

**Benefits and Challenges of a Smart Phone to Candidates in the
Holistic Formation of the Catholic Religious in Langata Sub-County
Nairobi – County**

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Abstract

The Catholic Church accepts and appreciates the use of Smartphones for proclaiming the good news. In fact, all social communication applications—could be effectively used for evangelization. This research focused on examining the benefits and challenges of using a smart phone in the holistic formation of the religious in Langata Sub-County, Nairobi County in Kenya. the specific objectives included; investigating the benefits and drawbacks of using IMO and Instagram, investigating the advantages and disadvantages of using Twitter and Facebook, investigating the advantages and disadvantages of using WhatsApp and Viber, and proposing alternative methods for

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effectively utilizing the benefits of smart phones for the holistic formation of the Religious in Langata Sub-County, Nairobi, Kenya. The study was based on the "Uses and gratifications theory" (UGT) and media system dependence theory. It used quantitative and qualitative methodologies, using a convergent parallel mixed method research design to enhance its findings. The target population consisted of 50 Novices, 10 Mother Superiors, and 95 Professed Sisters from various Congregations. Purposive sampling was used to sample 10 major superiors and 95 Professed Sisters, while simple random sampling was used to sample 40 novices. Data collected via questionnaires and interviewing protocols. Both quantitative and qualitative analytic methods were used to analyse the data. According to the research on the benefits of smartphone use for holistic formation, WhatsApp was used to communicate with new people in novel ways, Facebook was used to share information about formation and forging professional connections. Findings on challenges of using smartphones showed that; WhatsApp is a significant source of interruption during prayers, and religious women are psychologically affected by Facebook bullying. The study concluded that; the use of a smartphone could influence religious formation either positively or negatively, depending on the user. The study's recommendations include; formees should be trained on the proper use of smartphones, communities should also conduct workshops and invite communication experts to enlighten the novices on how to detect dangers such as scams and exploiters online, superiors should form small groups amongst formees to enhance sister's keeper" spirit, and strict rules should be established in the community to control the use of smartphones during critical times, like time for community prayers and other activities.

Keywords: Postulancy, Celibacy, Effective Communication, Formators, Holistic Formation, Initial formation, Major Superiors, Novices, Smartphones and Social Media.

Introduction

Human beings are social-beings, they have to socialize with their fellow human beings in different ways. A person is not an island. He/she has to share his/her ideas, opinions, opportunities, fears and thoughts with his fellow human beings in order to be enriched in different aspects of his/her life.¹ The Catholic Church accepts and appreciates the use of Smartphones for proclaiming the good news. Therefore, all social communication applications could be effectively used for evangelization.² For instance, WhatsApp is known as the most used application by every generation. It is used worldwide and could be useful as tool for formative development of candidates in formation.³ Smart phones, generally are not given to candidates at the stage of initial formation; however, they are given immediately after the First Profession. After some years of not using a phone, young Religious Sisters suddenly have access to it.—Smart phones have a lot of advantages for candidates who are in their initial formation stage, such as group discussion, communicating with their friends, relatives, superiors, posting creative pictures of their congregation to attract vocations, posting reflections and uploading songs.

However, WhatsApp has also some disadvantages such as the following: It allows communication only with those friends who have accounts on it, those who have Smartphones, and those who have internet access. It is used in the majority of English-speaking African nations. However, Africa engages in internet activities lesser than most other worldwide regions.⁴ On the other hand, there are also some

¹ Nick Morgan, “*We Humans Are Social Beings - And Why That Matters For Speakers and Leaders*,” last updated Sep 1, 2015, accessed April 15, 2021

² His Holiness Pope Paul VI, Decree On The Media Of Social Communications “*Inter Mirifica*,” accessed December 4, 1963, 13/04/2021, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19631204_inter-mirifica_en.html.

³ Mansoor Iqubac, “*WhatsApp Revenue and Usage Statistics (2020)*,” last updated March 9, 2021, accessed April 13, 2021, <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/whatsapp-statistics>.

