

# USE AND USE PATTERN OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BOOK NUMBER (ISBN) AND INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBER (ISSN) IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

International Standard Book and Serials Numbers are unique. Not all Nigeriana bear either number correctly.

The study aimed at examining the use and use pattern of each number on Nigeriana and proposing ways of ensuring their correct application. Opinion of 150 randomly selected publishers was surveyed through questionnaire and interview. 800 monographs and 200 serials were examined. Mode and percentages were computed.

National Library controlled application of the numbers. Most publishers applied valid numbers correctly on title page and front cover for ISBN and ISSN respectively. Few printers erroneously applied them. Promotion was, by advertisements and workshops by National Library. National Agency should intensify its technical advice and assistance while publishers should make their publications and invalid numbers known.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background Information:

International Standard Book Number (ISBN) is a universal system of numbering books for purpose of their identification and easy retrieval. Each set of numbers is unique to a specific publication and made up of 10 digits that are divided into 4 parts of variable length separated by a hyphen or space and preceded by ISBN. The 4 parts from left are:

- (i) Group identifier - a prefix and identifies the national, geographic, language or any other grouping in which the book is published. 978 is assigned for Nigeria.
- (ii) Publisher identifier - identifies a particular publisher within the group.



- (iii) Title identifier - identifies a specific title or addition of a title from a publisher.
- (iv) Check digit - a single digit that provides for computer an automatic check on the correctness of ISBN.

A publisher, for the purpose of ISBN administration, is defined as any person, company, partnership, association, group or body of any kind whatsoever, issuing and publishing books and pamphlets. The location on books of ISBN, its scope and formats are so specific to avoid ambiguity in its application.

Professor Foster of the London School of Economics, in May 1966, reported clearly the need for the introduction of a standard numbering system into the book trade and the benefits that accrue to all parties there from. Thereafter, the British scheme was worked out in 1967. In September 1968, a meeting was held in London to include United States, U.K., Ireland etc to work out an international application for the numbering system. The proposals were considered and accepted at a plenary session of the International Standard Organisation (ISO) in Stockholm, and there emerged the ISO Recommendation setting out the principles and procedures for the International Standard Book Numbering. In 1974, an ISBN National Agency in Nigeria was set up at the National Library of Nigeria charged with the responsibility of allocating numbers to the publishers. Similarly, a Nigerian National Serials Data Centre (NNSDC) was also set up in the National Library of Nigeria for the issuance of ISSNs.

**1.2 Statement of Research Problem:** In its capacity as a Bibliographic centre, the National Library of Nigeria set up bodies for the administration of ISBN/ISSN, made advertisements in the dailies to provide information on the numbering system and made contacts with the Nigerian Publishers Association. As a result, many publishers had applied for and had been assigned ISBN depending on their declared publishing output. Despite these, an examination of Nigerian publications revealed non-application of ISBN on some of them. When some publications carry the number, the application did not conform with the laid down guidelines for the application. The non-use or non-conformity with the guidelines undermine the use of the standard numbers in identifying specific publications and their retrieval.

### **1.3 Objectives:**

**General Objectives:** To investigate the degree and manner of use of ISBN/ISSN by Nigerian Publishers and propose how to promote and improve the use of the numbering system among the publishers.



Specific Objectives: To identify:

- (i) the various location of ISBN/ISSN on Nigeriana;
- (ii) Identify the mode of advertisements by the National Agency;
- (iii) Establish correctness and validity or otherwise of ISBNs/ISSNs found on Nigeriana;
- (iv) Suggest ways to promote and improve on the use of the numbers.

#### **1.4 Justification for the study:**

For growth of knowledge to be meaningful to mankind, whatever is published should be made accessible and available to its prospective users with ease. In order to facilitate retrieval of such work for consumption, it should be identifiable in any part of the world. This is made possible universally by the ISBN or ISSN which is specific to the publication, since no two publications bear the same ISBN/ISSN.

