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Evangelism in the Digital Age: Social Media as an Effective Tool for Missions in African Churches

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital communication has transformed the context in which Christian mission is carried out, presenting both opportunities and challenges for evangelism in African churches. While traditional methods of evangelism remain valuable, they are increasingly complemented by digital platforms that enable broader and more immediate engagement with diverse audiences. This study examines social media as an effective tool for missions within African churches, arguing that its effectiveness depends not merely on technological adoption but on its integration within a biblically grounded, contextually relevant, and theologically informed missiological framework. In order to achieve this, the study employs a qualitative research methodology to engage missiological literature alongside selected examples of African churches that utilise social media for evangelistic ministry. The findings indicate that social media provides significant opportunities for gospel proclamation, discipleship, community formation, and outreach beyond geographical boundaries. However, its effectiveness requires sound theological grounding, strategic content development, digital literacy, and integration with traditional forms of evangelism rather than their replacement. The study concludes that social media should be understood not simply as a communication technology but as a contemporary mission tool through which African churches can participate more effectively in the Missio Dei while remaining faithful to the Church's biblical mandate.

Introduction

The mission of God (*missio Dei*) lies at the heart of Christianity and defines the identity and occupation of the church. As observed by David Bosch, mission did not originate from human initiative, but from God's redemptive purpose for the world, accomplished through Jesus Christ and continued by the Holy Spirit. The Church does not have its own mission; rather, it participates in God's mission by proclaiming the gospel, making disciples, and bearing witness to the kingdom of God among all peoples.[1] While the content of the gospel remains the same, the methods through which it is communicated continually adapt to changing historical, cultural, and technological contexts. Throughout Christian history, the Church has used the communication media available in each generation, from oral proclamation and handwritten manuscripts to the printing press, radio, television, and the internet to fulfil Christ's great commission (Matt. 28:18–20). The advent of digital media should therefore be understood not as a deviation from the Church's missionary mandate, but as the present media in which the unchanging gospel is proclaimed.

The twenty-first century has witnessed a groundbreaking transformation in human communication through digital technologies and social media. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), TikTok, and Telegram have fundamentally reshaped how individuals communicate, form relationships, access information, and engage in social and religious life. As evangelism naturally is communicative, these developments have inevitably influenced the church's missionary practice. Digital platforms have created opportunities for churches to proclaim the gospel beyond geographical limitations, engage diverse audiences, facilitate discipleship, and cultivate communities of faith within virtual spaces. Consequently, social media should not be viewed as simply a communication technology but as a contemporary mission context that needs serious theological and missiological reflection.

Within Africa, this digital transformation has occurred alongside remarkable growth in mobile phone ownership, internet accessibility, and social media participation, particularly among young people. Although challenges relating to digital infrastructure, affordability, and unequal access remain, digital

[1] Bosch, *Transforming Missions*, 389ff.

communication has become completely inserted in everyday life across much of the continent. Some African churches are incorporating social media into their evangelistic ministries through live streamed worship services, online Bible studies, digital prayer meetings, pastoral counselling, and other forms of virtual engagement.[2] These developments shows that digital media has become an important platform through which some churches explore to fulfil their missionary calling in contemporary African society.

Despite this growing adoption, significant theological and missiological questions remain. While many churches celebrate social media as an effective platform for evangelism, others question whether online ministry can sufficiently nurture the genuine Christian community, discipleship, and pastoral accountability. Critics warn that digital ministry may encourage monetisation, fame chasing, doctrinal compromise, and shallow expressions of faith when numerical popularity determines ministerial success. On the other hand, advocates argue that refusing to engage digital platforms risks ignoring a very important sphere of human interaction where millions of people around the world live, communicate, and search for meaning. These contrasting perspectives shows that the central issue is no longer whether African churches should engage social media but how they can do so faithfully and effectively within the framework of God's mission.

Although scholarship on digital religion and African Christianity has expanded considerably in recent years, much of the existing literature has concentrated either on the opportunities presented by digital technologies or on the ethical and theological concerns arising from their use. There is not much research that provides a biblical and mission-based model for judging whether social media is helping African churches fulfil their mission effectively. Furthermore, discussions of effectiveness often focuses on digital metrics such as number of

[2] Examples of some African churches using social media to preach the gospel are Streams of Joy pastored by Pst. Jerry Eze (Nigeria), Enlightened Christian Gathering pastored by Prophet Shepherd Bushiri (Malawi), Koinonia pastored by Apostle Joshua Selman (Nigeria), Christ Embassy pastored by Dr. Chris Oyakhilome (Nigeria), Living Faith Church Worldwide pastored by Bishop David Oyedepo (Nigeria), Redeemed Christian Church of God pastored by Pst. Enoch Adeboye (Nigeria), Kingsway International Christian Centre pastored by Matthew Ashimolowo (Nigeria), Mike Okoronkwo of the Redeemed Evangelical Mission, and Bimbo Odukoya of the Fountain of Life Church.

followers, online visibility, likes, views, and engagement, while paying little attention to theological criteria such as faithful gospel proclamation, authentic discipleship, spiritual formation, and participation in the *missio Dei*. Consequently, an important gap remains in understanding how the effectiveness of social media for mission should be evaluated from a biblical and missiological perspective.

