

## The Importance of e-Book Platforms in Education

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**Abstract** – Many people have considered purchasing a tablet device, such as an iPad, Kindle, or Nook, for personal use, yet how many have considered adopting this new technology as a pedagogical tool in the classroom? This article presents the complexity of e-book platforms from Romania in comparison with Amazon, FNAC, or Springer and how they are being used in Romanian market. Moreover, the analysis through criteria comparison will show which strategies are mostly used by students. The result of the research and analysis had shown us the fact that the number of e-books used are increasing in Romania and online platforms are using different strategies in order to promote the digitalization of print books, especially in education and professional documents. What helps people to trust e-books more are the tutorials of using or editing them.

**Keywords** Education, innovation, e-book, platforms, comparative study

### I. INTRODUCTION

E-books are forms of electronic text containing many features that can be classified as accommodations. The document itself has three different components: an e-book file, software for reading the e-book, a hardware device to read it on, such as a computer, laptop etc. E-books are available through online libraries, bookstores, or can be created from common forms of electronic text with reading tools. E-books are often available free. Accommodating features that some e-books currently have include ease in portability, adjustable text size, highlighting, bookmarking, note taking, interactive dictionaries. By using these features instructors can create pre-accommodated e-books for student reading that can include items such as advance organizers and reading guides.

### II. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE OST POPULAR ROMANIAN E-BOOK PLATFORMS

Our analysis is based on a 36-criterion grid that tracks the organization of distributors, the range of products that are available, techniques and strategies, the complexity of the website and the e-book market. In order to land clear conclusions, we have made a

comparison between three platforms in Romania and three foreign platforms.

The Romanian platforms that we chose to analyze are Libris, Humanitas and Polirom. Initially, our study was focused also on Elefant.ro, but the collection of e-books of this platform was removed for reasons not publicly announced by the owners. On the other hand, we chose from the international e-book market three of the biggest and most renowned platforms, Amazon, FNAC and Springer.

#### A. Polirom

Following the applied grid, Polirom's online platform is best suited in terms of collection complexity. It now holds 1908 titles, all in Romanian. The absence of any listed collection in a foreign language (not even English) might be considered a weak spot. This platform offers the buyer both the electronic and the printed version for most of the books listed in its collection. One of Polirom's strong spot is when it comes to delivery, which is made through the Romanian Post or courier companies and DHL services - for purchases made from abroad. A very useful section for potential customers is dedicated to the company's delivery service policy, that explains the method of delivery as well as the shipping taxes applicable to different countries.

To widen its book collection, Polirom collaborates with other publishers and partners, that provide books, in both printed and electronic format. These partners support the copyright issues as well and most of the book's intellectual propriety type is ISBN.

Polirom uses some specific marketing strategies, including an old-fashioned newsletter, to which each user can subscribe to stay in touch with all the promotional campaigns. The subscription can be completed through a simple and user-friendly method: the user only provides his/her email to receive notifications about new collections or issues, applied discounts or new benefits.

The personalized marketing concept is not really used to its full potential on this platform. Polirom sticks to using cookies (a web standard nowadays), as well as personalized searches. Once logged in, the website will

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memorize the user's most recent searches, as well as his/hers points of interest. As for the use of cookies, the customer can be bothered by the adding on different other websites or social media platforms. Under the 'privacy policy' section, Polirom explains transparently the way that the data collected using cookies is being used and how the 'tracks' of the user can be deleted.

As far as the user account is concerned, Polirom offers only the classic version, with a few fields that can be filled in, without the possibility of logging in through social networks. Creating an account can offer some benefits to the user, but not so many. Polirom sticks to the classic approach, by registering searches for further recommendations.

The customer support sections are neither very modern, as there is no instant chat window with the staff. However, there is a 'Help' section, divided in a few subcategories: How do I buy, shipping details, FAQs, online library etc.

Another weak spot is given by the fact that the users don't have the possibility of filling out a feedback form to express their opinion related to 'surfing'/searching/purchasing. However, the e-book collection is well set up. The user is provided with basic information about the book (e.g., title, author, domain, collection, publishing year) and extensive content descriptions. These include a synopsis, the author's biography and photo. Readers can also leave reviews on the book, for which creating an account and logging in to it is mandatory. Yet another weak spot, in our opinion.

### B. *Libris*

Based on the number of e-books, Polirom is followed at close range by Libris. This Brasov based platform holds 923 titles in its collection and, just as its competitor, all the e-books provided are in Romanian. This platform uses the 'shopping mall' economic model, which means that it allows other merchants to sell their products on the website.

Like Polirom, Libris also offers books in both classic and electronic format. As it's expected, paperback or hardcover books come in a much more generous range of selection, but just like on other similar platforms, buying an available book on an electronic support is far cheaper than the classic version of the same title. The e-books come in formats that are most easily supported, such as ePub, MOBI or PDF, which make them readable on basically any common device.