Furthermore, ensuring the correct use and application of correct and valid ISBN/ISSN will promote the quality of Nigerian Publications. It will also improve the standard of their bibliographies, effective bibliographic control, universal availability of the publications; and, cooperative schemes such as inter-library lending, cataloguing practices among interested libraries and foster standardisation of library practices among them.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

Two sets of populations were considered for the study. These are publishers nation wide and Nigeriana i.e. publications emanating from Nigeria. Sample units were randomly selected from each population. From the population of the publishers a total of 150 units were selected. This includes individual and corporate publishers, government and non-government publishers. The individual publishers were those personal authors or joint authors who were also direct publishers of their work. The corporate ones include the government departments and such publishers as University Press Ltd (UPL). Africana-FEB Publishers, West African Book Publishers, Macmillan Nigeria Ltd., Evans, Longman Publishers, Heinemann, Board Publications of Nigeria etc. Personal visits were made to the publishers and each was interviewed on their use of ISBN/ISSN. Visits were also made to publishing warehouses, Bookshops and Nigerian depositories from which a total of 1000 publications were examined to identify, on each publication, location, correctness and validity of ISBN/ISSN.

In analysing the data, tables of frequency were drawn for the responses and other data. Mode and percentages were thereafter



computed to show trend on the use pattern. In order to check the correctness and ascertain the validity of each ISBN found on publications, it is assumed that the check digit i.e. the last number of ISBN is calculated on modulus 11. The modulus is with weight 10 - 2 using X in lieu of 10 where it would occur as a check digit. The first 9 digits excluding the check digit of ISBN was each multiplied by a number ranging from 10 - 2 and the product divided by 11. For an ISBN to be correct and valid the sum of the products obtained plus the check digit must be divisible by 11 without remainder.

### **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:**

#### **3.1 Users of ISBN**

95.5% of the publishers surveyed were already in use of ISBN on their publications. However 2.5% of those who applied the number on their publications are mere authors who ignorantly sought ISBN from other publishers. For instance few lectures of University of Ilorin, Nigeria sought for and used the ISBN meant for the University Library as a publisher. Contrary to the guidelines that the ISBN is not meant for printers, except in rare cases where a printer is also the publisher, few printers (1%) who are not publishers applied for ISBN from the National Agency at the National Library of Nigeria. The allocation of ISBN to such printers was made possible because they did not disclose their true identity as printers. They claimed to be publishers in their application. The impersonating printers revealed that such use of ISBN on their publications improved the standard of the format of their printed work and resulted in high revenue generation from higher patronage for printing. One percent (1%) of the publishers did not make use of ISBN on their publications. Such publishers include Omolayo Standard Press, Board Publication, Bakibinga etc.

#### **3.2 Publishers Categories:**

The publishing output and future projection of each publisher was the basis of extent of ISBN allocation. Three categories of publishers are identifiable in Nigeria through the use of ISBN.

- (i) 100-199: One hundred publishers identifier of 3 digits in length. Their title identifier is 1,000.
- (ii) 2,000-2999: One thousand publishers' identifier of 4 digits in length whose title identifier is 100.
- (iii) 30000-99999: Five thousand publishers identifier of 5 digits in length and title identifier is 10.

The smaller the publishing out-put, the longer the publisher identifier group. 65% of the publishers belong to the one-hundred identifier group. This includes Macmillan (Nig.) Publishers. University Press Ltd., Heinemann Educational Books (Nig.) Ltd., Evans, Longman (Nig.) Africana-FEP



Publishers etc. Thirty percent (30%) belong to one thousand publishers identifiers. This includes Shebiotimo, B. T. Associates, Omoniyi Ayeni and Gbabeke Publishers. Three percent (3%) belong to 5-thousand publishers' identifier. They are mainly sole author publishers.

The serial titles are assigned ISSN on receipt of a sample copy (i.e. vol i no i) of a particular serial or a photocopy of its title page to ascertain the real existence of the publication.

### **3.3 Promotion for Use:**

The attention of Nigerian Standard Organisation (NSO) and Nigerian Publishers Association (NPA) was drawn to the existence of the ISBN and ISSN for registration and their use by the National Agency (National Library of Nigeria) through advertisement in newspapers, radio and television. Letters were also sent to the publishers identified through legal deposit obligations.

Eighty percent (80%) of the publishers agreed that periodic advertisements in newspapers proved useful to them. However, 95% of the publishers agreed that the inclusion of the publishers' list of those already assigned the numbers proved most useful to them and encouraged them to apply for and use both numbers on their publications. Good relationship between the publishers and the Agencies promote the use of the standard numbers. To enhance the correct use of the number, publishers indicated that they either wrote or visited The National Library of Nigeria to clarify problems that might arise on the application of the numbers. The National Agency also organized workshops occasionally to educate the publishers and promote the use. Publishers agreed that such workshops fostered greater cooperation between them and the National Library of Nigeria and facilitated the use of the numbers among them. The first kind of such workshop took place on February 1st 1978 and it gave birth to expressed desire by the publishers to apply ISBN on Audiovisual materials.