This study addresses that gap by examining social media through an integrated conceptual framework that brings together three perspectives. First, *missio Dei* provides the theological foundation by tracing evangelism within God's redemptive mission rather than within technological development or church expansion. Secondly, contextualisation confirms that while the gospel message remains unchanged, the methods through which it is communicated should respond appropriately to changing cultural and technological contexts. Third, the study understands effectiveness not simply in quantitative terms but as the faithful communication of the gospel that leads to authentic discipleship, spiritual growth, and meaningful participation in the life and mission of the Church. These interconnected concepts provide the lens through which social media is evaluated throughout this study.

Accordingly, this paper argues that social media effectiveness for mission in African churches is not determined by use of technology or digital popularity but by merging it within a biblically grounded, contextually appropriate, and theologically informed missiological framework that augments rather than replaces traditional methods of evangelism. Social media is therefore understood not merely as a technological development but as a contemporary mission field in which African churches are called to engage faithfully and strategically in God's redemptive mission.

To investigate this argument, the study employs a qualitative research methodology based primarily on documentary analysis. It critically engages biblical, theological, and missiological literature alongside scholarly studies on digital religion, media, and African Christianity. In addition, selected examples of African churches that have incorporated social media into their evangelistic ministries are examined as illustrative case studies to demonstrate contemporary practices and emerging trends. Rather than seeking statistical generalisation, the study adopts an interpretive approach aimed at developing theological understanding and missiological insight.

The study is subject to several methodological limitations. First, because it is based primarily on documentary research, findings depend solely on the scope and quality of the available literature rather than empirical fieldwork. Second, the discussion focuses primarily on African churches, particularly with examples from Nigeria, and therefore does not claim universal relevance to all religious contexts. Third, the selected case studies are not intended to provide empirical evidence for all expression of online ministry across Africa but to illustrate broader developments. Finally, the study evaluates effectiveness primarily through theological and missiological criteria rather than quantitative indicators such as conversion rates, church membership growth, or social media analytics.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study contributes to contemporary missiological scholarship by proposing an integrated framework for evaluating social media as a tool for mission within African churches. It demonstrates that digital evangelism should neither be uncritically celebrated nor categorically rejected. Rather, when grounded in biblical theology, guided by sound missiological principles, and practiced with intentionality and contextual sensitivity, social media can serve as an effective complementary instrument through which African churches faithfully participate in the ongoing mission of God in the digital age.

Evangelism and Its Importance in Christianity

Evangelism lies at the centre of the Christian faith. The word evangelism is derived from the Greek word *euangelion*, which means "good news," specifically the good news of Jesus Christ.[3] Evangelism is the act of preaching the gospel to individuals and communities. It is the means through which the great commission is carried out and people come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice for humanity. As the proclamation of the gospel, evangelism has shaped the mission and identity of Christianity since the early church. It is the primary and permanent task given to the church without which the church ceases to exist.[4]

[3] Chan, *Evangelism in a Skeptical World,*18.
[4] Ogunewu, "The Church and Effective Evangelization," 67

The biblical foundation of evangelism is seen in the great commission, where Jesus commanded His disciples to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19-20). Over the years, there have been debates questioning the great commission as the basis for missions for the generations after the Apostles. According to C. R. Stam, the great commission was a command meant only for the eleven Apostles to carry out after Jesus's ascension. It is not to be carried out by any other generation at a later time.[5] He argues that the great commission for this dispensation was not the one Jesus gave His disciples, but the one spoken by the Apostle Paul, the ministry of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5:14-21.[6] Contra Stam, Jerram Barrs argues that, the command was not only given to the Church for that period of time but for generations to come, especially because Jesus used the phrase, "I will be with you to the end of the age" in Matthew 28: 20. He suggests that the Church in every age is called to participate in the great commission.[7] Ogunewu also suggests that Jesus' command to his disciples was a tool he gave for the expansion of the church from generation to generation.[8] Whether the great commission is that which Jesus gave or the ministry of reconciliation described by Paul, one thing remains clear, the church has been saddled with the responsibility of preaching the good news to the world for unbelievers to come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Consequently evangelism is how the church participates in the *missio Dei*.

