

Usage of Digital Platforms in Promoting Pastoral Communication in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri

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The article presents the findings of a study on the use of digital platforms in promoting pastoral communication within the Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri. Utilizing the Technology Acceptance Model as the theoretical framework for this research, the researchers gathered both qualitative and quantitative data from clergy and church members of the Anglican community residing in the Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri. A mixed-methods research design was employed. The sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula and comprised 384 individuals at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error for the sample. Respondents were selected using multi-stage sampling. Eighteen (18) participants were purposively selected from the clergy of the Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri for the study. The researchers made the following key findings: clergy in the Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri utilize digital platforms to some extent for pastoral communication; however, they rely more heavily on television and radio for this purpose. Consequently, the adoption of digital media platforms is very minimal. The reasons for this situation were identified as: 1) insufficient security of digital platforms against fraudulent messages, 2) inadequate technological capabilities for broadcasting pastoral services (preference for WhatsApp, Facebook, and email newsletters among platform users), 3) clergy's apprehension that electronic communication will reduce the physical presence of parishioners in church. Recommendations for the clergy in the Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri and pastors in Imo State regarding the use of digital platforms include: 1) transitioning to more secure and capacious platforms for electronic communication, such as Telegram and YouTube for live streaming; 2) more actively utilizing the potential of digital platforms for convenient communication, without limiting it to church members only; 3) training technical personnel to effectively use digital platforms for a wider audience and to counter cyber threats; 4) expanding the formats of personal meetings with church members.

KEYWORDS

Christians, church, digital platforms, evangelism, pastoral communication, Ecclesiastical province of Owerri

Introduction

The pervasiveness of the web and digital media are immensely changing the manner in which individuals communicate. The methods of communication of activities in different aspects of human undertakings are adjusting to the new patterns in communication utilizing the digital media. There are arguments with respect to

whether churches are towing the line of utilizing the digital media for pastoral communication or are still sticking to the old way of pastoral communication. This case is proof in Nigeria as well. More youthful grown-ups and adolescents are spinning to the Web for individual, social, and strict data (Recowacerao, 2019). Subsequently, religious foundations are committing more assets to improving

their essence on the web. In this present reality where consistently we become more interconnected, the worldwide 'perceivability' of churches is obviously connected to their duty to the Internet (Bolu, 2012).

The use of the digital media in pastoral communication has consistently represented difficulties to the church. A few people are of the view that the digital media ought not to be utilized for Christian pastoral purposes considering the difficulties in that. Religious associations are gone up against with difficulties and weight identifying with the reception of digital media innovations (Obayi & Onyebuchi, 2014). All the more along these lines, the Congregation has for the most part demonstrated absence of enthusiasm for the utilization of new data and communication advancements, a disposition which go back to the approach of film, which the church saw as having the ability of ruining the loyal of members in term of joining other denominations online (Ihejirika, 2008).

Churches are adopting digital media, virtual learning projects, and open access activities to allow the Bible to spread past physical limits, consequently, upgrading the church's significant part in raising another age of pioneers with character. There are a few investigations on the effect of data and communication innovation in church communications for development. Sturgill (2004) studied the degree and reason for which church websites can be used for church communication. Chung and Kim (2023) look at the foreseen outcomes of data and communication innovation (ICT) on six distant rustic networks situated in the northern Peruvian Andes, which were furnished with PCs associated with the Web.

This inconsistency has somehow influenced the way the new media have been utilized for Christian pastoral communication. While some may tilt to the utilization of the new media in Christian pastoral communication because of their impression of the advantages in that, others should avoid the developing impact of the new media or take as much time as is needed to audit the heading the new innovation is inclining before tolerating it as a media for Christian pastoral purposes.

Therefore, it is against this background that this study sought to assess the usage of digital platforms in promoting pastoral communication in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri.

The **objectives of this study** are to:

1. Find out the digital platforms mostly used in promoting pastoral communication in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri;
2. Examine the level of adopting digital platforms in promoting pastoral communication in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri;
3. Ascertain how digital platforms aid in promoting pastoral communication in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri;
4. Determine the disadvantages of digital platforms in promoting pastoral communication Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri.

Literature Review

Communication and Pastoral Communication

One of the vital tools in harnessing the development of human capital is communication. It is crucial in transmitting knowledge, skills, ideas and information to sharpen and re-order the awareness and discernments of the readers and viewers on a particular event or happening in the society and serves as a reservoir of knowledge of the past and current events (Edim et al., 2016 cited in Onyiri-

uka & Orji, 2019). Nwogwugwu et al. (2019) opine that in our world today communication in human activities has taken a universal level. There is no universally recognised definition of communication, and there are as many different meanings of communication as there are people. The fact that the term and act of communication signify different things to different individuals makes it more challenging to define communication in a way that is widely recognised (Asogwa & Amana, 2012). In addition to interpersonal communication, communication has expanded to encompass a broader spectrum of human communication, including pastoral communication (Nwogwugwu et al., 2019).

On pastoral communication, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (2019) asserts that pastoral communication is the avenue through which local church leaders in the church continuously provide information and support to every new leader in the church. According to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (2019), official pastoral communication is one of the means through which the worthiness standards of the church are given to its congregation (from the First Presidency). To emphasize the importance of pastoral communication, local leaders are advised against altering the standards communicated and/or teaching any their own standards.

