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# General studies, information and communication technology and contemporary mission in Africa

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This study examines the relationship between general studies, information and communication technology (ICT), and contemporary evangelism in Nigeria. Information and communication technology (is defined as a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information. These technological tools and resources include computers, the Internet (websites, blogs and emails), live broadcasting technologies (radio, television and webcasting), recorded broadcasting technologies (podcasting, audio and video players, and storage devices) and telephony (fixed or mobile, satellite, visio/video conferencing, etc.). Contemporary evangelism and mission in Africa is a radical approach embarked upon by agents of modern religious thoughts and practices to expand the horizons of the mission of religion to mankind in the present dispensation through general studies (GS) and ICT programmes. Through the medium of ICT, Christian evangelism has received a boost in television, radio broadcasts, computers, and the Internet across cities and nations. This work is an attempt to examine the methods adopted by early missionaries in evangelising Africa vis-à-vis the modern techniques of GS and ICT, the challenges of mission, the concept of ICT and its various forms such as phones, television, radio, computers, and the Internet, and their relevance to mission. This work therefore adopted historical, missiological, and phenomenological approaches in the analysis of data.

**Contribution:** This work discovers that radical development in communication across the globe has influenced and affected Christian methods and practices of carrying out 'the mission of religion' and its evangelical perspective, among others.

**Keywords:** general studies; GS; information and communication technology; ICT; Evangelism; mission; Africa.

## Introduction

African Christians have greatly benefitted from the establishment and function of information and communication technology (ICT) services, especially in the contemporary era. Information and communication technology is defined as a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information. These technological tools and resources include computers, the Internet (websites, blogs and emails), live broadcasting technologies (radio, television and webcasting), recorded broadcasting technologies (podcasting, audio and video players, and storage devices) and telephony (fixed or mobile, satellite, visio/video-conferencing, etc.) (UNESCO 2009). Twenty-first century is blessed with resourceful advances in science and technology dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries. These can account for periods of enlightenment, rationalisation, scientific birth, technological breakthroughs, and innovations. Breakthroughs in technology can account for the great advancements in communication, transportation, and service delivery in all fields of human engagement. Advances and breakthroughs in technology have enhanced communication in Christian evangelisation also. According to Paul VI (1976), 'to evangelize is to bear witness to God revealed by Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Becoming a witness to Christ is circumstantial or contextual'. Metuh (1996:36–50) explains further that, as a human endeavour, evangelisation could and should vary according to the context and circumstances of place, time, and sometimes the skills of the evangeliser. Metuh's view stresses the present need for the conceptualisation of the gospel message of Christ.

The report of the African Bishops Conference in Rome in 1974 drew a thin line between missionary evangelisation and pastoral evangelisation. To them, missionary evangelisation, or primary

evangelisation, or Kerygma, is the first announcing or proclamation of Christ and his gospel to non-Christians whose faith is thus awakened and enkindled. While pastoral evangelisation is all the activities connected with nourishing and fostering a living faith among the people of God, and these include catechesis, homiletics, theology, pastoral, and all the other activities of the sacred ministry aimed at building and deepening the faith in Christian communities.

Missionary evangelism seems to fit properly into the main theme and the sub-themes of this article. This can be implied from the point of view of the conceptuality of mission or evangelism. One of the reasons for the contextualisation of the gospel message of Jesus is to make the core values of the gospel address human problems. Metuh (1996) further elucidates:

> Contextualization, on the one hand, is the effort to make the gospel refer to the context and situation of those to whom the message is being brought. Every evangelist must conform to the basic truth of the gospel message. (p. 36)

It is in this same line of thought that the impartation of gospel values is deemed necessary and that it be integrated into the general studies (GS) curriculum. Catechesis, or the teaching of core values of religion like hard work, honesty, obedience, among others, should be systematically inculcated into young minds while GS lectures are in progress. The essence of employing technology in evangelism is to communicate God's message of love to all segments of human society with less stress and at a faster rate to a large mass of audiences. Important messages such as the Gospel of Jesus Christ to humanity should be communicated to all nations and ages at all times and seasons. Namwera (1990:123–136) establishes the origin of human communication in God, our creator. He says that:

> To truly communicate God's example of communion to humanity, technological gadgets have to be used. Although ICT added a new communication network, but the relevance of one-to-one and group-to-group. (Namwera 1990:123)

Personal relationships cannot be overemphasised. Some of the technological gadgets include television networks, radio stations, and Internet-backed services such as desktops, laptops, and handsets. If we accept the fact that ICT, has seriously affected improvements in service delivery and productivity in virtually all human engagements in Africa and the rest of the world, evangelism and religion are no exception. In the case of religion, ICT has aided in the transmission of the gospel message of our Lord Jesus from one area to another in a matter of minutes and hours. The ICT platform has created many channels of television and radio stations across the globe. Christian churches and groups catch on to this golden opportunity offered by ICT to preach the word of God to millions of listeners and viewers across nations and cities around the world. Christian doctrines, by this means, are reinforced, especially in Christian cities where there are other contending and equally attractive ideologies that can negatively sway the attention of Christian adherents.