Any discussion of evangelism within the Christian context would be incomplete without considering its importance First, evangelism demonstrates believers' commitment to God's redemptive plan for humanity and reflects their faith and obedience to his Word. By proclaiming the gospel, Christians obey Christ's command and participate in his mission of bringing salvation to the world. Furthermore, evangelism serves as a catalyst for church growth. Throughout history, the church has expanded primarily through the proclamation of the gospel as new believers have been added to its fellowship and communities have experienced spiritual transformation. Evangelism remains one of the primary means through which God continues to build his church. Finally, evangelism has played a major role in shaping values, promoting education,

[5] Stam, *Our Great Commission*, 17.
[6] Stam, *Our Great Commission*, 66
[7] Barrs, *The Heart of Evangelism*, 37-38
[8] Ogunewu, "The Church and Effective Evangelization," 67

advancing social justice, and encouraging peace and reconciliation globally. It is through evangelism that some African countries like Nigeria got access to education, medicine, freedom from slavery, and even the prohibition of the gruesome killing of twins.

Evangelism in the 21st Century and the Need for Innovative Evangelism

In the twenty-first century, evangelism has continued to improve with more mission bodies being established, more missionaries being sent out to the fields, more gospel materials (Bibles, tracts and Jesus films) being translated into different languages around the world, making it possible for the gospel message to be preached in many countries. Despite all these advances, according to the Joshua Project, only 43.5% of the world's population has been reached with the gospel so far.[9] Ogunewu observes that although evangelism has achieved significant success, it continues to face major challenges including religious hostility, demographic shifts, and competing non-Christian religious movements and ideologies.[10] Pakpahan et al suggests that secularisation and rapid technological change have transformed how people receive and respond to the gospel.[11]

Ogunewu observed that historically evangelism in Africa has been primarily rooted in traditional methods. These methods include missionary activities, mass evangelisation, evangelistic preaching, evangelistic counselling, Sunday school evangelisation, and media evangelisation.[12] These approaches proved particularly effective during the colonial and post-colonial eras when African societies were predominantly oral and communally structured. Lamin Sanneh argues that the indigenisation of the gospel in Africa was made possible through missionaries who translated the Bible and communicated Christian teachings in culturally relevant ways.[13] This helps explain why these traditional methods achieved considerable success during that period.

[9] https://joshuaproject.net/
[10] Ogunewu, "The Church and Effective Evangelization," 73-76.
[11] Pakpahan et. Al, *Social Media and Contextual Evangelism*, 119.
[12] Ogunewu, "The Church and Effective Evangelization," 81.
[13] Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 4–7.

While these traditional methods proved effective in their historical context, Scripture does not give a single model of evangelism. Sam Chan argues that Jesus commanded his followers to carry out the great commission but is not establish a one-size-fits-all approach for fulfilling it.[14] That suggests that the church must continually develop evangelistic strategies that are appropriate to the cultural and social contexts of the people.

Over time the church has employed different methods of evangelism, each reflecting the context in which it was practiced. Although traditional methods remain valuable, their effectiveness is influenced by changing cultural realities. Many of these approaches emphasised organised outreach through gospel tracts, witnessing programs, and public evangelistic campaigns, which were highly effective in societies where the Christian worldview was more widely understood or where communal patterns of life encouraged interpersonal engagement.[15] However, as cultures evolve, evangelistic methods must also adapt. Strategies that were effective in one generation may not achieve the same results in another because people's worldviews, lifestyles, and patterns of communication have changed.[16]

This is particularly evident in the twenty-first century. The church now ministers in a rapidly changing environment shaped by technological advancement, urbanisation, youth culture, demographic shifts, and broader cultural transformations. African societies, particularly those in urban centres, are becoming increasingly digitally connected. According to Daniel Slotta, about 570 million Africans use the internet as of 2022, while social media penetration continues to rise, especially among young people.[17] Consequently, traditional evangelistic methods, which rely heavily on physical proximity and analogue communication, are becoming less effective in engaging this digitally oriented generation.

[14] "There is no one size fits all model for our evangelism. We have different audiences with different thinking and learning styles, different socioeconomic groupings, and different existential entry point. So, we should be prepared to engage in a wider variety of models of Evangelism." (Chan, *Evangelism in a Skeptical World,* 41.)
[15] Greenway, "How Should We Then Witness," 91.
[16] Towns, "Changing Paradigms," 157.
[17] Slotta, "Internet Usage in Africa".