Digital Platforms used in Pastoral Communication

According to Winters (2017), the end of the twentieth century saw a revolution in the media used for communication. This period saw the advent of the Internet and its World Wide Web. The way people connect with each other and communicate has been altered by the Internet. People can connect more rapidly, widely, and efficiently almost anywhere, at any time, thanks to computers, including smartphones, tablets, and handheld gadgets. Viewing patterns have been altered by newcomers like Netflix, Apple TV, and iView. Television shows can now be viewed online at nearly any time.

This new millennium saw the emergence of "New Media" (or "digital media") platforms, such as blogs, email, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and programmes (or "apps"). A person can now make and consume media material thanks to the emergence of new media.

The following are digital communication channels that the church can use (Hjelmgaard, 2016). We use these channels – which include PowerPoint presentations, the internet, our website, email newsletters, mobile and small screen communications, social media, video, podcasts, and anything else that makes up the newest, greatest, and most advanced communication technology – as the most recent means of sharing the gospel. This channel is perpetually growing, changing, creating something new, and emerging. Not everyone has access to this channel, and the rate of adaption varies greatly depending on the audience's age, interests, and socioeconomic status (Phillips et al., 2013).

According to Ahinasha (2024), we are constantly exposed to digital communication in the form of changing discussions, photos, tweets, blogs, combinations, additions, revisions, collections, mashups, and condensations of previously unthinkable material. Some people find this stream of information and the ways we integrate, alter, and engage with it fascinating, while others find it completely perplexing. We are still learning how content, freed from time limitations and linear presentation, may convey eternal truth, regardless of how we feel about these new approaches. These issues will not sort out for a long time

and we need to figure out survival strategies in this evolving communication landscape.

Digital [Modern] media allow for simple and accessible quality communication and we are use to the most popular ones for evangelism.

i. Facebook – Social networks are now a standard component of communication. If our content is engaging, visually appealing, "like-worthy," and share-worthy, we may quickly reach thousands of people through sharing. We are engaging in a type of evangelism that can affect our friends by posting high-quality articles from Christian websites and portals, sharing our own personal testimonies, scripture quotes, Christian ideas, and images with inspirational messages.

ii. YouTube: As mobile devices and tablet computers advance, so does YouTube. As a result, it is easy to record a Christian message or witness and post it online. Social networks can be used to exchange videos. Additionally, we can create our own Internet TV channel.

iii. Chat: This direct written communication method helps individuals who are apart from one another stay in touch. Every participant must be online at the same moment for the real-time written chat to take place.

iv. Email: A large number of emails are passed about and being forwarded. These emails can contain links to additional materials, a story, or a fantastic presentation, but they can also occasionally be filled with various types of spam.

According to Prehn (2012), the church can use the following digital communication channels. Social media, video, podcasts, PowerPoint presentations, the internet, our website, email newsletters, cell phone and small screen communications, and anything else that makes up the newest, greatest, and most advanced communication technology are all examples of the channels we use to spread the gospel.

Empirical Reviews

Dankasa (2010) carried out a study to determine the audience's typical behaviour when using new media tools in relation to their commitment to and attendance at church activities, as well as the means by which the Catholic Church must reach its audience. The findings showed that Catholic youths were quite active Internet users. It's possible that 83% of Catholic youngsters use the Internet every day. The findings indicate that Catholic youths are more likely to be active on social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube and are more likely to be familiar with social media platforms than weblogs. This group's most frequent online activity is watching webcasts or clips of videos. The findings imply that Catholic teenagers are becoming less interested in religious matters. The results indicate that a greater number of young Catholics are unsure whether or not to take part in church-sponsored internet events.

In their research, Obayi and Onyebuchi (2013) found that, according to their research, the majority of the priests who were sampled had used public relations concepts in some capacity to evangelize, and that public relations strategies can be useful tools for evangelism at the grassroots level. Furthermore, the results showed that the most successful strategies for evangelising at the grassroots level are using charitable organisations, compelling communication, and leading a life that reflects the teachings of Christ. Additionally, the study discovered that a significant amount of grassroots evangelisation can be conducted via public relations strategies. It was deter-

mined that the public relations tactics used in grassroots evangelisation are highly effective based on the level of efficacy observed in their use. Additionally, the study demonstrates that public relations can be utilised to promote goodwill and a favourable perception of the church.

In a study, Obayi and Onyebuchi (2014) found that 68.9% of the studied population evaluates Christian pastoral messages mostly through new media. According to their research, the majority of Christians in southern Nigeria use modern media to meet their pastoral needs. The majority of people in southern Nigeria use modern media to meet their pastoral requirements. A research by White et al. (2016) found that people from a variety of social and religious backgrounds follow Ghanaian pastors. Additionally, it has allowed pastors and their congregations to build relationships with a varied spectrum of individuals without being restricted by geographic location.

Dyikuk (2017) used the qualitative research approach to assess the changes rocking the church as a result of the world of information and communication technology (ICT). This study expressed the fact that the church has no other option but to adopt and use the digital media in its operations. The church has to create and sustain online churches using the digital media to reach out to millions of Christians. This study discovered that some pastors with this understanding, as the case may be, are harnessing the potentials of the digital media of communication. These pastors are using these media to engage their members and followers by sustaining online communication, fellowship and church activities.