The serials assigned ISSNs are usually listed in 'The Nigerian File of International Standard Serials Number' which was usually published bi-monthly to disseminate and update information on serials assigned ISSN. It served as the most authoritative source of ISSN for serial titles. Also the names of publishers whose journals had been assigned ISSN were usually published in The National Library Diary.

### **3.4 Scope of Use**

According to the ISO, the materials on which ISBN should be applied include printed books and pamphlets, microfilm publications, Braille



publication, mixed media publications and machine-readable tapes while ISSN is for serial publications. Physical examination of the various categories of materials revealed that only printed books carried ISBN. Publishers whose books bore no ISBN had never applied for or been assigned ISBN. This was due to unawareness on the part of the publishers in question. The serials are academic journals, school magazines, government serial publications, states statistical yearbooks, Annual Reports of government organizations etc. 58% of the serials are academic journals. The high proportion of such serials was due to the desire of the lecturers to have publications for their promotion and advancement. Government serial publications constituted 33% of the serials that carried ISSN. This was facilitated by the ease by which such publications lent themselves to legal deposit obligations.

### **3.6 Location of Number on the Publication:**

The recommended location of ISBN on a publication include back of the title page, foot of the title page, foot of the outside back cover, foot of the back of the jacket or any other prominent position on the outside such as base of the spine and back of the cover. Those of ISSN are in or on the front cover, back cover and title leaf. The most preferable place is either on the top right hand corner or the front cover of the international bibliographic strip where used.

The most desired location indicated by publishers was the one that would promote aesthetic perception of their publications, which is in line with Bartley (1982). Verso of the title page was the most frequent location for the ISBN. 78% of the sample units had their ISBN on the verso of the title page, 19% on the front of the outside back cover and 3% on the back of the dust jacket.

In agreement with Fowowe (1985), the most predominant location for ISSN was the top right hand corner of the front cover page of serial publications. 80% of the sample units bore their ISSN on the front cover page. 9% on the back cover, 5% inside the front cover and 4% on the content page.

For example

"Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religion = ISSN: 0030 – 5596" and "Kwara State Statistical Yearbook ISSN: 1118-7913" bore the serial number on the top right hand corner of the front page.

"First Bank Monthly Business and Economic Reports = ISSN: 1115-5341" and "Annals of Borno = ISSN: 0189-2195" inside the front cover; "West Africa = ISSN: 0043-2962" and "News Watch = ISSN: 0189-8892" on



the content page. Contrary to Fowowe (1985), 90% of Nigeria Newspapers displayed the ISSN on the bottom of their last page.

### **3.7 Use by Printers**

Few printers impersonate publishers in the use of ISBN on the publications firmed out to them for printing. They wrongly applied for and were assigned ISBN. Such printers claimed that application of the standard number on their finished products improved the standard of their format and increased revenue generation of their business.

### **3.8 Miscellaneous Findings**

Generally, libraries in Nigeria had adopted application of ISBN and ISSN in their descriptive cataloging to ensure full bibliographic details of their holdings. The National Library of Nigeria in her efforts to encourage the use of the standard numbers, set up within it, both National Agency for ISBN and National Serials Data Centre for ISSN and handled relations with the International Agencies on behalf of all Nigeria Publishers. Schedule officers at the centres were sent abroad for workshops to enhance training in the operation and facilitate standard in the use of both standard Numbers at home. The National Library at its centre for the standard Numbers maintained a register of publisher identifier's names and locations as well as list of serials already assigned ISSN. The library also provided manual instruction for both ISBN and ISSN operations and computer printout of ISBN to publishers.

In the desire of the publishers to inculcate the culture of applying the standard numbers on their publications, each publisher usually applied for the allocation of the relevant number. They informed the library of their publishing output, obtained print-out of list of numbers from the ISBN National Agency/NNSDC and administered numbering of its own books. The publishers were required to forward a list of their publications ISBN/ISSN assigned them to the National Agency and each publication received through legal deposit obligation was usually examined for correctness and validity of ISBN/ISSN carried.