The limitation of relying primarily on traditional methods became even more evident during the Covid-19 pandemic that disrupted public gatherings and face-to-face ministry. Churches that had previously invested in digital technologies adapted quickly, while others experienced significant decline in outreach and participation.[18] Chitando and Gunda observe that "Covid-19 exposed the vulnerabilities of the African church's over-reliance on physical structures and traditional method of engagements."[19] The experience of Covid-19 demonstrated the need for innovation in evangelism by developing approaches that can effectively reach people beyond the physical walls of the church. One such approach is social media evangelism. In supporting the inclusion of social media evangelism, Pakpahan et al argues that social media evangelism should replace the physical evangelism.[20] Online or social media evangelism refers to the use of internet-based platforms such as social media, websites, blogs, video conferencing, podcasts and mobile applications to share the gospel message. In Africa, where mobile-first internet access is increasingly common, platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp provide unprecedented opportunities for churches to engage audiences across geographical, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. But to completely replace physical evangelism with social media evangelism appears extreme.

Digital evangelism presents several advantages over traditional methods. These advantages include lower costs, reduced risk, wider geographical reach, the ability to utilise multiple media formats, the capacity to reach entire language groups, convenience, accessibility, the ability to target particular niches, and the ability to explain complex concepts and enhanced credibility.[21] These advantages make digital platforms particularly effective for reaching today's interconnected society.

Despite these advantages, online evangelism should complement rather than replace traditional methods. Pakpahan et al advocate replacing physical evangelism entirely with online evangelism, a position that appears extreme. On the contrary, Towns argues that since the traditional method was effective

[18] World Council of Churches, "Churches Respond to COVID-19".
[19] Chitando and. Gunda, *Religion and the Covid-19 Pandemic in Africa*, 121.
[20] Pakpahan et al., *Social Media and Effective Evangelism*, 119
[21] Nsereka and Nwanze, "Evangelism in the Era of New Media," 645.

during a period, it shows that it can still be effective. However, it is important to note that the church must use methods available in every generation.[22]

While online evangelism provides broader reach and greater accessibility, it does not fully facilitate the deep personal relationships and deep meaningful face-to-face engagement that traditional evangelism promoted. Likewise, traditional evangelism alone cannot adequately reach many people, and cannot collaborate with mission bodies around the world who primarily interact within digital spaces. Therefore, integrating both approaches enables the church to maximise its outreach while preserving the strengths of each method. Ultimately, the message of the gospel remains unchanged, even though the methods of communicating it must continue to evolve. As technology advances and digital communication increasingly shapes everyday life, the church must adapt its evangelistic strategies if it is to engage future generations effectively. Rather than viewing traditional and online evangelism as competing approaches, the church should employ them side by side, creating a balanced and complementary model of evangelism that faithfully proclaims the gospel while responding to the realities of the twenty-first century.

Social Media: A Transformational Communication Tool

In the twenty-first century few innovations have had as profound an impact on human interaction as social media. What began as simple platforms for connecting friends and family have evolved into a global phenomenon that shapes how people communicate, learn, conduct business, and even practice their faith. Social media is a web-based tool for interaction that, in addition to facilitating conversations, allow users to create and share other contents such as photos, videos and links to resources. Unlike traditional media, social media encourages two-way communication, allowing users to interact with content and with one another rather than merely receiving information. This interactive nature has made it an influential medium for communication across different sectors of society. Some religious organisations view social media as a tool that can be used to spread the gospel.

[22]Towns, "Changing Paradigms," 159.

Although social media has been in existence since late 1990s, it gained recognition and a certain level of influence in the twentieth century, following rapid changes in technology.[23] The invention of blogging sites in the early 2000s led to the popularity of social media. These platforms were given recognition in 2006 when Facebook and Twitter were made available and accessible to users globally.[24] Since then social media platforms has continued to evolve. While platforms such as Facebook and YouTube continue to maintain global influence, some, like Flickr and Myspace, waned, and others, like Xanga, have gradually disappeared. At the same time, new social media platforms continue to emerge, showing the dynamic nature of digital communication.[25]

van Dijck enumerates different types of social media platforms: social network sites, user-generated content, trading and marketing sites, and play and game sites.[26] This classification is not exhaustive because there are many other categories. The major sites this research focuses on are social network and user-generated content sites, which are mainly sites where sociality and creativity thrive, making these platforms a better option for social media evangelism.

