

SOCIAL MEDIA IMPLICATIONS ON CHRISTIAN YOUTHS IN SELECTED CHURCHES OF OYO TOWNSHIP

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Abstract

Communication is an inevitable and indispensable phenomenon in the world of humanity. And from creation to the present time, man has developed various media of sending and receiving messages. In our contemporary period, social media has come to stay as major channels of communication globally. This study therefore underscores the social media and its implications on Christian youths in selected churches of Oyo Township. The study adopted descriptive research design with the use of structured questionnaires; guided by five research questions. One hundred (100) respondents were drawn from ten (10) churches through the use of systematic random sampling. These churches cut across main-line, Pentecostal and African Independent Churches. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, tables and percentage method. The study revealed that social media are grossly abused especially among Christian youths both within and outside the church. It is also discovered that social media can be of great benefits to the youths and the church if properly channeled. It was therefore recommended that; parents and guardians should be proactive and responsible to monitor, caution and educate their wards in order to curb excesses. The church also should positively engage the youth via social media by organizing seminars, conferences and dissemination of Bible studies and gospel messages.

Keywords: Church, Communication, Social Media, Youth, Oyo Township

Introduction

It is of note that relationship is paramount to human existence. This is why the creator resolved to create a help-mate for man, for the purpose of companionship. The strength of any relationship is said to be communication. Hence, communication is as old as man. From creation to the present dispensation, various media of information dissemination had evolved in the history of mankind. In traditional African societies, for example, sending and receiving messages were done through oral traditions. These include: folklores, pithy sayings, symbolic representations, totemic signs, talking drums among others. Most of these were done through coded signs and sounds.

The world today is celebrating the improvements in communication technology which has broadened the scope of communication through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The Social media have become major and popular means of communication world over. It is estimated that over one billion people log into Facebook each day. Instagram boasts more than 500 million users each month, and Twitter has 328 Million monthly active users (AGFinancial, 2020). Social media usage is one of the most popular online activities. In 2020, according to Tankovska (2021), over 3.6 billion people were using social media worldwide which represented approximately half of the world's population. This number projected to increase almost 4.41 billion in 2025.

Arising from the aforementioned statistics, it is discovered that the youths mostly use social media. For example, according to Brain (2021), on average, 63% of the world's population aged 13+ is on the social media. Unsurprisingly, 90% of those age 18-29, and 82% of those aged 30-47 are active users of social media in US. This is likely to be the experience in Africa, although, there is no accurate statistical recorded data. Thus, this study investigated the Church and Social media with its implications on the Christian youths within Oyo Township.

The Concept of Social Media

The Social media are interactive technologies that allow the creation or sharing/exchange of information, ideas, career interests, and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks (Kietzmann, Hermkens, 2011). According to Edwards (2016), in 1978, the first true electronic BBSs arrived with the Computer Bulletin Board system in Chicago. It first came online on February 16, 1978. In the mid-1990s, the World Wide Web (www, or the web) was added to the internet. Bruggemann (2012) asserted that another important feature of social media is digital media data compression. Kirkpatrick (2011) pointed out that, the development of social media began with simple platforms. The following social networking services were launched: Geocities (November 1994); classmates.com (December, 1995); sixdegrees.com (May, 1997).

There are many socio-media platforms, these include Open diary (October 20, 1998), Flickr (February 10, 2004), hi5 (June 27, 2003), Twitter (July 15, 2006), Snapchat (September, 2011), Live journal (April 15, 1999), My space (August 1, 2003), Tumblr (February 12, 2007), Tiktok (November, 2016), Friendster (March 22, 2003), Orkut (January 22, 2004), Yahoo (March 16, 2005), Instagram (July 5, 2010), Linkedin (May 5, 2003), Facebook, now META (February 4, 2004), Bebo (July, 2005), Google+ (June 28, 2011), Barbara (2012).

In the words of Bumsoo and Scharlach (2021), on the classification and evaluation of social media content in five countries (Germany, Italy, Japan, South Korea and the United States).; it is discovered that the people around the world share content through social media at unprecedented levels; with over 720, 000 hours on video uploaded to Youtube, 95 million photos and videos posted to Instagram, and 500 million tweets sent each day. The study reveals that older people were more like to appreciate friends and family, religion and

inspiration, and politics, younger people were more likely to appreciate topics like games and entertainment.