⁴ Madeline, “*WhatsApp in Africa: Statistics & Business Potential*,” last updated January 15, 2019, accessed April 13, 2021, <https://www.messengerpeople.com/whatsapp-in-africa/>.

disadvantages of using WhatsApp in the context of religious life. Overuse of the gadgets affect their life style negatively: such as health, ministry, and relationships, so it is very important to have discipline in using it. Facebook is a social networking platform with features where users could create profiles, send messages, and communicate with friends, and any person with an account. If Religious Sisters use this means of social networking properly, it could serve as a means of evangelization. For example, sharing reflections on daily scripture readings, discussions, academic work, posting news, etc. However, this same social networking could be abused. For instance, some Religious Sisters spend all their precious time chatting with someone thousands of miles away, while they spend less quality time with their sisters in the community. Some of them go late for spiritual exercises just because they are glued to their handsets.

Problem Statement

A Smart phone is an important tool in witnessing to Christ in our time; it is inevitable to use it. According to Justine John, “social communication helps the Church to engage people, in the dialogue of faith”.⁵ The Church supports the use of social communication in transmitting the truth that Christ reveals to humanity. However, she is keen and attentive in recommending the proper use of these gadgets; since information which comes from the media is not necessarily true or authentic. Nevertheless, the Church accepts them in her proclaiming of the Good News.⁶ It has been emphasized that a smart phone is not used during novitiate but most of the congregations do not explain

⁵ Dyikuk, Justine John. "The Pros and Cons of Social Communication in the Mission of the Church in Nigeria." (2019).page 8.

⁶ Rev. Fr. George Nwachukwu, *The Church's Position on the Use of Social Media*,” last updated October 11, 2019 accessed 13April 13, 2021, “<https://recowacerao.org/the-church-and-social-media-application-of-social-media-in-the-churchs-mission-of-evangelization>.”

clearly to the candidates the reasons for not giving them smart phones in the initial formation. It is helpful for the candidates to integrate the proper use of smartphones in initial stages of their formation. When this is not done, it creates a gap in the holistic formation of the candidates. There are many studies on the benefits and challenges of the use of a smart phone,⁷ however, the research did not find any study whose focus was specifically in the area of religious formation. Thus, the importance of this study was to investigate the benefits and drawbacks of smart phones among religious Sisters in Lang'ata Sub-County. The study thus, targeted major superiors, formators, professed sisters and formees' of female Catholic religious to explore how they might benefit from the use of smart phones for the formative growth of their candidates.

General Objective

The objective of this study was to find out benefits and challenges of using a smart phone for the holistic formation of the religious in Lang'ata, Sub-County, Nairobi County, Kenya.

Theoretical Review

Uses and Gratifications' Theory

The current study is based on the uses and gratifications' theory, which was devised in the 1940s by Blumler and Katz. The scholars were concerned with the interpretation of the media and its influence on human formation.⁸ The theory has its roots in the communications'

⁷“Dr Philippa Collin, University of Western Sydney Dr Ingrid Richardson, Murdoch University Dr Amanda Third, University of Western Sydney Ms Kitty Rahilly, Inspire Foundation” The Benefits of Social Networking Services April 2011.

literature. The uses and gratifications' theory—argue that most individuals prefer the media that satisfies their wants and provides the greatest amount of pleasure. In order to examine the advantages and difficulties of using a smart phone in religious formation, it might be helpful to consider the uses and gratifications' theory, which has particular significance to smartphones. The theory outlined 10 different uses, including communication, information gathering, leisure, amusement, relaxation, expressing of opinion, surveillance of others, and information sharing. The proponents of the uses and gratifications' theory conducted research on how the general public engages with media platforms. This approach contends that users leverage media to satisfy certain needs or desires.⁹ Many candidates for holistic formation use the Internet for pleasure, informational purposes, socializing, finding like-minded people, and self-expression. Every one of these applications serves a certain role, and the requirements determine how media is exploited. By analyzing the influences on media preferences of various populations, this theory is helpful in determining the motivations behind media use amongst religious novice sisters and how it could be of help in religious formation.

