
“Technosapiencing” and the Global Christian Mission in the Digit-shaped World

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Abstract

The forces of digital technologies are cohesive, penetrative and ubiquitous with the propensity to transform every human activity. Thus, the tempo of religious practices within the influence of this digital pull cannot remain unaffected. This study examines the influence of digital technologies on religious endeavours in the era of Global Information Culture (GIC), particularly on global missions and how humans cannot escape the glue. Descriptive and phenomenological techniques were adopted to x-ray the concepts. The study also identifies the roles of GIC in supporting socio-economic development, influencing cultural and cross-cultural practices, and affecting religious and inter-religious relationships. The study submits that innovations in the GIC have influenced spirituality and Christian witnessing in the 21st century and concludes that in the current webbed dispensation, humanity becomes *techno-sapiens* and remains so even in their religious practices. The paper, therefore, recommends that stakeholders in the religious sector and practitioners of mission need to embrace and imbibe GIC for their maximum output in their respective endeavours.

Keywords: Techno-sapiens, new media, church, ICT, religion, global information culture, network, technology, global Christian mission.

Introduction

The 21st century has seen the rapid evolution of digital technologies and their unabated penetrative impacts on every endeavour of human life, thereby making humans become *Techno-Sapiens*. By *Techno-Sapiens*, this paper seeks to link the intrinsic intelligence of man to his ability to develop, adapt to and adopt technological revolutions to meet his needs. The phrase, *Homo-Sapiens*, is used to describe humans with knowledge, wisdom and the ability to think before taking action, while *Techno-Sapiencing* in the context of this research is the process of aligning “the wise man” with technological realities. In doing this, it is important to note that the three major revolutions that humanity has experienced including the Cognitive Revolution, the Agricultural Revolution and the Scientific Revolution and have been greatly enhanced by the recent development known as the Technological Revolution. This 4th revolution is driven by advances in digital technologies, and Scientists in the field have technically described it to be the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR). The avalanche of digital resources now puts the once *Homo-Sapiens* or *Techno-Sapiens*.

Again, today, there appears to be an interconnection of some sort for all humanity due to the increasingly networked framework within which the current society operates. As this happens, theologians are compelled by necessity to give this new culture, now described as the techno-culture or information culture a deeper look. The work of Rebecca Grinter, Susan Wyche, Gillian Hayes and Lonnie Harvel on *Technology in Protestant Ministry* gives a snapshot of this thought (Grinter *et al.*, 2011). The authors examined the use of computing “systems in church management, worship, pastoral care, and outreach, and the challenges in integrating ICTs into religious practice” and reported the successes recorded by faith-based organizations and

fellowships which have leveraged on computing provision for their activities (Grinter *et al.*, 2011). This was not so in the centuries before. By making techno-sapiens out of humanity, information and communications become an inseparable part of human society.

This new way of life, however, gives a growing concern, especially as it affects the way the church goes about its mission. As the church is an integral component of the larger society, what transforms the society also influences the way the church worships and engages in its other activities. If this is true, one is left to wonder about what level of impacts the technological revolution of today would have on the church of today and the nearest future, specifically in the areas of global mission. This gives room for an unending exploration leading to recent research on Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW).

Recently, digital technologies have carefully and drastically changed the way the information culture is viewed among different organizations, groups or individuals. In that regard, information culture typically finds itself between individuals, groups or organisations and the way they generate; use and manage information within the context of their respective needs and business culture. According to Gillian Oliver (2011), one cannot, therefore, effectively discuss the present information culture without some concentration on information technology, information systems and the digital world. This alludes to the definition by Andrienne Curry and Caroline Moore that Information Culture is:

a culture that is conducive to effective information management where the value and utility of information in achieving operational and strategic goals are recognized, where information forms the basis of organizational decision-making and Information Technology is readily exploited as an enabler for effective information systems (Curry & Moore, 2003).