The rapid growth of internet-enabled smartphones has played a significant role in expanding the use of social media across the world.[27] Increased availability and accessibility of these smart phones and affordable internet access have enabled billions of people from diverse parts of the world to participate actively in one or more social media platforms. Consequently, social media has evolved from being just a technological trend to an essential medium for communication.

Today, social media platforms extend beyond entertainment and personal updates. Governments, businesses, non-profits, and religious institutions all use these platforms to communicate with their audience. Their ability to provide instant access to information, facilitate interaction, and encourage

[23] Drew, "Complete History of Social Media," 1.
[24] Drew, "Complete History of Social Media," 2.
[25] van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity,* 8.
[26] van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity,* 8.
[27] Poushter, Bishop, and Chwe,"Social Media Use Continues to Rise," 7.

active participation has transformed the way individuals and organisations communicate. As a result, social media has become one of the most influential communication tools in contemporary society.

Despite its widespread use and many benefits, social media presents both opportunities and challenges.

Challenges

Generally, social media has had a positive impact on communication over the years; however, it is not without challenges. According to Agbawe, some scholars argue that social media has brought about significant opportunities that have led to transformation in societies and advancement in communication, but it has also brought about challenges affecting societies.[28]

One significant challenge is misinformation. Ling Hang observes that through these social media platforms, wrong information or fake news can easily spread like wildfire due to the ease of sharing content across platforms such as Facebook and Twitter which has caused more harm than good in the real world.[29] Another challenge is addiction. Social media, if not properly checked, can easily be addictive, affecting the productivity of individuals.[30] This addiction can expose them to different content, both those considered as healthy and unhealthy.

Cyberbullying also is of major concern. The anonymity and accessibility social media provides can encourage harassment, trolling and abusive behaviours online. People can easily harass others on social media which may damage reputations, emotional distress, and in extreme cases lead to depression and suicide. Privacy and data security are also a challenge because personal data are often collected on these social media platforms, and most times these data shared online can pose as a threat if misused or obtained by the wrong people. This raises concern because it can lead to scandals and breach of privacy.[31]

[28] Agbawe, "Challenges and Prospects of Social Media," 18-32.
[29] Hang, "The Impact of Social Media," 2.
[30] Agbawe, "Challenge and Prospects of Social Media," 28.
[31] Hang, "The Impact of Social Media," 2.

Advantages

Despite the challenges enumerated above, social media offers different advantages that have transformed modern communication. One of its greatest strengths is ability to reach wider audiences from different communities, states, countries, and continents at the same time. Social media transcends physical boundaries. Nona Jones describes social media as the "digital public square" emphasising that unlike the traditional public square it is not restricted by location or time; instead, it makes enables people around the world to interact with shared content.[32] Another major advantage is the speed through which information is communicated. News, educational resources, scientific discoveries, employment opportunities, sporting events, and other forms of information can be shared and accessed almost immediately by users around the world.

Unlike many traditional forms of communication, social media promotes two-way interaction rather than one-way communication. Users can respond to content by commenting, asking questions, sharing posts and participating in online communities. Such an interactive environment encourages dialogue, collaboration, and strong relationships between content creators and their audiences.

Another advantage is the permanence and accessibility of digital content. Information shared on social media platforms can easily be retrieved through online searches. Consequently, messages can continue reaching new audiences long after they were originally published. An additional advantage is that social media is cost effective compared to traditional media. Research by Bocala-Wiedemann shows that social media is not just accessible, but also free, fast and convenient to make and share posts.[33] This is particularly beneficial for churches and Christian organisations that may not have the resources to utilise more expensive forms of media for evangelism.

These characteristics make social media a particularly valuable platform for contemporary Christian evangelism. Its global reach, interactive nature,

[32] Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry*, 39.
[33] Bocala-Wiedemann, "Social Media as a Tool," 29

accessibility, permanence, and cost-effectiveness provide churches with unprecedented opportunities to proclaim the gospel beyond geographical boundaries. Nevertheless, the church must also navigate challenges such as misinformation, cyberbullying, and privacy concerns to ensure that these platforms are used responsibly, ethically, and effectively in fulfilling the great commission.

The African Church and Social Media

As technology continues to evolve, the African church faces an important decision: whether to resist digital technologies because of their perceived risks or to embrace them as strategic tools for evangelism. Given the increasing influence of digital communication on contemporary society, the church cannot afford to ignore the opportunities that technology presents for proclaiming the gospel. The digital age is characterised by technology and media. Technology over the years has continued to influence different aspects of human communities and facets of life such as religion, morality and even productivity, solving problems and ensuring improvements. Technology and media are intertwined because it is through technology that media was created. Media is a platform through which communication takes place and information is shared. It has different forms, including print, digital and electronics.