The platform also offers a lot of explanations and descriptions that can be useful to the reader, regarding the electronic book, a suggested app for a better reading experience and many other topics that might come in handy. Even more so, the platform offers special tutorials, regarding installation of different apps and transfer of e-books. It's important to know that the electronic books provided by Libris are not supported on Kindle devices but can be loaded through Adobe Digital Editions.

Users can form complaints or forward suggestions using the feedback form, that can be filled in even without creating an account. On the other hand, creating an account can be useful in many ways, as the platform offers its users some important advantages and special services. They can, for instance, make a wish list, and benefit from important discounts such as free shipping (for big orders), return, call center support, quick order and loyalty points. Libris also offers discounts limited by a certain period, promotions that are well displayed, usually being the centerpiece of the home page for better visibility. Discounts are also announced through the newsletter, that can be subscribed to by any visitor, just by listing his/her email address.

As for delivery, the options are the same as for the previous example: the Libris bookstore, courier, Romanian Post and DHL, for orders placed from abroad.

### C. *Humanitas*

Humanitas, the third Romanian platform in our analysis, currently has a rich collection of electronic books, approximately 920. This website has a well optimized mobile version and is well structured, so the user can quickly find anything he/she searches for. The user is informed regarding the devices and the operating systems that the e-books can be read on - iPad, Macintosh, iPhone, Android, eReader, Kindle (the first Romanian e-book platform to support it!).

User support is provided mainly through an instant chat section, but also through a section called 'Recent Questions'. Within it, the user can find questions and answers on topics such as discounts, delivery methods, payment methods etc.

Following the applied analysis grid, we noticed that the LibHumanitas platform does not cover support for serious difficulties that might concern the customer. For example, staff responses via email or telephone are rare. Although, theoretically, the instant chat window promises a quicker response from the staff, this is not the case at LibHumanitas. Questions asked through this tool also go unanswered for several hours or even days.

The user account is built in a classic format, with registration or logging on windows. However, users can easily log in using their Face-book, Google+ or Yahoo accounts, in order to skip the old-fashioned account creation steps.

Each e-book comes with basic information, such as the title, the author's name, the publishing house, year of appearance, collection and a short synopsis. The biography of the author is not shown on LibHumanitas, and the book cannot be 'browsed', as only the cover is available for a preview. The available formats are ePub and PDF. The platform also provides the customer with a guide that walks him/her through all the needed steps to install the required programs or apps, regardless of the used device.

As for the user's interaction with the product - in our case, the e-book - we find it low. The customer can leave comments, filling a few predefined fields (such as nickname, review title and review). However, users

cannot get involved in conversations and in the exchange of ideas and opinions. They also cannot give recommendations that could make the product better, more user-friendly, easier to purchase/download/read.

LibHumanitas does not do very well in the field of marketing techniques and resources as well. The platform does not provide its visitors with any extra discounts, promotional packages or other benefits. The only tactic that is being used is promoting, within the home page, different events in which the publishing house (Humanitas) is involved or new books that are being printed.

As for payment services, the classic methods are being used: reimbursement or paying by credit card. Deliveries are made by courier companies, directly from the libraries. There is also a special section for international shipping: it provides a well-structured, clear, step-by-step ordering information, as well as an email address to confirm payment or to offer support.

#### *D. Amazon*

As we specified earlier, our analysis also focuses on three major e-book selling platforms with an international range. And one of the best rated e-commerce platforms in the world is, undoubtedly, Amazon.com. In this case, we chose to study the domain dedicated to the United Kingdom, amazon.co.uk. It has various categories and products, from books, clothes, electronic devices, DVDs, accessories, cosmetics, clothing, detergents etc. Although the website is very complex, this involves a more difficult handling. As we mentioned, there are many different categories, therefore finding the desired information can sometimes be a bit of a challenge.

Specifically, Amazon UK has an incredible collection of 3.4 million e-books, available in 20 different languages. Only 46,717 of them are in English! As a platform type, it is like the ones discussed above. The economic model is that of a “shopping mall”, but also a “marketplace” (an online platform that allows the seller to advertise products at their own risk by selling them to consumers or sellers interested in them. In this case, the main platform is the intermediary that offers the actual selling place, through which the seller and the buyer can interact).

The placement of orders is done through filters, such as author, language or review. Unlike the platforms analyzed earlier, Amazon provides the user with all the categories in which printed books are available, adding in various Kindle deals (Kindle being the device on which the e-books can be read). The payment methods are also like the previous examples, but in this case the users can benefit from gift cards, fidelity points etc.