Rabia and Aboul (2015) note that, “*Social media provides a space for individuals, especially the youth, to participate in the act of utilization as well as in the construction and sharing of ideas, knowledge and culture*”. From the foregoing, it is indicated that the youths mostly patronize social media. The Library of Parliament (2012) asserted that increasing availability of broadband, software tool, development of powerful computers, mobile devices, the rapid use of the social media by young people and increased affordability of these technological devices have all contributed to the growth of social media network. Kayode-Adedeji, Oyero and Aririguzoh (2017) opined that social media take the form of varieties of tech-enabled activities. These activities include: Photo sharing, blogging, social gaming, social networks, video sharing, business networks, virtual worlds, review and much more. In all these, social media users tend to be younger. Nearly 90% of people between ages of 18 and 29 used at least one form of social media (Greewood, Perrun and Duggan, 2016).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to explore the social media with the implications on the Christian youths in Oyo Township. The specific objectives include:

- i. To identify causes of abuses of social media among the Christian youths
- ii. To determine the level of negative effects of social media on the Christian youths
- iii. To examine the positive contributions of social media to the life of Christian youths
- iv. To see how church leaders can explore social media for the propagation of gospel among Christian youths
- v. To suggest possible ways to curb excesses or the abuse of social media by Christian youths.

Research Questions

In order to do justice to this study, the following questions were raised:

- i. What are the causes of the abuse of social media among the Christian youths?
- ii. To what extent has social media negatively affected the Christian youth?
- iii. How can Church leaders explore social media for the propagation of the gospel among Christian youths?
- iv. What are the possible ways to curb excesses or the abuse of social media among Christian youths?

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive research design which afforded the researcher the opportunity to describe events and situations the way they are. A total of one hundred (100) respondents were drawn from ten (10) churches through the use of Systematic Random Sampling. The churches cut across the Mainline, Pentecostal and African Independent Churches which include: Baptist, Anglican, Catholic, Christ Apostolic Church, Redeemed Christian Church of God, New Covenant Church, Deeper Life, Celestial Church of Christ, Methodist and Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church. Data were collected through the use of structured questionnaire which contain fifteen (15) items. These were guided by five (5) research questions. The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts, tables and percentage method.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: *Causes of the abuse of social media among the Christian youths*

S/N	ITEMS	A %	SA %	D %	SD %	Total %
1.	Carefree attitude of parents towards their wards is a major cause of social media abuse.	38 38%	26 26%	32 32%	04 4%	100 100%
2.	Peer group influence also forms major cause of social media abuse.	20 20%	76 76%	04 4%	-	100 100%
3.	Unguided and vulnerability of different post, film and nude pictures on social media also responsible for the abuse.	26 26%	66 66%	04 4%	04 4%	100 100%

Source: Field work 2021

Table 1 above shows the responses of the respondents on the causes of the abuse of social media among the Christian youths. Sixty four (64%) of the respondents agreed that the parents' lackadaisical attitudes can engender abuse of their wards on social media; while 36% did not oblige to the assertion raised.

Table 2: *Negative Effects of Social Media on Christian Youths*

S/N	ITEMS	A %	SA %	D %	SD %	Total %
4.	The academic of many youth suffers due to abuse of social media	40 40%	44 44%	12 12%	04 4%	100 100%
5.	Social vices become rampant among youths as a result of abuse of social media	46 46%	44 44%	08 8%	02 2%	100 100%
6.	Abuse of social media among the youth is a life-time waster.	38 38%	46 46%	12 12%	04 4%	100 100%

Source: Field work 2021

From Table 2, it is crystal clear that social media have serious damaging effects on the youths. This is reflected in the responses as stated above; 84% agreed to the fact, while the remaining 16% did not.

Table 3: *Positive Contributions of Social Media on Christian Youths*

S/N	ITEMS	A%	SA%	D%	SD%
7.	If properly utilized, social media expands the horizon of the knowledge of the youths.	42	38	18	02
8.	Social media exposes the youth to the wider world	38	58	04	-
9.	Useful information on spiritual upliftments and academics are disseminated and accessed through social media	44	28	16	12

In table 3, the respondents were of the view that, social media can positively contribute to the development of the Christian youths, 80% of the respondents agreed on this, while just 20% declined. This shows that the question raised is accepted.