Since Scripture does not give a one-size-fits-all method for evangelism, the church should remain open for contextualisation and innovation in fulfilling the great commission. Nevertheless, some African Christians remain skeptical of social media, viewing it as a secular or even morally compromising space. Heidi Campbell confirms that while these concerns are valid, they should not discourage engagement. Instead, they should call for theological reflection and ethical practice in the digital realm.[34] Instead of rejecting digital platforms because of their misuse, the church should focus on how they can be used responsibly to faithfully preach the gospel and fulfil its calling as the "light of the world" (Matthew 5:16).

The African church's engagement with technology should therefore be intentional rather than indifferent. Nyarko observes that although digital

[34] Campbell, *Digital Religion,* 56–58.

platforms are often associated with immoral or harmful content, the platforms themselves are not inherently evil. Rather, their impact depends on how they are used. Nyarko argues that if the church withdraws completely from these digital spaces, it risks surrendering valuable opportunities to positively influence society with biblical values and the message of the gospel.[35] Consequently, the challenge before the African church is not whether technology should be used, but how it can be used wisely, ethically, and effectively for evangelism.

Encouragingly, many churches in urban areas across Africa are fully exploring social media platforms for evangelism. Some churches now livestream their services, conduct online Bible studies, publish devotional materials, interact with followers, share gospel messages through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok. Well known examples include Redeemed Christian Church of God (@rccgworldwide), Dunamis Intternational Gospel Centre (@DunamisGospel), Streams of Joy International (@streamsofjoyinternational), Loveworld (@loveworld.globalfellowship), and Koinonia (@koinonia)—all of which maintain active digital ministries that extend their outreach beyond the physical walls of the church.

Despite these encouraging developments, the adoption of digital evangelism remains uneven across Africa. Haruna Akebok observes that urban churches generally adopt digital ministry more readily than rural churches because of the digital divide. He explained that many rural communities continue to experience limited internet connectivity, inadequate technological infrastructure, and reduced access to digital devices. In addition, digital literacy tends to be lower in many rural areas, making the implementation of online evangelistic strategies more challenging.[36]

While some churches have embraced and taken advantage of social media platforms to win more souls, disciple and update their members, extend their membership beyond their geographical location, preach the gospel, and share their church activities to mass audience, many African churches encounter significant obstacles that hinder their full engagement with social media. Beyond infrastructural challenges, many African churches also encounter

[35] Nyarko, "The Church, Digital Technology and Media," 6
[36] Akebok, "The Role of Social Media," 117.

institutional and cultural barriers that hinder their effective use of social media. Some of these challenges include dependence on foreign technologies, unstable electricity supply, poor network infrastructure, limited digital literacy, inadequate availability of quality Christian content, and concerns about online criticism or cancel culture. [37]

In addition to these institutional barriers, digital platforms present several ethical and practical challenges. These include cyberbullying, the spread of false information, online incivility, pornography, sexting, cyber fraud, and excessive use of social media. Such concerns have led some Christians to regard social media as a secular space unsuitable for evangelism.[38] However these risks should not result in complete rejection of digital platforms by the church. Rather, they highlight the need for responsible digital engagement, sound theological guidance, and appropriate digital literacy within the church.

Although significant challenges remain the growing adoption of social media by African churches demonstrates that these obstacles are not insurmountable. With intentional investment in digital infrastructure, improved digital literacy, ethical online practices, and sound theological reflection, the African church can effectively integrate technology into its evangelistic mission. Rather than replacing traditional methods of evangelism, digital media should serve as a complementary tool that enables the church to proclaim the unchanging gospel in ways that are relevant and accessible to contemporary society.

Opportunities for Evangelism through Social Media

Social media does not only have negative influence on its users like some suggest. It also presents unparalleled evangelism opportunities for the church. It is not the platform that is the problem, but how it is been used. Pakpahan et al give the possibilities and opportunities presented to the church by social media for evangelism as follows:

1. Privacy and confidentiality in sharing of information.

[37] Ojeifo, "The Church, Social Media, and Politics," *84-85*
[38] Bocala-Wiedemann, "Social Media as a Tool," 27.