Apart from this, ICT platforms have exposed the beauty of Christian liturgy, which is variety in style, sequence, and time. It has facilitated Christian core beliefs to be aired, heard, and appreciated by Christians themselves and others outside the Christian faith. Modern evangelism is more radical than the period of the Apostles and disciples of Jesus. The radicality stems from its outward disposition in terms of numerical strength, evangelism stratagem, and its numerous churches and ministers. The ICT platforms are able to help religion reach all parts of the world through effective communication mechanisms embedded in the mission command of Jesus the founder.

## General studies programme and evangelism and mission work

The need to expand the horizons of understanding for Nigerian students led the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) to create the general studies programme (GSP). The NUC thereupon saw to its enforcement and domiciliation in public and private higher institutions in Nigeria. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka, happens to be the originator of this wholesome idea. Iffih (1998) examines the historical origin of GS in Nigerian universities. He says that:

> The establishment of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, on 07 October 1960, was shortly followed by the launch of the General Studies program in the 1961–1962 session. Today, the general studies programs have become approved programs in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It has four units. General studies program 201 and 202 are for social sciences for the first and second semesters, respectively. In the social sciences unit specifically, religion is taught to students, and through this channel, Christian tenets are spread across a widely dispersed audience of undergraduate students. (p. 2)

The students are the leaders of tomorrow, and as such, any training for them should be whole, not one-sided. Unfortunately, one-sided training, especially for young minds, can lead to personality disorders. Religion is part and parcel of the social structure that aids any progressive society. It stabilises moral conduct and assures governments of the obedience of their members to legal authorities. It is also true that social change or transformations such as education and materialism affect worshippers of Christian religion. By implication, these transformations in human society affect religion and evangelism. The most vulnerable members of society when it comes to social conflicts are the youth. This is largely because of their inexperience with life in general. To bridge this gap in experience of life in general, NUC created GSP 201 and 202, in which religion, as a part of social science, can assuage life challenges affecting undergraduates (youths) through the means of evangelism. Evangelism cannot be restricted to the church environment alone. It must enter the classrooms and lecture halls. What is to be preached to students at universities includes the imbuement of Christian virtues of honesty, hard work, discipline, sincerely, and others. These Christian virtues can easily affect the students through the positive actions of lecturers, who also double as mentors to the youth. More so, in the School of General

Studies, international conferences for staff and the outside world are organised. During these conferences, religious topics are presented and debated. Also, there are usually seminar group presentations by students in different departments and during general lectures in the different faculties of the university. Through these channels, religious virtues are passed down again and again to a large audience globally.

## Methods of evangelisation in the early church

Methods of evangelisation here apply to those channels through which the good news of Jesus Christ was transmitted, either in the past epoch of the disciples and apostles of Christ or in modern approaches by evangelists and preachers of the word. Method, in the understanding of Hornby (2002), concerns itself with a particular way of doing something that is reliable and effective in data analysis. It is the quality of being well planned and organised. To disseminate the word of God to the audience, the preacher must organise his thought in such a manner that it will sound convincing, logical, and forceful at the same time. Wikipedia believes that to be sent is the first step of evangelism, which is rooted in the act of sending (apostolic). The Greek words apostle and apostolic were coined from the word *apostello*, which means to send. Comparatively, the Latin word *mittome* means to be sent. It is from these root words that the word mission emerged. To be sent, therefore, is the foundation of Christian mission and evangelism. The following biblical verses explicate sending as an important and necessary foundation for evangelism:

- **The burning bush (Exodus 3:1–4:17):** Here, God calls Moses and instructs him on what to do. Despite his resistance, God's will prevailed.
- **Isaiah 6:** God calls Isaiah and sends him to Israel. After purifying his unclean lips, that is, his sins, Isaiah was sent to announce God's punishment to them as well as his exile to foreign land.
- **Ezekiel 1–3:** God chooses Jeremiah as a prophet of the nations to plant, build, and uproot.
- **Jesus calls the first disciples (Mark 1:16–20, 2:14–17):** These were professional fishermen. Jesus mission was to make them fishermen instead of fish. The mission establishes the importance of the human soul over material things in God's judgement or evaluation.
- **The conversion and call of Paul (Ac 9:1–30):** Saul, re-named Paul, was called to serve Jesus on his mission to persecute Christians at Damascus. This was a twist of fate.