Dyikuk (2019) in a study found that radio, television and personal appearance are metaphors for degrees of intimacy namely, hearing, seeing and touching are apt. However, in the context of pastoral communication, the author did not highlight the contents of both radio and television and how they apply to communication

Theoretical Framework

This study was underpinned on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) which was developed by Davis (1989). The two items construe in the Technology Acceptance Model includes; perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use that are proposed to influence acceptance of a technology.

According to Davis (1989) perceived ease of use is "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort." Regarding perceived usefulness, users' behavioural intent to use an information system is geared, to a large extent, by their perceived usefulness of the system (Davis et al., 1989). There is also extensive empirical evidence that supports the significant effect of perceived usefulness on behavioural intention. Azmi et al (2010); Olushola and Abiola (2017), has it that Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is widely used and accepted to explain the relationship between perceptions and the use of technology such as business texting and the two main constructs that influence behavioural intention are Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEU); Perceived Usefulness (PU) is defined as the user's perception of the degree to which using the system will improve his or her performance in the workplace and Perceived Ease of Use (PEU) is defined as the user's perception of the amount of effort they need to use the system. On the foregoing, Fishbein & Ajzen (1979) as cited in Momani & Jamous (2017) stated that Technology acceptance theories and models aim to convey the concept of how users may

understand and accept the new technology and how they may use it.

According to Davis et al. (1989), defined the technology adoption as: the implementation of the software such as business texting and hardware technology in an organization to increase productivity, competitive advantage, improve processing speed, and make information readily available. According to Hong et al., (2008) perceived ease of use was the most important driving force in forming a positive attitude toward continued usage of mobile data services. It also suggests that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are the two most important factors in explaining the usage of technology for pastoral communication.

The development for Technology Acceptance Model comes through three phases: adoption, validation, and extension. In the adoption phase, it was tested and adopted through a huge number of information system applications. In the validation phase, researchers noted that Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) uses accurate measurement of users' acceptance behaviour in different technologies. The third phase, the extension, where there are many research introducing some new variables and relationships between the TAM's constructs.

With the ever increasing interest of scholars on the subject of the adoption of new and digital media in the church, a lot is gradually getting covered already. However, as far as social science is concerned, there is no topic that can be discussed exhaustively. There will still be areas of a given subject that will still demand further attention. Little or no attention has been given to the adoption of digital media in pastoral communication in Imo state.

Method

Research Design. The research adopted the mixed method research design for this study. This method is also referred to as the hybrid method of research. This is because it combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), mixed method is not merely used because there is something fundamental or distinctive about bringing together qualitative and quantitative data together; rather, it is used to integrate these two fundamental ways of looking at a social phenomenon. Therefore, this study adopted the mixed-method approach involving survey and in-depth interview (IDI). As suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018), the data from both methods will be carefully put into dialogue with each other to proffer improved interpretation of data. Etumnu and Ndukwu (2025) have used this method in their study and it was effective in addressing issue in a study.

Population of the Study. The population for this study comprised Anglican residents of Imo State's However, the population is unknown hence the Cochran formula was used to determine the sample size. For the qualitative study the population of clergymen in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri is 835 according to the (*Owerri Ecclesiastical Province Clergy Directory, 2020*).

Sample Size and Sampling technique. To determine the sample size, the population was calculated with the Cochran formula at 95% confidence level and 5%. The formula is thus:

The Cochran formula is:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where:

e – is the desired level of precision (i.e., the margin of error).

p – is the (estimated) proportion of the population which has the attribute in question.

q – is $1 - p$.

z -value is found in a Z table.

There are actually variations on the formula based on the perceived size of the population.

Therefore to get the sample size of the unknown population

$$\begin{aligned} &= \frac{(1.96)^2 (.5) (.5)}{(.05)^2} \\ &= 1.96 \times 1.96 = 3.8416 \\ &= .5 \times .5 = 0.25 \\ &= \frac{3.8416}{0.0025} \\ &= 384 \end{aligned}$$

Therefore the sample size for the study is 384.

The sample size for the qualitative aspect of this study was 18. The reason for the small number of participants is because in qualitative research method the amount is usually small. In this study, the researchers used the multi-stage sampling technique. The Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri, Anglican Church which covers Imo State has 12 dioceses, 160 archdeacons and 354 parishes (Church Year Calendar, 2021, Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion). Firstly, the researchers used simple random sampling to select 6 dioceses for the study. To do this, the researchers wrote out the names of the 12 dioceses, folded them into a basket, toggled and randomly, as in balloting, picked 6 dioceses. Secondly, the researchers using proportionate sampling chose parishes for each diocese. A total of 21 parishes were chosen. Using the purposive sampling, the researchers selected 19 respondents each from the 21 parishes selected.

Instrument of Data Collection and Validity/Reliability of the Instrument. The measuring instrument was a researcher's structured questionnaire and the in-depth interview guide. The researchers used the face validity which was done using experts in the field of communication who were given the instruments to examine in order to ensure that the questions in the questionnaire were in line with the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was tested for reliability with Cronbach Alpha method of computation using Microsoft Excel and the result was 0.87. Member checking was used to check the level of trustworthiness for the interview guide.