2. The gospel can be preached with no time or location limitation.
3. It presents opportunity for establishing relationships, communication, and conduct discussions without being limited by time or place.
4. It makes rooms for hosting meetings without having to be present physically.
5. It gives access to wider audience.
6. Youth can easily be accessed through these platforms.
7. It makes information available quickly and precisely reaching places and people. Therefore, it could extend the reach of the church and propagate the message of the gospel beyond the four walls of the church, beyond physical meetings and physical barriers across different countries, including the unreached in closed countries.
8. Through groups, relationships and conversations online, the church has the opportunity to disciple and mentor people they have never met or might never get the opportunity to reach without the help of social media.
9. Different types of videos can be posted and accessed by wider audience.
10. There are different formats which contents can be posted such as text, images, sounds, animations and other multimedia data.[39]

One of the churches that have leveraged on these opportunities is Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). The church has a Facebook page with over 28k followers where they post sermons and prayers. From audience engagements, one can see impacts of the sermons and prayers posted on their pages. Since social media impacts are seen through comments, likes, shares, engagement and followership, it is evident that RCCG are having positive impact on followers. Apart from the RCCG Sermon and Prayers Facebook page, some branches of the Church also have their pages where they post sermons, church activities, post program invites, and prayers across social media.

[39] Pakpahan et al, *Social Media and Effective Evangelism*, 121-122.

The digital space is not without challenges, as we have seen, but the ability of the African church to find ways through these challenges, to change their attitude towards social media, and to adopt the numerous opportunities provided by these platforms will increase her effectiveness in fulfilling her mission.

Effective Strategies for Social Media Evangelism

Bocala-Wiedemann observes that simply having a presence on social media does not guarantee effective evangelism.[40] Rather, the effectiveness of social media evangelism largely depends on the quality and faithfulness of content produced, the strategic use of the social media platforms, meaningful audience engagement, and a clear understanding of how these platforms work. Therefore, churches seeking to adopt social media evangelism must be intentional and strategic. Effectiveness for the church should not be measured by online followership or visibility but by the extent to which engagements shows that the gospel is faithfully communicated, discipleship takes place, and the church's work continues to advance the *missio Dei*.

One of the most important principles of effective social media evangelism is creating biblically faithful and contextually relevant content. While engaging visuals, short-form media, infographics, and other available multimedia formats are effective in attracting the younger audiences that dominate these platforms, the church's primary concern should not be audience attention alone. Rather created content should faithful communicate the gospel and lead to repentance, discipleship, and spiritual growth.

Pakpahan et al opined that much of the content on social media produced by Christian influencers focuses more on personal branding and appearance than on the transformative power of the gospel.[41] Therefore, African churches must be careful not to make the desire for engagement surpass the purpose of sharing the gospel. Instead, engagement should be the vehicle for communicating the gospel not the end itself.

[40] Bocala-Wiedemann, "Social Media as a Tool," 22.
[41] Pakpahan et al, *Social Media and Effective Evangelism*, 119.

Bocala-Wiedemann suggests that contents such as memes, quotes, facts, and info graphics using short videos or pictures attracts more engagement than other content formats.[42] These formats can serve as valuable tools for evangelism when they are made in such a way that the gospel is proclaimed in clear, relatable, and contextually relevant way. This reflects contextualisation, whereby the unchanging message of the gospel is proclaimed through ways that people from different background or context can easily understand. Churches should produce professional, well edited, high quality content that captures audience attention while still being biblically sound.

Beyond producing quality content, churches should also understand the different characteristics of different social media platforms. Knowing the appropriate platform is essential because each platform attracts different audiences and emphasises different content formats.[43] Just as missionaries adjusted their method of evangelism to different cultural contexts without changing the message of the gospel, African churches must also understand the communication culture of different platforms to effectively proclaim the gospel online..

Nona Jones identified the strength of various social media platforms: YouTube is solely for video content, Instagram is for visual contents, X is more conversationally driven, TikTok is for video sharing, Facebook which is mainly for connection allows for contents in different forms.[44] Other platforms to also consider are WhatsApp and Telegram. African churches should prayerfully choose platforms according to their objectives, audience, and the nature of their message. Platforms analytics, posting schedules, different content formats, and a study of other successful digital ministries will go a long way to ensure success in strategically proclaiming the gospel.

Another important element of effective social media evangelism is the development of a strong online identity known as page persona. Page persona is the church's online identity, which distinguishes the church from others. This is characterised by a unique voice, consistent message, and visual identity. Maintaining a strong online identity demands that the church be actively

[42] Bocala-Wiedemann, "Social Media as a Tool," 29.
[43] Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry,* 40.
[44] Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry,* 42-52.

involved with content and followers, maintaining consistency.[45] The persona of the Church should reflect convictions, missionary vision, and commitment to proclaiming the gospel.

There must be authenticity and consistency when it comes to the church and her contents or message. Ensure transparency in the post and share biblically sound messages; be consistent in sticking to a posting schedule and do not compromise but keep your focus on the message, the gospel. Build your brand identity (logos, colours, hash tags) and post consistently on your page to keep your audience updated and in touch. And in order to ensure that you meet the needs of your audience, know your audience, their preferences, pain points and their interests.[46] Knowing all these will help the ensure effective interaction.