Now, let us look at the methods of evangelisation briefly in the early church:

- **Kerygma:** This means to proclaim. Kerygma can be defined as the public teaching of the word of God. It is a public or general act that announces the Christian foundational stone upon which all methods of evangelism stand. Its central message is that Jesus is the saviour of humanity and that the church founded by Christ can be trusted as the channel of God's salvific plan. This public proclamation is considered 'good' 'news' because it brings with it the salvation and liberation of humanity from sin and the devil's disturbances. In the time of Jesus and his disciples, Kerygma occurred in the temple, synagogue, mountain tops, seaside, and open places. In our own time, it happens in churches, crusade grounds, market places, stadia, adoration grounds, and ministry environments.
- **Martyria:** This implies witnessing the good news of Jesus Christ about God's kingdom in a personal way. It is an outward sign of conviction and attachment to Jesus message about God's kingdom. Witnessing the effect and truth of the mission of Jesus is witnessing his resurrection from death. Luke's Gospel recounts in chapters 24:44–48 the importance of being witnesses to Jesus events. Jesus called his apostles and disciples witnesses to his public life, evangelistic outreach, death, and resurrection. Martyria (witnessing) is therefore one of the many ways of proclaiming the kingdom message of God as championed by Jesus. Practically, it implies imitating Jesus in many possible ways of establishing and proclaiming his kingdom principles on this planet.
- **Didache:** Is teaching or giving instruction. The underlying reason to teach or instruct, especially as it concerns the message of Jesus to humanity, is to, among other things, explain the reason for salvation in Jesus Christ, his personality, and his mission on earth. Instruction was a means of teaching or orienting new converts to the new faith. It is a means of strengthening Christian faith and community, a means of forming future Christian leaders, and preserving church history, tradition, and belief systems.
- **Apologia:** Implies defending one's faith in trying moments or circumstances. Defence of one's faith is a practical means of evangelism in that it defends the core assumptions of a particular faith or religion against heresy and contrary or negative views about a particular faith. Apologetics came at a time in the life of the early Church to defend heretical teachings of Arianism, Masonism, among others. The early Church fathers developed water-proof methods of defending the teachings of Jesus via many methods such as public defence, writing, and martyrdom.

## Concept of information and communication technology and its relevance to modern evangelism

The 21st century has been a period marked by unprecedented landmarks in the scientific world. Change is one unchangeable phenomenon, including in the world of communication. The scientific world, being in constant research on how life could be globalised within a network, led to the emergence of what is known as ICT. The ICT that as a concept covers the transfer and use of all kinds of information, is presently conceived as the foundation of the economy, and is a driving force of social change in the 21st century (Gorana & Dario 2011). The ICT

covers 'hardware, software, the Internet, telephony, and content, application, and support service, provided by entitles ranging from corporate giants to garage entrepreneurs to individual developers and open-source networks' (William, Beth & Robert 2007:6). Internet, a strong organ of ICT, has been very instrumental in the emergence of a globalised world. As a milestone of this age, ICT has continued to describe, shape, and define everything in human existence, most prominently the world wide web (Olusola 2015:634). This shows that without the advent of ICT, the world of today will be like that of the centuries just immediately after the death of Christ.

Information and communication technology, having assisted in other areas of human affairs, also contributes to evangelism and the spread of the gospel. The spread of evangelism has been faster and easier through social media platforms. These social media platforms include *Facebook*, *WhatsApp*, *Twitter*, *and Google Plus*, among others. These social media platforms could be used to spread and share gospel pictures, handbills, postal, emblem, audio, and visual messages, among others. Figure 1 shows the statistics of people using some of these online platforms around the world. For this article, the first two, that is, *Facebook* and *WhatsApp*, are taken as samples because they gained wide popularity over time.