Method of Administering Instrument and Method of Data Analysis. For both methods the face to face approach was used to collect data in the study. The data gotten from the fieldwork was analysed using mean analysis. As for the qualitative data, the researchers analysed it using thematic analysis and explanation building technique.

Results and Discussion

This section of this research dealt with the analysis and presentation of primary data gotten from the field work. On the quantitative data, the researchers sent out 384 copies of questionnaire. The return rate was very high (99.2%) as the researchers only discarded 3(1%)

copies of the questionnaire on the grounds of inconsistency of responses and multiple cancellations. Table 1 showed that a majority of the respondents believed that the use of WhatsApp by clergies to send church information and updates was most preferred by members (with the highest mean score of 3.25 and a frequency of 286 agreeing responses). The respondents opined that the use of Email was the more preferred social media platform of choice. The use of email, which followed WhatsApp, was one of the two options with the highest

frequency of "agreed" (75% with 286 agreeing responses). However, it was ranked second because the mean score for the use of Email (3.01) was lower than that of WhatsApp. Ranking third was the use of Facebook pages for the church with a mean score of 3.12 and 62% of agreed responses. Although the mean score for the use of Facebook was higher than the mean score for the use of Email newsletters (3.12 > 3.01), Email newsletters was ranked second because of the percentage of respondents (62% < 75%, Facebook and email respectively).

Table 1. Digital platforms mostly used in promoting clergy al communication in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri

S/N	STATEMENT(S)	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	TOT (%)	MEAN	DECISION
1.	Clergymen in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri use church websites to communicate and receive information from their congregation.	145 (38)	141 (37)	95 (25)	0 (0)	381 (100)	3.13	Accepted
2.	Email newsletters are adopted as one of the digital platforms for clergymen in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri to communicate with their members.	50 (13)	286 (75)	45 (12)	0 (0)	381 (100)	3.01	Accepted
3.	Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri, members prefer their clergy to use WhatsApp to send church information and updates.	95 (25)	286 (75)	0 (0)	0 (0)	381 (100)	3.25	Accepted
4.	Facebook pages for the church are becoming one of the platforms for communication between clergymen and member in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri.	95 (25)	236 (62)	50 (13)	0 (0)	381 (100)	3.12	Accepted
5.	Clergymen in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri uses zoom and other video conferencing platforms to convene meetings from time to time.	122 (32)	114 (30)	50 (13)	95 (25)	381 (100)	2.69	Accepted

(Source: Researcher, 2024)

The church website which is believed to be the fourth most used digital platform had 38% strongly agreed options and 37% agreed responses followed with a mean score of 3.13. Video zooming conference platforms

ranked the least used digital platforms by clergies in Imo state.

Table 2. Extent to which clergymen adopt digital platforms in promoting pastoral communication in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri

S/N	STATEMENT(S)	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	TOT (%)	MEAN	DECISION
1.	Clergymen in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri completely rely on digital platforms for promoting their communication with members/ sermons.	50 (13)	95 (25)	145 (38)	91 (24)	381 (100)	2.27	Rejected
2.	The use of digital platforms by clergymen in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri is very minimal.	38 (10)	202 (53)	91 (24)	50 (13)	381 (100)	2.60	Accepted
3.	In Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri clergymen pay attention to the use of digital platforms to promote their sermons and communicate with members.	53 (14)	152 (40)	168 (44)	8 (2)	381 (100)	2.67	Accepted

4.	The digital media is rarely adopted by clergymen in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri to promote their sermon and communicate with members.	95 25	91 24	145 38	50 13	381 100	2.61	Accepted
5.	Clergymen in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri use digital platforms in addition to TV, radio to promote their sermon and/or communicate with members.	114 30	191 50	50 13	26 7	381 100	3.03	Accepted

(Source: Researcher, 2024)

Table 2 showed general tendency represented by the highest mean score that clergymen in Imo state used digital media platforms alongside with TV and radio to promote their sermon and/or communicate with members (3.03); using the mode, a majority of the respondents (53%, with a mean score of 2.60%) agreed to this claim that the use of digital platforms by clergymen in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri is very minimal. The high level of disagreement (38%) of the respondents on the issue that digital media is rarely used helped to defined the assumed perspective of the respondents in their conceptualisation of minimal and rare. Although a majority of the

respondents thought that the use of digital media was minimal, they did not consider 'minimal' low enough to be classified as rare. It can be assumed that rare here was conceived by the respondents to mean "infrequent"; while the minimal meant "least than expected". Therefore, this table implies that in as much as the extent of the use of digital platform by clergymen in Imo state was not up to expectation, it was also not infrequent. There were frequent evidences that clergymen in Imo state used digital platform but the level of usage was below respondent's expectation – minimal.