Oliver argues that all organizations, irrespective of size, business line, drive or location have a certain form of information culture (Oliver, 2011). However, how this culture is applied in or applies to each group could be entirely different, largely based on certain factors, which may include but are not limited to the defined policies of the organization, the values placed on information, its larger goal with information, etc. Information culture can also be seen as the atmosphere where knowledge is generated with social intelligence, social interaction and work knowledge. This is based on the premise that every business thrives on useful information and every human society gets transformed with vital information. And it implies that information drives the transformational processes of every endeavour, including relationships of all sorts. As every individual or group depends on some information for survival, the implication is that everyone unavoidably becomes a member of the global information culture (GIC) where there is a transitive relationship existing among all entities. Experts in GIC have given an understanding of a webbed relationship for all. Since a network is a connection of different components in different locations for some common purpose, then, we all seem to live in a networked era. How this apparent oneness would promote world Christian outreach is a major subject of discourse in theological circles today. This study attempts to shed light in that direction.

The aim of this study, therefore, is to present techno-theological thoughts and understandings into the networked society we live in and the global information culture that drives the present world.

The attempt is to present a global and unified perception of the ubiquitous impacts of information on the ways we all do things in the church. This is what is now known as the Global Information Culture (GIC) with a focus on the Christian mission.

The objective of this study is to assess the trends of today and zoom into the church of the future and beyond to understand the impacts of the global moves of digital technologies on the mission of the church. Specifically, this study seeks to:

1. assess the impacts of the Global Information avalanche on the cultural and cross-cultural life of humanity;
2. examine the impacts of GIC adoption on Religion and their implications for interreligious relationships;
3. investigate the impacts of our GIC Innovations on the practice of spirituality and their implications for religious communities and
4. explore how recent technological and informational changes shape Christian witness in general and the implications of such for Christian mission in the 21st century.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the materials used and the adopted methodology for the study. Discussions are made in Section 3. These cover fundamental concepts such as *techno-sapiencing*, GIC and implications. The section also assesses the impacts of GIC on socio-economic

development, cultural and cross-cultural life of humanity, religious and interreligious relationships, spirituality and Christian witnessing in the 21st century. The conclusion of this paper is the last section.

Materials and Methods

The study adopted historical and phenomenological approaches in exploring the key concepts in the problem domain. Descriptive tools were employed to elicit vital information that has helped in making reasonable deductions in this work. The researchers also relied on personal interfacing with the current tools, electronic gadgets and applications through which the mission of today's world is run. Experimenting with these devices alongside interactions with other cyber-missionaries gives the researchers a wider understanding of the issues surrounding the evangelisation of the next generation through information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Discussions

This section discusses fundamental concepts and the impacts of GIC on different areas.

A. Fundamental Concepts

i. Techno-Sapiencing at this Time

Techno-sapiens is a new coinage used to attach and attribute technological inclination to humanity. *Techno-sapiencing* is not a one-off occurrence; it is an ongoing evolution of the human world into being digital natives who cannot be separated from digital technologies. *Techno-Sapiencing* is an advancement of tools that would better the lives of people in all endeavours.

This paper adopts “*Techno-Sapiensing*” (TS) to describe the process or tendency of having or developing humans who are technology-glued. *Techno-sapiens* is the outcome while *techno-sapiensing* is the act of making, integrating or aligning humanity fully with technology. TS can also be described as techno-sapiens evolution which is driven by technology and genome. Jackelen calls this neurotechnology, and he argues that its relationship and the Christian gospel must portray the life of Jesus Christ the Messiah (Jackelen, 2002). It results in highly intelligent humans who are exposed to multiple tools to learn and use daily to achieve speedy results. These humans are expected to be more intelligent than robots. Unlike robotic products, they will not be programmed to obey the directives hidden in codes but will understand and apply human laws, and observe ethics and public policies (Wallach, 2011). TS simply demonstrates the migration or rather evolution from homo-sapiens to techno-sapiens which is pushed by human mediated-technology (Waters, 2017).

ii. *The Concept of Global Information Culture*

The goal of GIC is to present, through different prisms that the world is a global village, glued by “zeros” and “ones”, where every human seems to be seamlessly connected, though spread billions of miles apart. This is a core of the study that seeks to unravel. The GIC demands digital compliance by all and sundry. By complying, individuals can harness the vast potential of techno-culture for communication, sharing, socializing, transactions and relationships. One of the aims of GIC is to ensure the global availability of information. This information must be in a meaningful, reproducible and acceptable format. The role

information plays in organization decision support has been established in different studies and fora and because the information is encompassing, GIC extends the borders to cover religious practice.