Table 4: *Exploration of Social Media for the propagation of the gospel among Christian Youths*

S/N	ITEMS	A %	SA %	D %	SD %	Total %
10.	Biblical teachings and messages are easily brought to the door step of the youths via social media.	46 46%	34 34%	16 16%	04 4%	100 100%
11.	The youths are easily accessed for counseling and other spiritual programmes through social media.	60 60%	10 10%	22 22%	08 8%	100 100%
12.	Christian seminars and conferences are carried out via social media.	46 46%	28 28%	10 10%	16 16%	100 100%

Source: Field work 2021

From table 4 above the respondents' responses to the questionnaire items of research question 4; the percentage of the respondents that strongly agreed and agreed is 80%. It indicates that social media can be explored for the propagation of the gospel especially among the youths. .

Table 5: *Possible ways to curb excesses or abuse of Social Media by Christian youths*

S/N	ITEMS	A %	SA %	D %	SD %	Total %
13.	The parents and guidance should be proactive in monitoring the youths on the use of social media.	54 54%	44 44%	02 2%	-	100 100%
14.	Discipline is required from the Christian youths in the use of social media.	42 42%	54 54%	04 4%	-	100 100%
15.	The Church should equally educate the youths on the use of time.	54 54%	42 42%	04 4%	-	100 100%

Source: Field work 2021

The responses of the respondents from the table 5 above indicated the three items raised under the research question were accepted by almost all. The agreed and strongly agreed percentages (54% and 44% respectively) totally 98% attested to this.

Discussion of Findings

This study reveals that the social media is a laudable technological innovation which is contributing immensely to the growth and development of humanity, especially in the areas of accessibility of vital information useful for moral upbringing of the youth. The church also make use of social media in diverse ways especially among the youths, however, it is discovered that it has attendant negative consequences. For example, the academic of many youth suffer, social vices become rampant and precious time is wasted due to the abuse of social media.

The social media/Network has been the fastest avenue for the spread of sex clips, pornographic pictures, sex-provoking songs, sex items, among young people. And that is why conscious efforts should be put in place to curb the excesses. The abuses according to the study are caused among other factors, as a result of lackadaisical attitudes of parents towards their wards on the use of social media. Also, unguided contents of posts on social media through the regulating agencies exposed the youths to vices.

It is of note that, if properly utilized and guided, social media can be of great benefits both to the Church and the Christian youths. Useful information for spiritual upliftments and

academic development are easily disseminated and accessed via social media. Meetings, conferences, Bible Studies, Counseling and other spiritual programmes can be organized through the social media. More importantly, ideas, exposure and connections to friends and families within shortest time, are made possible through the social media.

This result is in tandem with the findings of Blake, Bumsoo and Scharlach (2011), Kayode-Adedeji, Oyero and Aririguzoh (2017), Dimka (2014); that the goal of interaction or socialization or relationship (whether human or electronic) is INFLUENCE! Inferentially, the Christian youth must be aware that he/she is constantly being influenced by what he/she see or hear or engaged in on the social media, hence, the need for censor and regulation of social media contents.

Forrester (2021) pointed out the benefits and good side of social media to the church; helping the church to connect with their members, as well as people who may not attend the church. Websites like Facebook offers a free, easy way to promote church events and strengthen the church community outside of Sunday services. However, misusing social media, even if unintended, can damage church ministry's reputation.

Conclusion

The study delved into the interplay between the Social media and Christian youths. Findings from the study revealed that social media are beneficiary both to the church and the Christian youths in so many ways if judiciously used. On the other hand, social media also can breed all manners of social vices if abused as we see it today in our contemporary time even among Christian youths.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of this study, the following recommendations were therefore made:

It is essential for the parents and guardians to be proactive and wake up to their responsibilities of paying keen attention and surveillance on their wards on the use of social media as a result of the risks involved in using it. They must not be left alone for long without checking on what they are doing on the computer system or their phones. Parents must not be care free or non-challant to their wards. This may be a dangerous disposition.

In the same vein, Christian youths should shun all forms of ungodly addiction and explore all means to feed on worthy things that will build and sustain the God-purity in them. They must be determined to stay pure even online. To achieve this, the youth must be disciplined and exercise self-control. Social media should be seen as tool for self-development. The fear of God must rule their hearts to run away from evils in this generation.

It is opposite also, to remind the Church to come up with pragmatic programmes and plans that will assist the youths. The church should develop a social media policy, train the youths and other church members on the proper and improper use of social media. The church website and social media pages, as well as posts made by others should be consistently monitored. The church should also engage the youth on worthwhile teachings and messages via social media.

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