Ninety-five percent (95%) of the sample monographs had their ISBN in correct format. However, the use of hyphen was more favoured than that of space in separating the four groups that constitute an ISBN. However, 4% of the monographs had wrong format of ISBN either by having the number divided into 3 groups as against 4 and/or having the check digit lumped with the title identifier.



**Examples of publications with wrong format are:**

OBASANJO, Olusegun (1990). Not my will, Ibadan: UPL ISBN: 978 2491616

YEROKUN, Olusegun (1986). Insurance: general principles and some aspects of insurance law in Nigeria ISBN 978-30268-011.

The above number for Yerokun (1986) contains 11 digits as against 10. The number is therefore incorrect and invalid.

**Other invalid/incorrect numbers are**

ISBN 978-132-243-8. This is invalid because the sum of the products and digit is not divisible by 11 without leaving a remainder.

ISBN 975-2792-48-9. This number has wrong group identifier.

Eighty eight percent (88%) of serials sampled carried correct ISSN. Each serial number was found to consist of 8 digits divided into 2 groups of 4 digits and separated by a hyphen. However, ISSN was wrongly applied on few serials such as 'New Nigerian' = ISSN 03382755. The eight-digit number is not divided and separated into 2 groups by hyphen. Guardian bears ISS No. 181-6125 as against 8 digits and the correct version of ISSN 0181-6125. The Nigerian Tribune bears 3 digits i.e. ISSN 271 rather than 8 digits of 2 groups of 4 digits each, while Atoka Igbomina: a monthly newspaper carried ISBN instead of ISSN. The publication was not registered with NNSDC. Each publication obtained through legal deposit obligation was usually examined. Any incorrect or invalid number detected was usually cancelled and new one assigned. The National Library usually published regularly in National Library Diary and annual cumulative issues of National Bibliography of Nigeria (NBN) a list of publications with their assigned standard numbers i.e. ISBN/ISSN.

This study revealed that most Nigerian Publishers have accepted the use of ISBN/ISSN without reservation. A few are of the opinion that the National Library of Nigeria should be organizing workshops more frequently to assist them and other new publishers clarify problems that might arise on the numbering of their books.

**4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

From the findings outlined above, there is no gain saying that the use of ISBN and ISSN has been fully established in Nigeria and that Nigeria has taken a renewed position in the world of bibliographies. Though, with few problems on their application, much advantage has been derived from the use of the numbers.



For the continual use of the two numbers for maximum advantages, the author of this paper is of the opinion that

1. Attempts should be made by publishers to avoid errors either by omission or commission in the application of the numbers;
2. In order to ensure the proper use of the numbers by the publishers, the National Agency and the Nigerian National Serials Data Centre (NNSDC) should provide the publishers technical advice and assistance from time to time. This should be supplemented with manual instructions;
3. The Agency and the Centre should also offer to number all the backlist to facilitate retrieving and/or identifying all the published works;
4. Publishers should be above board in forwarding lists of their publications with their ISBN or ISSN to the issuing body and informing the same body of any invalid number(s) rather than applying the numbers(s) wrongly on their publications;
5. For the ISBN/ISSN to serve its purpose maximally, every library in Nigeria should provide ISBN/ISSN on all their cards as found in the books or serials. Also, an ISBN/ISSN index, which should be updated periodically and made available to all participating libraries, should be put in place;
6. Efforts should be made by the National Library of Nigeria with the coöperation of other Nigerian Libraries to publish the second edition of the National Union list of serials (NULOS) as well as the first edition of the National Union Catalogue (NUC). This is to assist in tracking down publications that do not bear Standard Numbers with the aim of assigning them the number;
7. Well-informed libraries and other groups on the use of both numbers must always assist in educating the publishers and other would-be users of the numbers. If the users and quality control were enhanced, most publications (especially serials) would not perished unnoticed and Universal Availability of Publication (UAP) would be greatly enhanced; and
8. The use of ISSN and ISBN is relevant to the book trade in general. All the participants in the book trade should join hands to promote and embrace the use of the Standard Numbers in accordance with International Standard guidelines.

In conclusion, the use of ISSN and ISBN and adherence to its guidelines will continually enhance the quality/accessibility to and facilitate the retrieval of publications emanating from Nigeria both locally and internationally.



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