⁸ Anita Whiting and David Williams, “Why people use social media: a uses and gratifications approach,” last updated August 30, 2013, https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/QMR-06-2013-0041/full/html?casa_token=rCUxJJzrh4wAAAAA:7nOyNZpbxjrdDu2LKy0vTfsY0pqc_7tyilovMFdpKKLc5hkLqoh-S8LWS7PblRe83hfJLHEtPLYBs4vxxgduq9dN8ciOfinXHrcdiVY7PNw6ffSPBqZh#b9.

⁹ Lariscy R.W., Tinkham S.F. and Sweetser K.D., “Kids these days: examining differences in political uses and gratifications, internet political participation, political information efficacy, and cynicism on the basis of age,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55, 6 (2011), 749 – 764.

Media System dependency Theory

Ball-Rokeach and DeFluer introduced the Media Dependency Theory in 1976.¹⁰ This theory was developed to understand how people and media relate. The main reason behind the development of the theory was lack of clarity on the impact of media on people. The extent to which a person relies on the media to provide information is a key point in understanding the influence of the media on a persons' beliefs, emotions or behaviors. The theory asserts that if a person becomes so reliant on mass media, the media becomes a key source of information to that person. Hence people relate well with the media which is beneficial to them and gives them an opportunity to understand what is happening around them. The more an individual relies on the media, the more significant media will be in their life and have a great impact on them.¹¹ Social media platforms are a key tool for engaging societal activities since they are broadly used to disseminate information.¹² Since media dependency theory aims at understanding the asymmetric dependencies amongst individuals and media systems, it was applicable for research on finding out benefits and challenges of using a smart phone for the holistic formation of the religious in Lang'ata Sub-County, Nairobi County in Kenya.

¹⁰ Ball-Rokeach, S J.. "An Application of Media System Dependency Theory." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 2 (1976)

¹¹ Grant, A. "Television shopping: A media system dependency perspective." *Communication Research* 18 (2014):

¹² Ognyanova, K and S Ball-Rokeach. "Political Efficacy on the Internet: A Media System Dependency Approach." in Laura Robinson (2015): 27.

Literature Review

Yilmazsoy¹³ sought to investigate the implications of adopting WhatsApp as a social networking tool in the Turkish educational processes. Results revealed that, in comparison other students, those who are hooked to instant messaging lack discipline, are unable to manage the amount of time they spend texting, and ignore their responsibilities. Additionally, the students understanding level, learning skills and productivity and academic achievement had also been affected. Students who spend a lot of time messaging on WhatsApp also feel sleepy during the day since they spend many hours at night chatting. Zanamwe¹⁴ examined WhatsApp's usage in higher education. The findings showed that students utilized social networking sites for educational achievements, particularly for group projects. It was also determined that social networking tools strengthened learners' social abilities, increased their technology expertise, and assisted learners in communicating in novel ways with unknown peers. Bouhnik¹⁵ examined implications of the use of WhatsApp in school. According to research, leveraging WhatsApp for learning has several advantages, including improved student communication, fostering of interaction and facilitation of cooperation among students, cheap cost, speed, accessibility to learning resources, and learning that continues outside of the class hours. Kamau et.al¹⁶ sought to determine how using WhatsApp affected Kenyan

¹³ Yilmazsoy, B and M Kahraman. "Negative Aspects of Using Social Networks in Education: A Brief Review on WhatsApp Example." *Journal of Educational Technology & Online Learning 3* (2020): 69-90.

¹⁴ Zanamwe, N, T Rupere and O Kufandirimbwa. "Use of Social Networking Technologies in Higher Education in Zimbabwe: A learners' perspective." *International Journal of Computer and Information Technology 2* (2013):

¹⁵ Bouhnik, D and M Dshen. "WhatsApp goes to school: Mobile instant messaging between teachers and students." *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research* (2014):

¹⁶ Kamau, J, N Mwaura and M Njau. "Effect of Utilization of Whatsapp Social Media Platform on Spiritual Growth of Church Members a Case of New Life Church Kenya." (2019):

churchgoers' spiritual development. Research findings showed that using social media makes Religious people more mature, with lives marked by more love for one another, regular prayer and devotion, a rise in selflessness, and a better sense of community. According to the findings, church leaders and members who use social media will become more mature Religious women who could do their assigned duties efficiently. Njoroge¹⁷ looked into how social media usage among young people affected how they changed their behavior within some of the universities in Nairobi, Kenya. Findings showed that Students used internet on their mobile devices, particularly on WhatsApp. 68.8 percent of the students, talked on the phone or used a computer to text or chat with virtual peers.