Table 3. Influence of using digital platforms on clergy al communication in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri

S/N	STATEMENT(S)	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	TOT (%)	MEAN	DECISION
1.	In Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri, clergymen who adopt digital platforms promote their sermon and communicate with their congregation easily and conveniently.	232 61	111 29	23 6	15 4	381 100	3.47	Accepted
2.	Clergymen in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri who adopt digital platforms tend to reach out to more young people than those who do not.	191 50	76 20	53 14	61 16	381 100	3.04	Accepted
3.	Using digital platforms by clergymen Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri enhances the way they interact with their congregation.	118 31	191 50	61 16	11 3	381 100	3.09	Accepted
4.	Digital platforms make it easy and convenient to convene meeting with church official at very short notice.	255 67	126 33	0 0	0 0	381 100	3.67	Accepted
5.	Pastoral communication is positively influence when clergymen in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri adopt digital platforms.	191 50	126 33	64 17	0 0	381 100	3.33	Accepted

(Source: Researcher, 2024)

Table 3 assessed the level to which the use of digital media platforms have influence pastoral communication. A very high and strong agreement was credited to the assertion that digital platforms made it easy and convenient for clergymen to convene meeting with church official at very short notice (67% and a mean score of 3.67). It is also strongly supported, with a mean score of 3.47 and 61% that the adoption of digital platforms by clergymen in Imo state made promoting their sermon and communication with their congregation easy and convenient more than other media platforms such as TV and Radio. With 50%

each, and low mean scores of 3.3 and 3.4 respectively compared to other mean scores on the table, respondents had weak supports for the general assumptions that clergymen in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri who adopt digital platforms tend to reach out to more young people than those who do not received; and that the adoption of digital platforms, on a general note, positively influenced pastoral communication. In as much as the extent of support is weak, there is still a show of support.

Table 4 investigated the possible disadvantages of adopting digital platforms for pastoral communication.

The disadvantage that was mostly perceived by the respondents was that live stream of church service via digital platforms have great tendencies to make members feel comfortable being absent from physical church (56% with a mean score of 3.10). Following this, another striking disadvantage was that interpersonal interactions and communications reduce when clergymen start communi-

cating via digital platforms. This was strongly agreed by over 180 of the respondents (with a mean score of 3.49). The next disadvantage that is worthy of note due to the high frequency of respondent (49%) and mean score (3.23) the fact that digital platforms are susceptible to cyber fraud and members could be dupe under the covers of the clergymen.

Table 4. Disadvantages of adopting digital platforms for pastoral communication

S/N	STATEMENT(S)	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	TOT (%)	MEAN	DECISION
1	Digital platforms are susceptible to cyber fraud and members could be defraud under the covers of the clergymen.	187 49	114 30	61 16	19 5	381 100	3.23	Accepted
2	Setting up and managing digital platforms are time consuming and needs trained experts.	126 33	152 40	58 15	45 12	381 100	2.94	Accepted
3	Live stream of church service via digital platforms make members feel comfortable being absent from physical church.	213 56	42 11	76 20	50 13	381 100	3.10	Accepted
4	Due to the subjective and personal nature of digital platforms, it is difficult to correct people when they use the digital platforms wrongly.	114 30	156 41	61 16	50 13	381 100	2.88	Accepted
5	Interpersonal interactions and communications reduce when clergymen start communicating via digital platforms.	187 49	194 51	0 0	0 0	381 100	3.49	Accepted

(Source: Researcher, 2024)

Summary of Qualitative Data Presentation and from In-depth Interview. The thematic analysis approach was used in analysing the qualitative data for this study got from in-depth interview. Using this method, the researcher approached the qualitative data with preconceived themes that were related to the four research objectives stated in the chapter one of this study. The themes included: mostly used digital platforms by clergy men in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri, extent of use, influence of using digital media on pastoral communication and challenges of using these platforms.

Theme 1: Digital platforms mostly used in promoting pastoral communication

Clergy 9 and Clergy 5 from the interview sessions held with them opine that they mostly used the Facebook for live streaming and sharing of sermon; while WhatsApp was mostly used in reaching out to church officials and members with important information and prayer point. The opinion of clergy 5 on this matter was explicit and covered a wide range of the brief comments made by clergies 9 and 5. Clergy 5 opined that:

We use digital media in my church for live streaming of sermons and messages and we also use these media to communicate with church officials and members. The digital media platform we mostly use of live streaming and sharing of sermon is Facebook and YouTube, especially when the service is to be streamed live for 1 to 2 hours. Also, we do use Instagram sometimes but only for short video clips and pre-recorded videos. I know that we do use Facebook and YouTube most often for sharing our sermons on Sundays.

Clergy 9 affirmed, “We mostly use Facebook for airing our church services”. In the opinion of Clergy 5, “Facebook is one of the social media platforms we use in my church to share message, especially with it is general for

everyone”. Clergy 5 further adds that WhatsApp is used for communication meant for church officials and members, specifically; “For WhatsApp, we do use it more for internal communication; say with the members who are already part of the church and then for sharing messages for ones that are new converts”.

Theme 2: Extent to which pastors adopt digital platforms in promoting pastoral communication

In terms of the extent to which pastors and clergy men use digital platforms in promoting pastoral communication, Clergy 1 was of the opinion that:

Social media is used in our church for a lot of our operations, because we recently recognised that it is the fastest way for people to receive information and to broadcast messages to society or to the community. And nearly everyone comes easily. Anyone can access social media sites, regardless of where they are, given that the internet is available. We also found via the study that this is one of the easiest and quickest ways to acquire our members’ information.

Clergy 2 added that, “in my church, we use social media platforms to propagate the Gospel, for advertising, spreading the word across the globe and for reaching people who are not closer to us”. This notion is supported by Clergy 3, the reasons including that “we are using that medium because we think it’s commonly used by most people and perhaps very reliable to reach out to members and others.