## Computers and the Internet in the 21st century: A historical evaluation

In 1613, the term computer was used to describe a human being who performed calculations, computations, and some statistical analysis. Table 1 below shows the number of social media users in Nigeria. The definition of a computer remained like that; however, by the end of the 19th century, there was birth of machines as a result of the industrial revolution of that time, and the job of these machines was calculation. At this point, the machine was called the
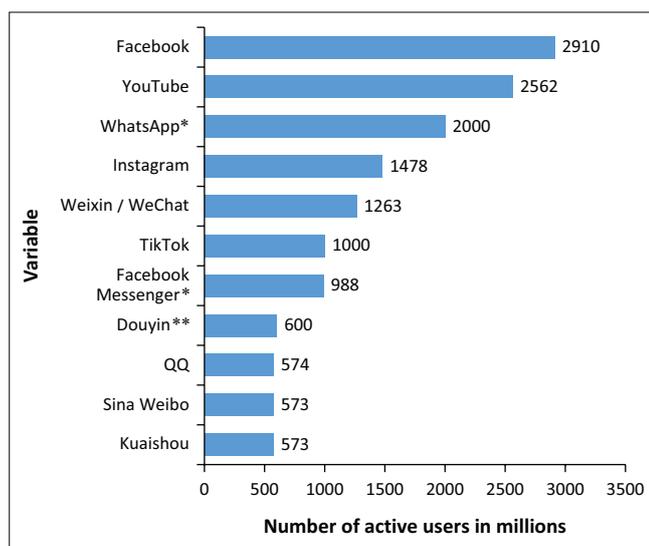


*Source*: Adapted from STATSSA, 2023, *Most popular social networks worldwide as of October 2023, ranked by number of monthly active users*, viewed n.d., from https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-numberof-users/

**FIGURE 1:** Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2022, ranked by number of monthly active users (in millions).

computer. Thus, a computer 'is an electronic machine operating under the control of instructions stored in its own memory that can capture or accept data and manipulate the data according to specified rules (Bakpo 2014:1). Consequently, with the introduction of the International Business Machines (IBM) 5100 in 1975, the 21st-century world witnessed dramatic changes. This is just like what Ikekeonwu (2002:3) said: 'a priori, the acronym PC meant IBM PC; that was to show that IBM heralded the development in the contemporary society of today'.

One cannot talk about the Internet without first conceptualising the concept of a network. A network deals with the harmonisation of computers together so that they can share information and communicate with each other. The Internet was given its life in 1969 in the United States of America (US) by the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), which was codified as ARPANET. The Internet 'was based on the idea that there would be multiple independent networks of rather arbitrary design, beginning with the ARPANET as the pioneering packet switching network, but soon to include packet satellite networks, ground-based packet radio networks and other networks' (Barry 2009:24).

## Information and communication technology apparatuses in modern evangelism

Modern evangelism is a modern approach to preaching the word of God. Communication technology has greatly aided contemporary evangelism mechanisms. Among the modern means of spreading the gospel messages of Jesus are television and radio stations, newspaper stories, and billboards. Crusades, adorations, and vigils, although old systems of spreading the good news have been rebranded by the use of communication technology, called ICT. Science and technology have invented various platforms and gadgets to enhance modern communication in evangelism. The contributions of some of these platforms to modern evangelism will be briefly discussed.

### Facebook (Meta)

Facebook is an online platform, both for desktop computers and phones, used to share ideas, pictures, and messages, among others, between friends and groups. It was founded on 04 February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, with the assistance of Andrew McCollum, Eduardo Saverin, Moskovitz Dustin, and Chris Hughes. They were students at Harvard University, and Zuckerberg was a student of psychology. On Facebook, groups are created, friends are added, and through it, one can post or advertise missionary work as one wants. In this case, the word of God could be typed and pasted on one's Facebook wall and in groups, which goes a long way towards reaching both targeted and untargeted audiences. Also, one can use Facebook's basic Ads Manager to create ads (Mark 2015), in which biblical message ads are advertised. Facebook Ads could also be

TABLE 1: Internet users in Nigeria as on July 2016.