Baruah¹⁸ investigated social media's efficacy as a medium for communication and its potential benefits in India. Findings indicated that social media has facilitated communication in a variety of ways and has the potential to radically alter the social lives of individuals, both personally and collectively. Altenhofen¹⁹ investigated the methods employed by some American Catholic priests on Facebook to build and preserve their clerical power. The research found out that priests utilized Facebook to connect with one another and exchange information concerning their church groups. They used Facebook to stay in touch with friends and family, share life events, obtain news updates, and find humorous material. Facebook helped them to

¹⁷ Njoroge, R. "Impacts of Social Media Among The Youth on Behavior Change: A Case Study of University Students in Selected Universities In Nairobi, Kenya." (Masters' Thesis, University of Nairobi, 2013).

¹⁸ Baruah, T. "Effectiveness of Social Media as a Tool of Communication and its Potential For Technology Enabled Connections: A Micro-Level Study." *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications* 2 (2012):

¹⁹ Altenhofen, J. 'Sharing The Catholic Faith: How Priests Establish/Maintain Religious Authority on Facebook,' (PhD Dissertation, Texas A&M University, 2016).

establish and maintain religious authority. Makinde²⁰ analyzed the impact of social media on Christian youth's faith and their lifestyle. The findings showed that many Christian youth were negatively and positively influenced by twitter and facebook usage. While some of them used social media for faith networking, others used it to advance immoral practices and were swayed away by social media even during church services. Odek²¹ looked at how University of Nairobi students' use of mobile phones affected their ability to communicate interpersonally (face to face). Results showed that students largely depended on their smartphones for academic purposes, for building relationships, resolving disagreements, and entertainment, to the point where it significantly reduced their use of the typical Face-to-Face method of communication and led to a cellphone over-reliance.

Research Design and Methodology

The study adopted convergent parallel mixed method research design, where descriptive and phenomenology research designs were used.²² The target population for the study was 50 Novices, 10 Mother Superiors and 95 Professed Sisters from various Congregations living in Lang'ata sub-County in Nairobi County, Kenya. The sample size was 10 major superiors, 95 professed sisters, and 40 novices. Questionnaires and interview guides were used to collect data.

²⁰ Makinde, O. "Impact of Social Media on Christian Youth's Faith And Their Lifestyle." (Masters' Thesis, Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Lagos, 2017).

²¹ Odek, A. "The Impact of Mobile Phone Use on Interpersonal (Face To Face) Communication Amongst The Students of The University of Nairobi Main Campus." (Masters' Thesis, University of Nairobi, 2015).

²² John W. Creswell J.W. and David J. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed., (California, Sage Publications, 2018), 63.

Table 1: Benefits and Challenges of Using WhatsApp for Holistic Formation

Statements	SD		D		UD		A		SA		M
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Benefits											
WhatsApp helps religious women interact with new people and improves their interpersonal skills	8	6.4	10	8.0	14	11.2	35	28.0	58	46.4	4.00
WhatsApp enhances continuation of learning beyond class hours	6	4.8	4	3.2	7	5.6	25	20.0	83	66.4	4.40
Challenges											
Religious women addicted to instant messaging are unable to control the time they spend in messaging and neglect their assignments	8	6.4	10	8.0	8	6.4	36	28.8	63	50.4	4.09
Overuse of WhatsApp has a negative effect on the life style of religious women	10	8.0	4	3.2	19	15.2	34	27.2	58	46.4	4.01
Religious women who spend a lot of time messaging on WhatsApp feel sleepy during the day since they spend many hours at night chatting	8	6.4	12	9.6	6	4.8	40	32.0	59	47.2	4.04

Key: SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, UN=Undecided, A=Agree, SA= Strongly Agree, M=Mean.