Theme 3: Influence of digital platforms on pastoral communication in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri

The clergies were also asked to explain why they chose the social media channels they had adopted. Clergy 4 explicitly declared,

These platforms are easy to get and especially easy to use – example is WhatsApp, as we have already stated. And now,

too, we can access Facebook simply with our phones, receive YouTube and other alerts. We also chose it, because it is always available and requires or very little information technology knowledge to use it.

Clergy 4 explains that the use of digital media platform is helpful in pastoral communication. In his words:

I think it helps more in communicating with a well defined targeted audience; not just members. When messages are disseminated using social media or digital media platforms to reach even people that are not members can also reach out to those on this platform. Take, for instance, the Facebook, you realized that from videos of preaching that we upload on this platform, people all across church names can hook-up to the message. We get comments, likes and some views from these people. This serves as feedbacks. I think these digital platforms have everything. Most often our church uses Facebook.

Another benefit of using digital media platforms is highlighted by respondents of this study as the easy access of everyone to information on the Internet and on digital media platforms. Clergy 2 opines that:

Our church recognised that in recent time, digital platforms are the fastest way to get information and transmit messages to members in society or to the community that we use social communication platforms. And nearly everyone gets easy. Everyone can access the social media platforms, regardless of where they are, if the internet is available. Digital platforms are one of the easiest and fastest ways to gain our members commitment to the church.

Also, digital media platforms help in the communication of transient information. As opined by Clergy 7,

Digital platforms have been able to help us with transient communication. By transient communication, I mean communication that is very fast, accurate, and timely. This means we can reach out to our church officials and/or members with an instruction and readily get a response, and they can adhere to the instructions as quickly as possible, compared to when we relied on letters, memos, etc. Let's not even go as far back as the time of letters. When telephones first arrived around the early 2000s, we didn't have the internet to communicate quickly. So, we had to call one person, who would call another, who would call another – you know how those processes work. But with digital platforms, we can easily communicate to a whole group of people via WhatsApp groups, and before you know it, they are disseminating the information to their units and leaders, and so on. We can reach them that way. So, digital platforms, apart from [missing verb, perhaps 'facilitating'], have really helped us send out information in a speedy and timely manner.

Theme 4: Disadvantages of adopting digital platforms for pastoral communication

Furthermore, head clergymen in the sampled regions were asked to describe some of the obstacles faced by the Churches in their activities with the usage of the social media platforms. Clergy 5 said that, "weak network most times interrupts communications that are broadcast on social media platforms. This is one of the main concerns". The idea of network posing a challenge to the use of digital platforms was also highlighted by Clergy 1, Clergy 6 and Clergy 9. Clergy 1 said, "Slow internet connectivity was the first difficulty. In accessing any social networking site, the Internet is one of the important reasons." Clergy 5 agreed that "the poor internet connectivity was one of the inhibitors of use of the digital platform; these fastest internet connections are somewhat costly". Clergy 9, as shared: "A poor network interrupting communications on social media platforms is one of the main difficulties".

Others clergies (Clergy 11, Clergy 4, Clergy 8, Clergy 3, Clergy 1 and Clergy 6) complained about the high cost

of data subscription. "The cost of data is very expensive and intolerable, especially when doing live streaming" Clergy 3 opined; adding that, "It therefore required us to be very meticulous and minimise cost by all means and still get better the usage of social media platforms for church operations. This is always very challenging". Another challenge is the problem of control. Clergy 8 holds the belief that:

On WhatsApp most especially, group admins assigned by the church do not have full control of what may be posted there and what cannot be placed on some of the social media platforms. On Facebook, admins do not have the right to prohibit messages that are not godly, unguided comments. This is one of the reasons we don't like to use some of these digital platforms. Facebook is gradually becoming a platform where you can't help with what you can or can't access, this is unlike WhatsApp. On WhatsApp, the leaders can now only post messages/info on the platform, so that the leaders can be totally controlled.

Another challenge with the use of social media is shared by Clergy 7, Clergy 4 and Clergy 12. They believe that social media makes it difficult to organise information especially on WhatsApp and Facebook. Clergy 12 specifically noted that:

The core disadvantage of using digital platform that we have experienced as a church is overflowing of information, especially when it comes down to the WhatsApp groups. This makes it difficult to manage on the personalities on it. Sometimes, you notice that anybody can just say or post in the group. Thanks to WhatsApp, now we now have to create restrictions on it that only administrative people can comment or share your opinion on the group, and then another thing disadvantage that we have faced.

Another challenge we experience said Clergy 6 is the fact that the timely and speedy information representation in signs – timely recordings. According to this clergy,

People now take our word out of context. You're not seeing them say, oh, on this recording, they said this and they don't sit back to listen to us to say, okay. This is where we are going to, this is where we are headed for. So that's mostly the challenge being taken out of context and overflowing of information. It now makes people that. Information techniques people now miss out on the cogent points that you stated earlier so for instance you preaching. And then somebody comes and copied another preaching for Malaysia. You realize that before people can come and say amen to defend one you are post. Another person has supposed to say another person is sharing another person sharing a testimony. It just makes the whole thing look disorganized.

Still on the disadvantages, Clergy 7 discussed various challenges of using digital media, especially social media. He said that the use of digital media exposes the church to negative comment from haters and critics; "they try to put messages that do not satisfy the church's standard, superfluous posting, posts which are not godly because we are a religious organisation. Some people occasionally try to attack other churches, like Facebook, to give feedback".