| Year | Internet users | Penetration (% of Pop) | Total population | Non-users (Internetless) | 1 year user change | 1 year user change | Population change (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2016 | 86 219 965 | 46.1 | 186 987 563 | 100 767 598 | 5.0 | 4 124 967 | 2.63 |
| 2015 | 82 094 998 | 45.1 | 182 201 962 | 100 106 964 | 8.4 | 6 348 247 | 2.66 |
| 2014 | 75 746 751 | 42.7 | 177 475 986 | 101 729 235 | 15.3 | 10 076 474 | 2.70 |
| 2013 | 65 670 276 | 38.0 | 172 816 517 | 107 146 241 | 19.0 | 10 487 424 | 2.72 |
| 2012 | 55 182 852 | 32.8 | 168 240 403 | 113 057 551 | 18.5 | 8 622 851 | 2.73 |
| 2011 | 46 560 001 | 28.4 | 163 770 669 | 117 210 668 | 21.7 | 8 298 063 | 2.73 |
| 2010 | 38 261 938 | 24.0 | 159 424 742 | 121 162 804 | 23.3 | 7 220 509 | 2.72 |
| 2009 | 31 041 429 | 20.0 | 155 207 145 | 124 165 716 | 29.5 | 7 074 482 | 2.71 |
| 2008 | 23 966 947 | 15.9 | 151 115 683 | 127 148 736 | 140.6 | 14 004 723 | 2.69 |
| 2007 | 9 962 224 | 6.8 | 147 152 502 | 137 190 278 | 25.4 | 2 015 189 | 2.68 |
| 2006 | 7 947 035 | 5.5 | 143 318 011 | 135 370 976 | 60.4 | 2 992 013 | 2.66 |
| 2005 | 4 955 023 | 3.5 | 139 611 303 | 134 656 280 | 183.2 | 3 205 447 | 2.63 |
| 2004 | 1 749 576 | 1.3 | 136 033 321 | 134 283 745 | 136.2 | 1 009 007 | 2.60 |
| 2003 | 740 569 | 0.6 | 132 581 484 | 131 840 915 | 78.8 | 326 383 | 2.58 |
| 2002 | 414 185 | 0.3 | 129 246 283 | 128 832 098 | 265.6 | 300 896 | 2.56 |
| 2001 | 113 289 | 0.1 | 126 014 935 | 125 901 646 | 43.9 | 34 549 | 2.55 |

*Source*: Adapted from Nigeria Internet Users (2014), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), World Bank, and United Nations Population Division, viewed 07 October 2016, from http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/nigeria/

used to spread gospel e-books and create a gospel news feed, among others (Dan 2015). The importance of this platform cannot be overstated.

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The significance of computers and Internet cannot be underestimated, nor can it be overemphasised. The computer and the Internet have brought unprecedented advantages to people's means of livelihood. In Table 1, there is the significant increase in the number of Internet users beginning from 2001–2016. Starting from the home, to the office, to the church, among others, the importance of the computer and Internet has been felt. People use a computer:

[F]or social networking, playing games, and watching videos. According to research, among children, ten percent report reading magazines or newspapers online. Among older youth (in grades seven through twelve), more than half (55 percent) have looked up online health information. (Databank 2015)

In offices, it is used for financial transactions (like in banks) and for recording and distributing information (like educational institutions in Nigeria).

# Recommendations

After a brief study and analysis of this topic under investigation, the authors hereby recommend the following:

- The evangelisation of Christ message should be pursued using several methods, especially Internet devices, as they attract students easily.
- Effort should be made by lecturers to imbibe Christian or religious principles as well as intellectual ones at the most opportune times.
- Even though the lecture walls are no crusade or church grounds, lecturers should still teach moral ethics to their students through proper attitudes and exemplariness.
- Students should be eager to copy good moral conduct from their tutors, who are also their mentors.

# Conclusion

The importance of ICT platforms in the spread of the gospel of Christ in African society cannot be overemphasised. The ICT has tremendously aided in the spread of Christian doctrines, liturgy, and basic theological assumptions. For instance, ICT channels have seriously facilitated the spread and transmission of the Christian message of salvation embedded in the divine command of Matthew 10:10 and Mark 15:16, 'Go ye inside the entire world and spread the good news'. Television and radio stations, for instance, have carried this divine mandate through their religious programmes from one end of the earth to the rest. The effect of these religious programmes on listeners is voluminous, as they have reached millions of Christian listeners in minutes and hours of communication from a particular ICT channel.

The school environment is a fertile ground for Christian evangelisation. Since youths are the leaders of tomorrow, they should be properly trained on Christian tenets and moral virtues. The effect of proper indoctrination of good religious virtues in students of higher education can be

seen in their work areas when they graduate and are employed. As youths grow up to face the world in its true nature, religious culture is paramount to their ethnic formation. Information and communication technology channels for housing and transmitting programmes can therefore be veritable channels of evangelisation for university students since this age bracket is both ICT-compliant and ICT friendly.

# Acknowledgements

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