Findings show that respondents strongly agreed that WhatsApp enhances continuation of learning beyond class hours (M=4.40). WhatsApp helps religious women to interact with new people and improves their interpersonal skills (M=4.00). Findings concur with Bouhnik²³ that benefits of using WhatsApp include easier communication with colleagues/family, creating dialogue and encouraging sharing, low cost, immediacy, and continuation of learning beyond class hours. Kamau et.al²⁴ also demonstrated that using social media makes religious people more mature, with lifestyles marked by more love for one another, regular prayer and devotion, a growth in generosity, and a better sense of togetherness. Findings on

²³ Bouhnik, D and M Deshen. "WhatsApp goes to school: Mobile instant messaging between teachers and students." *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research* (2014):

²⁴ Kamau, J, N Mwaura and M Njau. "Effect of Utilization of Whatsapp Social Media Platform on Spiritual Growth of Church Members a Case of New Life Church Kenya." (2019):

the challenges reveal that religious women addicted to instant messaging are unable to control the time they spend in messaging and they neglect their assignments (M=4.09), religious women who spend a lot of time messaging on WhatsApp feel sleepy during the day since they spend many hours at night chatting (M=4.04), and overuse of WhatsApp has a negative effect on the life style of religious women (M=4.01). Findings also concur with Yeboah²⁵ that due to the time commitment required by WhatsApp, users have procrastination-related issues, loss of attention, and difficulties juggling WhatsApp usage with other responsibilities.

Table 2: Benefits and Challenges of Using Facebook for Holistic Formation

Statements	SD		D		UD		A		SA		M
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Benefits											
Facebook platform enables religious women to communicate information about their development and cultivate professional contacts.	8	6.4	5	4.0	11	8.8	37	29.6	64	51.2	4.15
Religious women use Facebook to remain in contact with family and friends and obtain liveupdates.	3	2.4	11	8.8	16	12.8	60	48.0	35	28.0	3.90
Facebook help Religious women to establish and maintain religious authority.	10	8.0	12	9.6	17	13.6	34	27.2	52	41.6	3.85
Challenges											
Some Religious women often check their Facebook accounts before doing anything else, which affects their formation.	8	6.4	6	4.8	14	11.2	58	46.4	39	31.2	3.91
Religious women are psychologically affected by Facebook bullying and negative comments of posts/tweets.	4	3.2	7	5.6	13	10.4	36	28.8	65	52.0	4.21
Some Religious women use Facebook more for social interactions than for religious purposes.	8	6.4	4	3.2	11	8.8	87	69.6	15	12.0	3.78
Religious women are swayed away by Facebook, evenduring Mass and prayers.	12	9.6	16	12.8	5	4.0	73	58.4	19	15.2	3.57

Key: SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, UN=Undecided, A=Agree, SA= Strongly Agree, M=Mean.

²⁵ Yeboah, J and G Dominic. "The Impact of Whatsapp Messenger Usage on Students Performance in Tertiary Institutions in Ghana." *Journal of Education and Practice* 5 (2014):

The results demonstrate that the respondents agreed that religious women use Facebook to discuss their development and forge connections in a professional capacity (M=4.15), they use Facebook to stay connected with friends and relatives and getting news updates (M=3.90), and Facebook helps religious women to establish and maintain religious authority (M=3.85). Findings concur with Altenhofen²⁶ that Facebook is used by religious individuals to exchange information about their church and establish professional connections. It also makes it easier for religious people to remain in touch with their loved ones, share life events, and obtain news and updates. Regarding challenges of using Facebook, findings revealed that religious women are psychologically affected by Facebook and Twitter bullying and negative comments of posts/tweets (M=4.21), some Religious women often check their Facebook and Twitter accounts before doing anything else which affects their formation(M=3.91), some Religious women use Facebook and Twitter more for social interactions than for religious purposes (M=3.78) and Religious women are swayed away by Facebook and Twitter, even during-Mass and prayers (M=3.57). Findings concur with Makinde²⁷ that while some Christians use social media for faith networking, others use it to advance immoral practices and are swayed away by social media, even during church services. Odek²⁸ revealed that some smartphones usage has drastically reduced use of the traditional Face-to-Face mode and that has resulted in a mobile phone dependency.