With this, the researcher has established, although not exhaustively, the challenges that clergymen faced in adopting digital platforms for pastoral communication. And uses the words of Clergy 6 to establish what clergymen ought to do; thus: "I think that any Church who would like to use social media platforms to communicate with their members of the Church should be prepared to use all the tools that it requires so that this job is not a 550% effort but a complete 100% activity".

Additional theme: Digital Media Platforms should be used as Complementary to other platforms

One of the respondents to the interview introduced an additional theme to this work. The respondent added that the digital media platform should be used with other media platforms to strength pastoral communication. The respondents urged his fellow clergies not to perceive the digital media platforms as standalone media but complementary media to other media platforms that existed before the advent of digital media. In his works:

I would like to add something and I would say that use of digital media platforms should be used together with the older method and media that we use should before. They should be combined together; one should not go without the other so that the digital platform should not be used as like a major tool of communication. It should be used as an enhancement for us. So that, in case, we don't have the time to reach out to somebody about the particular information, we can just reach out to them on that social media. The social media or digital media shouldn't be like the only way for us to reach out to people. It should be combined together with all the ways that we are used to such as calls, pastoral visits, internal memos and letters.

This addition was meaningful because it uncovered the idea of media convergences in the use of digital media in promoting pastoral communication in Imo state.

Discussion of Findings

The first question was: *which are the digital platforms mostly used in promoting pastoral communication in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri?* To answer this question; first, the researchers had findings that showed that clergies in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri significantly use digital platforms for pastoral communication. There were great qualitative backings for the finding from the interview session that clergy men in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri actually adopted digital media platforms in their day in and day out pastoral communication endeavour. This finding concurs with the assertion by Conrad (2008) that the use of digital platforms and new technologies are certainly the basic factors that has changed church communication. In line with this, Bogesic (2019) states that the church has always attempted to make use of the media to communicate the gospel to believers, converts, and even unbelievers. This finding further strengthens the diffusion of innovation theory. It shows that a new innovation, referred to as digital media, has diffused into pastoral communication.

The researchers further found that among the digital media platform used by clergies in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri, WhatsApp, with 75% and 3.12 mean score, was the most preferred in term of easy and speedy delivery of important information and church sermons in WhatsApp groups and broadcast messages. In addition to this, the use of WhatsApp was followed by the use of Email Newsletters (75% but with 3.01 mean score) and then Facebook pages (62%). The researchers also showed from the data analysed that video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Skype and the likes were seldom used in pastoral communication (with 30%), especially when it had to do with communicating with members of the congregation. From the interviews, it was revealed that pastors used Facebook more for sharing of sermon and live-streaming of their service; while WhatsApp ranked top in their communication with church officials and members. This agrees with the list proposed by Prehn (2012) as the preferred channels of digital communication that can be adopted by the church: website, email newsletters, social media, video, and podcasts. In addition, Dankasa (2010) found out from a study

that Catholic youths were more likely to engage with pastoral communication on social network sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube than with websites, blogs and email newsletter.

The research question that was second reads *"to what extent do pastors adopt digital platforms to aid in promoting pastoral communication in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri?"* The researchers found that clergymen in Imo state still relied heavily on the use of TV and radio for the promotion of pastoral communication (50%). In agreement to this, from the interview, a clergy advised that as far as the use of digital platforms is still in its formative days in the country, clergies should use it in addition to other media platforms and not as a standalone media. Obayi and Onyebuchi (2013) looked at public relations techniques as effective approaches in grassroots evangelism and pastoral communication other than the media; persuasive communication, use of charitable organizations, and living a Christ-like life are the most effective means of evangelizing at the grassroots; especially where there is no access to the Internet. As a result of this, the adoption of digital media platforms is very minimal (53%). However, the idea of minimal should not be considered in terms of frequency. This is because the researchers noted a moderate level of disagreement (38%) on assertion that digital media platforms were rarely used by clergymen in Imo state to promote pastoral communication.

This implies that there were frequent evidences that clergymen in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri used digital platform but the level of usage was below expectation – minimal. So, the idea of minimal within the context has to do with the inability to fully harness the efficacy of digital platforms for pastoral communication. This might be due to the challenges hindering this adoption. Nevertheless, Dyikuk (2017) stated that the church has no other option but to adopt and use the digital media in its operations.

Thirdly, the next question covered *how digital platforms aided in promoting pastoral communication in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri.* The researchers found the adoption of digital platforms, on a general note, positively influenced pastoral communication. Particularly, the researcher's finding showed a very high and strong agreement to the assertion that digital platforms made it easy and convenient for clergymen to convene meeting with church official at very short notice (67%). Finding of this study also strongly supports, with (61%), that the adoption of digital platforms by clergymen in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri made promoting their sermon and communication with their congregation easy and convenient more than other media platforms such as TV and Radio (with 50%).

Adding to the above, the researchers revealed supports, although weak, for the general assumptions that clergymen in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri who adopt digital platforms tend to reach out to more young people than those who do not use them. Also, from the interview, it was shown that the use of digital media allows the clergymen to communication with audiences that might not be their members and at some point it gives them global reach to the unsaved. This corroborates the findings of Obayi and Onyebuchi (2014) that most southern Nigerians are making use of the new media to meet their pastoral communication needs. According to White et al. (2016), social media is a new phenomenon that many pastors and televangelists use worldwide. In Ghana, pastors and their congregations are making the most of

the chance to build relationships with a wide variety of people without being restricted by geographic location.