Beyond building an online presence through followers, likes, and comments, effective social media evangelism requires nurturing genuine relationships and discipleship. Among the platforms suitable for online evangelism, communities can be formed through Facebook groups, WhatsApp broadcast groups, and live sessions. These communities can facilitate Bible studies, discussions on faith-related issues, prayer requests, testimonies, and responses to questions. In this way, social media becomes more than a broadcasting tool; it becomes a platform for Christian fellowship, spiritual growth, and discipleship.

The effectiveness of social media evangelism should also be evaluated continuously through intentional reflection. Statistics such as views, shares, comments, and reach provides a valuable insight on audience engagement on social media platforms that can help the church strategise better on how to effectively communicate the gospel and interact with the audience. However, these metrics should not be the main measure of success.

As argued throughout this study, effectiveness for the church is measured theologically not technologically. Therefore, the interpretation analytics for the church's social media platform should be interpreted alongside sound biblical interpretation, discipleship, spiritual growth, meaningful Christian online community formation, and the church's involvement in God's mission.

[45] David, "Content Creation," 2.
[46]David, "Content Creation," 2.

When the attention of the church shifts from its primary goal which is faithfully preach the gospel, it risks replacing that goal with online popularity and monetisation. Analytics should be a supporting tool for online mission, not its definition of success.

A practical case study of an African church that has strategically been using social media is Streams of Joy International led by Pastor Jerry Eze. The church's daily online program New Season Prophetic Prayers and Declarations has consistently had thousands of viewers. According to official analytics given by the ministry, a total of 1,130,665 views through their Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram page and a total reach of 4,531,973 was recorded.[47] This success illustrates the importance of selecting appropriate platforms, maintaining consistency in content production, and fostering continuous audience engagement. These statistics alone do not prove the effectiveness of this platform. Instead, the comments and testimonies of followers show its effectiveness. This is an example of a digital Christian fellowship beyond physical boundaries because people from all over the world participate on this platform.[48]

Ultimately, effective social media evangelism requires more than enthusiasm. It requires knowledge, intentionality, and continuous learning. Church leaders and members who desire to participate in digital evangelism should therefore receive adequate training in theology or Bible interpretation, digital literacy, content creation, audience engagement, online ethics, and the effective use of personal and organisational social media accounts.

Such training will help the church to not merely master technology but to also use it effectively for the proclamation of the gospel. When the church ensures sound theology, contextual sensitivity, and digital competence, social media becomes an effective tool to faithfully carry out the *Missio Dei* in a digital age.

Conclusion

In the digital age where technology and social media continue to shape human communication, the African church must embrace digital evangelism as an

[47] Jerry Uchechukwu Eze, https://www.facebook.com/share/17uWzriSfU/
[48] Streams of Joy International, https://www.facebook.com/share/1MBg4RFiBM/

essential tool for its missionary strategy. Such adoption does not mean changing the message of the gospel, but rather communicating the unchanging message through contextually relevant methods. Social media evangelism should not be viewed as replacing traditional methods but as a complementary approach that enables the church fulfil its mission. The words of the Apostle Paul provides a foundation for this approach: "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor 9:22). Paul's willingness to use this method without compromising the gospel shows the importance of contextualising evangelism in every generation. In this generation, "all possible means" includes the responsible and intentional use of online platforms.

Social media platforms present the African church with an opportunity to reach diverse audience with the gospel across geographical, cultural, and generational boundaries. It enables the church to engage both believers and unbelievers alike, extending the message of the gospel beyond the walls of the church into homes, offices, schools, and other digital spaces where young people interact daily. However, the effectiveness of online evangelism is not guaranteed simply by maintaining an online presence. Rather, it requires intentional planning, biblically sound and engaging content, strategic use of appropriate platforms, meaningful audience engagement, consistent communication, and a commitment to building authentic online communities that encourage spiritual growth and discipleship.

Finally, this study argues that the effectiveness of social media evangelism is not measured by visibility, audience size, likes, or comments. Rather, it is evaluated by how faithfully the gospel has been proclaimed, how discipleship takes place, how it promotes spiritual growth, and the extent to which the church is actively involved in *missio Dei*. When the African church employs social media evangelism within a biblically grounded, contextually relevant, and theologically informed framework, it becomes more than a communication tool; it becomes an effective contemporary mission tool. Through these platforms the church continues to proclaim the unchanging message of the gospel in a digital world.

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