iii. Religious Practice in the Webbed World

Leverage of the interconnectedness of the world through digital technologies has made available massive channels for religious practice. This is irrespective of religion, language, race or place of worship. This non-discriminatory nature of the technologies makes their acceptance pervasive and ubiquitous. It is also helping to foster the unity of the people, not minding their belief systems and worship orientations. These are in addition to other potentials and benefits that the GIC brings to the religious landscape of our world. In Christianity, for instance, religious activities have been greatly shaped in the presence of GIC. Digital technologies have provided worshippers with several tools to make access to their means of grace easy. Through grace, we are referring to activities and practices that draw the worshippers to their object or entity of worship. Such activities may include Prayers, fasting, sacrificial giving, Baptism, Bible Study, etc. Besides, today, Christian groups can share daily reflections, bible reading plans, fellowship calendars, prayer guides and other means with themselves on the internet or with others online. These resources, in themselves, are captured, developed and mastered digitally.

Sermons can conveniently be recorded in text, audio, video or multimedia format and shared at will through different channels. Several social networks and mobile environments support religious engagement at all levels. This way, the Christian religious practice is made easy and highly simplified. The webspace is also serving as the meeting point for worshippers. This was massively brought

to full light as people sought alternative ways of meeting and reaching out to one another during the global Lockdown occasioned by the novel Corona Virus Disease (Covid-19) in early 2020.

B. GIC and its Implications

i. Impacts of Global Information Avalanche on the cultural and cross-cultural life of humanity

Today, as John Efiog describes, our children are born plugged into digits. They become digital natives and natural *techno-sapiens*. While the older generation, often referred to as generation X, may need more time to align or adapt to and possibly adopt the tools and services of smart technologies, the natives of technology (generation Y) find fun in “playing” with the hard tools (Efiog, 2017). With the presence of digital tools everywhere, one cannot but seek ways to adopt them and adapt to their provisions. By adopting these tools, humanity becomes *techno-sapiens* and this inevitably rubs off on our culture and the cross-cultural practices of the people of the world.

As each fragment of the world becomes a member of the global village cohesively held together by advances in the digital elements of the century, one is bound to face cross-cultural influences. Since culture is dynamic and transitional, it becomes easier for groups with lower cultural influences to lose theirs in an attempt to embrace the seemingly appealing one. This is where the techno-culture or the global information culture has taken a bite of the world’s culture. As we willingly align to the new way of life, what the end holds for each culture is unknown and raises concern for theological deliberations. What is even more worrisome is the

extent of cross-cultural interference that would arise from the mixture of cultural components introduced by varying members of the global village.

ii. Impacts of GIC adoption on Religion and Implications for Interreligious Relationships

Whether or not the global adoption of information culture is a blessing or a curse to the world religions and their interrelationships calls for examination. In matters of faith, Heidi Campbell makes efforts to identify how the faithful of the three major religions of the world (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) interpret religious authority and attempts to use that to understand how the believers of each religious group interpret the provisions of digital technologies and appropriate Internet resources (Campbell, 2007). As it were, interreligious relationships are enhanced, supported and upheld. The GIC creates rooms for interfaith dialogues and orders ecumenical moves among the various religions of the world. To achieve this, the GIC upholds that information is a global culture, therefore, the opinions, creeds, articles of faith or expressions of the adherents of each religion should be respected. This implies that we will expect more religious tolerance through better understanding, effective communication and interpersonal relationships devoid of religious sentiments.

However, some theologians are worried that there is more to be careful of about technology adoption as it poses threats to the existence of Christianity, specifically while serving as preparatory grounds for the rise of the Anti-Christ through the objective of promoting one world government for the enemy of the church. For instance, Craig Parshall, in his "Dark Innovation: The Role of Technology in Revelation 13" relates technological advances to the fulfilment of the biblical predictions in the book of Revelation in

the 13th Chapter (Parshall, 2014). This was corroborated by a Russian Orthodox Church Bishop, Patriarch Kirill, who claimed that the Internet is a tool for the Anti-Christ (Ma, 2019). Recently, Reinke (2021) reported that the digital devices we use are enabled to serve Satan's end-time purpose.