Next question, "What are the disadvantages of digital platforms in promoting pastoral communication in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri?" The study found that the disadvantaged that was mostly perceived on the adoption of digital platforms for pastoral communication was that live stream of church service via digital platforms have great tendencies to make members feel comfortable being absent from physical church (56%). While cyber-crime (49%) was seen as one of the leading disadvantage from the perspective of the survey respondents, the clergies who responded to the interview noted that high cost of data and the severe technicalities surrounding the use of digital media are the greatest disadvantage of adopting the platform. This goes comes in as one of the factors that made Dyikuk (2017) to opine that generally the internet has advantages and disadvantages. Following this, the study revealed that interpersonal interactions and communications reduce when clergymen start communicating via digital platforms. Also in this line of finding, data from the study showed that digital platforms are susceptible to cyber fraud and members could be dupe under the covers of the clergymen.

Conclusion

Owing to the technological demands of the 21st century the use of digital platforms in church is sacrosanct as it is indispensable in the spread of the gospel. Based on the findings, it is therefore concluded that clergies of the Anglican Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri heavily uses digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and email newsletters in their pastoral communication. They use these digital platforms because of their ease, speed, convenience, and how they aid the spread of the gospel message. It was however still concluded that the too much convenience the digital platforms give encourage members to shy away from being present physically at the church. Also, fraudsters can leverage on it and defraud members. The study has contributed to knowledge of the importance of digital media platforms, especially in the areas of pastoral communication. This study focused on the level of usage of digital media platforms and how it is use for pastoral communication. The findings in this area will no doubt contribute significantly to the body of knowledge in the area of new media and pastoral communication. Further study should be done in the area of effectiveness of the use of digital platforms for pastoral communication and whether it can actually lead to conversion. Studies should also be carried out to ascertain the perception of clergies and members alike towards the use of digital media platforms for pastoral communication. Further study should be carried out in other Christian denomination in Imo state to ascertain the level of usage of digital platforms in pastoral communication.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made from the finding of this study:

1. Clergymen in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri should maximise other more secured and size accommodating social media platforms such as Telegram in their pastoral communication with members and church official as well as YouTube for live streaming.

2. Clergies in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri should endeavour more to harness the potentials of digital platforms to make pastoral communication easier, convenient

and even boarder. They should not restrict their message scope to their member strength alone. They should be more board in the audience targeting for their messages and sermon sharing.

3. Digital platforms will be more helpful in promoting pastoral communication in Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri when clergymen begin to employ the service of professionals or enrol their technicians for professional training in the use of digital platforms for wide audience reach.

4. Pastors in Imo state using digital platforms should be extremely careful while using these media as they are prone to cyber attacks. Sensitive and vital information of the church should not be disclosed on the digital platforms of the church; except the platforms is confirmed as being Pastors engaging in the use of digital platforms should not ignore the place of face-to-face (one-on-one) interactions with their members from time to time.

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Використання цифрових платформ для розвитку пастирської комунікації в церковній провінції Оверрі

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Стаття містить результати дослідження використання цифрових платформ у просуванні пастирської комунікації в церковній провінції Оверрі. Використовуючи модель технологічного прийняття як теоретичну основу для цього дослідження, дослідники зібрали якісні та кількісні дані від духовенства та членів церкви англіканської спільноти, що проживають у церковній провінції Оверрі. Був використаний змішаний метод дослідження. Розмір вибірки був розрахований за формулою Кокрані і склав 384 особи при 95% рівні довіри та 5% рівні похибки для вибірки. Респонденти були відібрані за допомогою багатоступеневої вибірки. Вісімнадцять (18) учасників були цілеспрямовано відібрані серед священнослужителів церковної провінції Оверрі для дослідження. Дослідники зробили такі ключові висновки: священнослужителі в церковній провінції Оверрі певною мірою використовують цифрові платформи для пастирської комунікації; але більше покладаються на використання з цією метою телебачення та радіо. В результаті цього прийняття платформ цифрових медіа є дуже мінімальним. Причинами такої ситуації визначено: 1) недостатню захищеність цифрових платформ від повідомлень шахраїв, 2) недостатні технологічні можливості для транслявання пастирських служб (перевага корситувачами платформ надається WhatsApp, Facebook та електронним розсилкам), 3) побоювання священнослужителів, що електронне спілкування зменшить фізичну присутність прихожан у церкві. Рекомендації для духовенства в церковній провінції Оверрі та пасторів штату Імо щодо використання цифрових платформ включають: 1) перехід в електронній комунікації на безпечніші та місткіші платформи, як-от Telegram та YouTube для прямого ефіру; 2) активніше використання потенціалу цифрових платформ для зручного спілкування, не обмежуючись лише членами церкви; 3) навчання технічного персоналу ефективно використовувати цифрові платформи для ширшої аудиторії та протидіяти кіберзагрозам; 4) розширення форматів особистих зустрічей з членами церкви.

Ключові слова: християни, церква, цифрові платформи, євангелізація, пастирське спілкування, церковна провінція Оверрі.