As it can be easily predicted, Amazon applies much more well several marketing tactics - each user can benefit from a wide range of offers provided he/she creates an account: free reading apps, newsletters, the possibility to give an e-book as a gift to another users, well detailed biographies etc. More than that, each new user has a free 30-days period to watch movies and TV

shows streamed on Amazon Prime, and students have accounts dedicated to them (Prime Student). The personalized marketing part is marked by the user's benefits, including the above-mentioned student account, as well as birthday gift cards and bonus points.

The user accounts are of two kinds: prime (e.g., prime student, movies, series, clothes etc. with discounts and fast delivery options) and business (developed especially for companies - stationery, equipment etc.).

The user support section is well organized, in a very structured section regarding various issues: orders, returns, digital services, premium accounts, payment options, account settings etc.

Following the analysis, we have concluded that Amazon stands good at every chapter, including e-books. In addition to the large number of titles that are available, the information is well structured and complete for every book (title, year of appearance, publishing house, number of pages and available formats). The cover of the book can be easily viewed and there is even an audio narrator incorporated. The books are also provided with a synopsis, plus advanced information, such as further recommendations, testimonials of other readers and tagged content. The users can interact by leaving comments or reviews.

#### *E. FNAC*

FNAC is, in many ways, the French version of Amazon. It is a very well-developed platform, available in both desktop and mobile versions. Like in the above-mentioned examples, it also uses the 'shopping mall' economic model, following the same steps in the distributing process. Just like Amazon, FNAC has a rich and well-turned category - cards, music, smart devices, home appliances, sports, babies etc.

FNAC also uses a wide range of marketing strategies. The platform offers users discounts on large product categories, and “3 products at the price of 2” type of promotions. These are all listed on the home page of the website, to instantly capture the visitor's attention. Another similarity with Amazon is its capability to remember searches and to rebuild them later, for faster navigations. This can be done even if the user is not logged on his/her account. Customized marketing strategies include certain benefits dedicated for subscribers, bonus points, 24 h delivery, lower shipping rates and even some free books. Through these seemingly tiny tactics, FNAC keeps the user close to the platform, rewarding him for his choice. At the same time, FNAC calls on the e-mail strategy targeted at various categories of clients, placing product recommendations identified by user searches.

The user has the option to create a classic account by filling in mandatory and predefined fields with basic information, as well as signing in directly through a social network (most commonly Face-book or Google+).

User support is made through a special category, organized according to the most useful aspect (orders,

returns etc.) for a quicker navigation. FNAC does not have an instant chat window for fast communication with the staff, and this might be considered one of the weak points of the platform. To be fair, it's a merely small inconvenient in comparison with the generous amount of offers and services. One of the newest and most demanded option is the FNAC++ card, that allows customers to get improved services - fast delivery, one day delivery, priority in outlets, free delivery, discounts etc. Of course, all the terms and conditions for acquiring this service are explained on the website.

Just like Amazon, FNAC also uses a special device for reading its e-books, named Kobo. If the user does not own such a device, he will still be able to download a smaller range of e-books in ePub format. However, if the customer is also a Kobo owner, the number of available e-books increases.

Each e-book comes with some basic information (title, year of appearance, publishing house, collection, electronic format), but also with some additional data (book details, other books by the same author or of the same category etc.).

FNAC also gives its users the possibility of skimming through the e-books. They can even download a few pages, but only after logging in to their own accounts.

Regarding the available information for every e-book, FNAC does not feature the author's biography. Instead, users can leave comments, reviews and can rate each product.

### III. ANALYSIS OF SOME PLATFORM FOR E-BOOK CREATION

In the context of TeachSUS project (Erasmus+ Programme – Strategic Partnership, project no. 2018-1-RO01-KA204-049253) developed in an international consortium, there have been developed an analysis of different software types/platforms for the e-book creation and view. This activity is part of the dedicated Intellectual Output that will be materialized in a dedicated e-book for project-based learning in the field of teaching and educating sustainability, in the case of pre-university level of education. The created TeachSUS e-book will support teachers in their pedagogical approach for educating topics of sustainable development.

Table 1 shows the results of different software analysis to create an e-book in order to make it available on-line. The analysis has been not considered all the available software tools, only the most popular. Other software applications used in practice are:

- PC sau Mac — EPUB or PDF:
- iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch — EPUB or PDF:
- Kindle și Kindle Fire — MOBI or PDF:
- Android — EPUB:
- NOOK, NOOK Color și NOOK Tablet — EPUB:
- Sony Reader — EPUB.