In support of the pessimistic stance, Dae Suk Lee, cited by John Efiang presents the psychological, ethical and social issues surrounding the information age and sees digital technology as an object of moral degeneration and a tool of sinful acts (Efiang, 2015). Other schools of thought reject such understandings and urge all to see the blessings in the tools of technology as they can be used to save the unreached people of the world (Vatican, 2018). These are two extremes that demand further and careful study.

iii. Impacts of our GIC Innovations on the practice of spirituality and its Implication for religious communities

In 2007, John Edmiston predicted that the internet was going to affect the way we do missions in the 21st century (Edmiston, 2007). He succinctly pointed out that in the nearest future, most people would ask most of their spiritual questions online and seek fellowship online. Rapid innovations in digital technologies have since seen this to be true. Today, there is an online church, online fellowship and internet bible study. In the same vein, John Efiang maintains that the believers of this age prefer the church without walls to the church with walls (Efiang, 2016). The church without walls is strongly held by the internet and its supporting infrastructure. People prefer maintaining anonymity in asking those 'silly' questions which represent their spiritual situations. The GIC innovations enhance this tendency.

The implications of this for the religious communities are multi-dimensional. On one hand, there is going to be a continuous dwindling number of worshippers on Sundays in the communal fellowship centres. The once-filled large Cathedrals will gradually and drastically witness a decline in the number of attendance at services as most people would prefer connecting to the services with their handheld devices such as mobile phones, iPads, tablets and personal computers. Those who cannot attend real-time online would download the sermons after the services to watch. Secondly, parishioners would get busy attending to members who would need their attention online. Counselling and prayers would be received online. Pastors would become moderators of forums and newsgroups where their church members are also members. They will be expected to guide in discussing certain spiritual themes that may affect the faith of the worshippers.

How much spiritual satisfaction online worshippers can get from hooking up to their digital devices is a matter of deeper exploration. Further studies will dedicate a substantial amount of resources to investigating and exploring these concerns. In doing so, one would need to design some form of spiritual thermometer to gauge the level of satisfaction these digital natives may have compared with the traditional fellowships in tents and temples. The fact that the online pastor would be faced with the problem of anonymity from the members will further open more windows for researchers to make explorations.

iv. Impacts of technological changes on Christian Witness and their implications for Christian mission in the 21st century

In the 21st century which is the dispensation of digits and high-speed pieces of machinery, Christian witnessing is given leapfrog. As changes in technology permeate society, witnessing and global

Christian missions experience a paradigm shift, with impacts, particularly on practical theology. Within this domain where the technological application in society finds its root, theologians have had to “look for God” in these digits. One watches with awe as the world becomes miniaturized, handheld and portable.

In a swift of interest, as an academic exercise, one is compelled to find a nexus between this new way of doing things and the search for God in the advances. In giving deep thought to these, one discovers that this technological avalanche is capable of enhancing *Missio Dei* – the mission of God. The Latin term *Missio Dei* means the mission of God. Raphael Idialu sees it as a concept that seeks to re-establish the Christian theory and practice of mission in the Triune God (Idialu, 2012). This could be a breakthrough for Missiologists. As theologians hold unswervingly that, Theology is the mother of Sciences, understanding the blessings of computing technology in fostering and expanding the frontiers of the Gospel in the networked world becomes an unending excitement for the missiologists. This understanding and union between theology and technology, with support from other disciplines have the propensity to influence the mission of the Church in the coming years.

Conclusion

Global missions are carried out by humans who are now driven by techno-culture and have become *techno-sapiens*. Since what influences humanity has a way of influencing our activities, the mission of today is affected by the movements in digits. This paper shows that since advances in computing technology have supported human living in a great many ways, the changes they bring to

Christian witnessing, worship and interreligious relationships of today will certainly influence the global Christian mission of the future. In many respects, *techno-sapiencing* pays, including man's search, the quest for and his worship of God and in relationship with his ecosystem. The impacts of the Global Information Culture on various areas of man's life have been discussed in the study. It, therefore, goes without saying that the significance of information technology in today's world cannot be overemphasized. If the Church and the worshippers are going to meet up with the trend of things, digital compliance is a necessity.

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