover, the research highlights an alarming trend where some publishing houses resort to using pirated software due to cost considerations. While this practice may seem cost-effective initially, it exposes organizations to various risks, including malware infections, instability in operations, and legal repercussions such as fines and reputational damage. Addressing these challenges requires a balanced approach that prioritizes compliance with legal standards while exploring sustainable financial models to support the acquisition of legitimate software solutions.

The digital transformation journey for publishing houses is fraught with challenges, yet it also presents promising opportunities. On one hand, integrating digital skills and advanced technologies enhances the competitiveness of publishing houses, enabling them to meet the increasingly digital-centric expectations of consumers. This alignment with consumer preferences for digital content consumption positions publishing houses to capitalize on emerging market trends and expand their reach. On the other hand, achieving sustainable digital transformation necessitates overcoming significant barriers, including financial constraints, technological complexities, and regulatory compliance. For instance, the absence of a comprehensive legal framework governing the editorial function in some regions complicates efforts to standardize practices and ensure uniformity in quality across the industry. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts involving policymakers, industry stakeholders, and regulatory bodies to establish clear guidelines and frameworks that support the digital evolution of publishing houses while safeguarding the rights of creators and consumers.

The digital growth strategy outlined for publishing houses underscores the critical role of empowering employees and acquiring sophisticated software in driving successful digital transformation. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation among employees and investing in robust digital infrastructure, publishing houses can navigate the complexities of digital disruption while leveraging opportunities for growth and sustainability. However, addressing challenges related to software acquisition and compliance remains imperative to ensure the long-term viability and ethical integrity of digital initiatives within the publishing industry. This provides a comprehensive overview of the strategic imperatives and challenges associated with digital transformation in publishing, emphasizing the need for proactive measures to harness its full potential in an increasingly digital landscape.

5. Conclusions and Prospects

All in all, in most Sub-Saharan African countries, local publishing is mainly de-

voted to the production of textbooks and educational materials. This focus on textbooks is largely due to the constant demand for educational books in a context where national educational systems are expanding. However, the plurality of locally spoken languages in Cameroon and their difficult institutionalization weaken efforts towards diversified local publishing. With more than 250 languages spoken, it is challenging to standardize and produce content that meets the diverse linguistic needs of the population. This creates an additional challenge for local publishers, who often have to choose between producing in local languages, French, or English, the two official languages.

Of course, economic factors also pose a major obstacle. The low purchasing power of the majority of the population limits Cameroonians' ability to buy books, whether educational or otherwise. Moreover, the low reading culture, often linked to educational systems that do not sufficiently encourage reading for pleasure, further reduces demand for non-educational books. This difficult economic situation is exacerbated by the lack of infrastructure around the book chain, such as adequate roads, efficient delivery services, and well-stocked stores. These logistical deficiencies make book distribution costly and difficult, thereby limiting access for both rural and urban populations to available books.

When considering the contribution of information access in Africa to improving publishing in the digital age, many authors assert that access to information through digital means will increase in the medium term. They foresee a trajectory similar to that observed in the West, where early technology adopters and the middle class were the main users at the beginning of the digital transition. However, this premise raises many questions given the specificities of the Cameroonian publishing industry. The country's digital infrastructure is still developing, and access to cutting-edge technologies remains limited for much of the population. Additionally, the costs associated with equipment and internet connections remain prohibitive for many.

Thus, printed materials will continue to coexist with digital media, at least in the medium term, and will be provided by a range of suppliers, including NGOs and international and local publishers. This coexistence is crucial to ensure maximum coverage and to meet the diverse needs and preferences of readers. Whether digital content access grows or not, libraries remain the most effective model for optimizing the number of users per book. Libraries, whether small and community-based in rural areas or large and municipal in urban areas, must remain at the heart of book access for millions of Africans. They play an essential role in providing access to information at minimal cost to users, and their support must be a priority.

To enhance the experience of readers, whether using an e-book or a printed book, it is essential to support libraries, librarians, teachers, parents, and other readers. This includes not only funding for infrastructure and book collections but also training staff to effectively assist users in discovering and using available resources. An inclusive and collaborative approach can greatly enrich the culture of reading and the desire for lifelong learning.

Indeed, despite highlighting the benefits of digital media for the growth of the book industry, many publishing houses are slow to follow suit. This reluctance can be attributed to various factors, including perceived opacity of digital processes, lack of mastery of digital techniques, and increased risks in the digital realm such as piracy and counterfeiting. Digital transformation represents a major and complex change that requires significant investments in time, training, and financial resources. Many publishing houses, often small with limited resources, may hesitate to take these risks without adequate support.

In light of all this, it is urgent to support the legal, political, structural, and socio-economic aspects of digital transformation in publishing houses in Cameroon. A clear and protective legal framework must be established to regulate digital practices and protect the rights of publishers and authors. Incentive policies, such as subsidies and tax credits for digital investments, can encourage publishers to adopt modern technologies. Structurally, it is essential to develop the necessary infrastructure to support a digital book industry, including secure distribution platforms and reliable delivery networks. Finally, from a socio-economic perspective, it is crucial to raise awareness and train stakeholders in the book chain, as well as the general public, about the benefits and uses of digital technologies. This transformation will ensure the presence of Cameroonian cultural industries at the crossroads of giving and receiving, thereby ensuring their competitiveness and relevance in an increasingly connected world.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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