Table 1. The synthesis of the analysis of different software types/platforms for the e-book creation and view

Software or platform name	Description	View and web page
<b>Pressbooks</b>	“The Open Book Creation Platform - Openness. Accessibility. Creation. Control.” The Pressbook is very similar to the WordPress platform, but it has a different concept. You can add and edit paragraphs, sections, and so on. It's ratuity, but if you want to remove the rat's watermark, you need the paid platform update. (starts with an initial payment of \$ 19.99)	<a href="https://pressbooks.com/">https://pressbooks.com/</a>
<b>Beacon</b>	“Your Complete Lead Magnet Solution. Use Beacon to create professional lead magnets and convert more website traffic into leads.” It's a WordPress plug-in. Plugin transforms blog articles into an e-book. You can miss which items are included, or how to filter them by category. The plugin modifies articles in HTML5, or PDF formats. Layout features are automatically included and can help design the e-book through the dashboard menu.	<a href="https://beacon.by/">https://beacon.by/</a>
<b>Kitaboo</b>	Kitaboo is a cloud-based content platform to create-publish-distribute interactive mobile-ready content. An award-winning e-book publishing platform, it creates interactive multimedia-rich & mobile-friendly digital content. The cloud-based technology securely publishes and distributes e-books on all mobile platforms and devices with powerful analytics and user insights. It supports and allows:	<a href="https://kitaboo.com/">https://kitaboo.com/</a>

	<p>Cloud based creation platform  Automated ePub Conversion  Secure B2B, B2B2C and B2C distribution  White-labelled reader apps for iOS, Android and Windows  Advanced user analytics</p>	
<b>Epubeemaker</b>	<p>It is a free software (ePUB Maker, ePUBee Maker)  ePUBee Maker is a powerful Word addin that helps publishing EPUB, Mobi, PDF e-book with the same quality as Word document.  Keyfeatures of ePUBee Maker v1.8.1.29:  100% free and safe;  Quick, efficient conversions from word to epub;  No contents or quality losing;  Set cover, edit metadatas, edit table of contents, make professional e-book;  Amazingly easy to use, just need edit word documents and click on "Publish";  Generate EPUB, MOBI, AZW, AZW3, PDF books in one software;  Import EPUB, MOBI, AZW, AZW3, HTML, TXT to Word, you can use ePUBee Maker as e-book Editor or e-book Reader.</p>	<p><a href="https://epubee.com/maker.html">https://epubee.com/maker.html</a></p>
<b>Flipbuilder</b>	<p>Convert Static PDF Magazines/Brochures/Catalogs into Interactive, Media Rich e-books that Can Be Viewed, Shared and Distributed on Web, Social and Mobile.</p>	<p><a href="http://www.flipbuilder.com/support/how-can-i-share-my-created-e-book-online.htm">http://www.flipbuilder.com/support/how-can-i-share-my-created-e-book-online.htm</a>  <a href="http://www.flipbuilder.com/">http://www.flipbuilder.com/</a></p>
<b>Blurb</b>	<p>A software for making electronic books to assist during the publishing and distribution process. It seems that is has not been used for educational materials.</p>	<p><a href="https://www.blurb.com/e-book">https://www.blurb.com/e-book</a></p>
<b>Calibre</b>	<p>Caliber is a raturity e-book management software and an e-book viewer so you can store e-books and organize them in a library but also convert between PDF, EPUB, MOBI and other formats E-books.</p>	<p><a href="https://calibre-e-book.com/">https://calibre-e-book.com/</a></p>
<b>Visme</b>	<p>Give free solution for the educational environment.</p>	<p><a href="https://www.visme.co/e-book-creator/">https://www.visme.co/e-book-creator/</a></p>
<b>FLIP PDF PROFESSIONAL</b>	<p>Convert Static PDF Magazines/Brochures/Catalogs into Interactive, Media Rich e-books That Can Be Viewed, Shared and Distributed on Web, Social and Mobile.  There is a free version (light in functionalities) but there are available 2 versions for purchase:  Flip PDF is a utility which can be used to convert PDF files to animative page-flipping e-books which work on all device (99 USD)  Flip PDF Professional provides more flexible and functionalities, such as enable you to embed video, audio, Flash and links (299 USD).</p>	<p>A very suggestive DEMO of what an e-book is can be seen at:  <a href="https://www.flipbuilder.com/free-e-book-creator.html">https://www.flipbuilder.com/free-e-book-creator.html</a></p>

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Digital technology and its applications, next to the internet have generated significant changes on the book

market as well. There are two big trends in industry: first, the transition from offline to online commerce and second, from the print book to the e-book. At the beginning there were spectacular increases and similar features. The results had shown that the sales of e-

books are decreasing in favor of a comeback of paper books. The print and the e-book will coexist, for a while. The publishers and book retailers find themselves in a new context, faced with new players and new opportunities. Lately, the Romanian book market follows the global trends. Both the online book market and the e-book market are changing in Romania. The online book market is becoming important in Romania, as well as on other markets.

With Romania's overall book market, on-line book buying is expected to grow as much as 20% this year, with books the third most popular online purchase. With Amazon pretty much ignoring the eastern Europe markets, there is plenty of room for growth for Libros, both with books and other online sales. The market leader in e-books in Romania used to be Elefant.ro. Again, Amazon has no e-book presence in the country.

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