²⁶ Altenhofen, J. 'Sharing The Catholic Faith: How Priests Establish/Maintain Religious Authority on Facebook,' (PhD Dissertation, Texas A&M University, 2016).

²⁷ Makinde, O. "Impact of Social Media on Christian Youth's Faith And Their Lifestyle." (Masters' Thesis, Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Lagos, 2017).

²⁸ Odek, A. "The Impact of Mobile Phone Use on Interpersonal (Face To Face) Communication Amongst The Students of The University of Nairobi Main Campus." (Masters' Thesis, University of Nairobi, 2015).

Table 3: Ways of Making Effective Use of the Benefits of a Smart Phone for Holistic Formation

Measures	Frequency	Percentage
Choose the right information from reliable people and avoid getting addicted to a smartphone.	72	57.6
View or post things which are helpful to religious formation.	85	68.0
Encourage responsible use of a smart phone and correct irresponsible or misuse of it.	68	54.4
Allow formees to have phones and teach them how to use them rather than collecting them from them.	90	72.0
Emphasize recreation time with community members and not be on phones.	45	36.0
Set timelines for using smartphones.	68	54.4

n=125

Findings also show that respondents suggested possible ways of making effective use of the benefits of smart phones for the holistic formation of the Religious which included; allowing formees to have phones and teach them how to use them, encourage formees to view or post things which are helpful to religious formation, guiding formees on how to choose the right information from reliable people and avoid getting addicted to a smartphone, encouraging responsible use of a smart phone and correcting irresponsible or misuse of it and emphasizing recreation time with other community members and not to be on phones, which have been proven to be a source of self-isolation. Findings equally concur with Marshall²⁹ that the media has made the religious to turn away from spiritual matters, and has prompted them to compulsively think and do things that plainly injure their spirit.

²⁹ Marshall T. Poe, *A History of Communications: Media and society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet*. New York: University Press, 2011), 275.

Conclusions

Use of smartphones could influence religious formation either positively or negatively, depending on the user. When used appropriately, a smartphone could nurture spiritual growth while when used inappropriately it could hinder spiritual growth. WhatsApp has been identified as a useful App since it enhances sharing of religious content and communication with superiors, colleagues and families. However, it could also be used to spread secular content and too much use of the App could lead to addiction, hence distracting religious activities like prayers, vigil and being effective in the ministry where one is assigned to share the Word of God. Religious women heavily rely on Facebook to get current updates from all walks of life, not just for religious information. Getting updates on current affairs might not affect religious formation. However, as the religious scroll their phones, they might view/read secular information which is a source of disruption. It is always not easy to erase memories, and sometimes what people read/see sticks in their minds, and religious women are not an exception. The smartphone Apps, especially social media Apps, do not have an option of filtering information, so when one logs in, she gets to see all that is posted by friends/followers. However, some posts promote religious formation since they focus on the gospel and devotion.

Recommendations

Formees should be trained on the proper use of smartphones. This would equip them with great knowledge of how to use smartphones for spiritual growth and would also know that improper use of smartphones might lead them astray. The community should also conduct workshops and invite a communication expert to enlighten novices on how to detect dangers such as scams and exploiters online.

This would help them to filter their social media accounts so as not to allow all sorts of information to pop up on their screens. Superiors should form small groups amongst formees to enhance “sisters' keeper” spirit. This would ensure that everyone is looking after the other, and it would make it easier to identify those who spend most of their time on their phones and perhaps even what they do with their phones. Strict rules should be established in the community to control the use of smartphones during critical times, like community prayers and other activities. The rules could include no use of smart phones in prayer rooms and to achieve this, they could invest in security measures to identify those breaking the rules. To have a common room for computers whereby formees could have access to internet for research purposes, and also chat with their family members and friends on an established date. Communities that allow members to use the Wi-Fi should introduce security measures which would ensure that the members would not be able to access immoral sites since it is easier to control the use of public internet than personal mobile data. To introduce training in computer application in the initial formation, to be designed as part of the formation programme.

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